

Travel through the Book of Genesis with renewed curiosity about your family history.

# Our Covenant God



BY JEN  
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**S**INCE BECOMING AN AUTHOR, I've had the opportunity to travel quite a bit to teach the Bible. I never thought to teach it anywhere beyond the walls of my living room, and that sweet geography would've been sufficient to keep me happy and fulfilled for my lifetime. But getting to travel and teach has taught me something my living room might not have. Each place I go, I get to savor the beautiful truth that there are people everywhere who love God and are about His kingdom work. The people of God spread all across the face of the earth. Their languages, skin tones, and cultures are many and varied, but their faith shares a common object: the Deliverer, Jesus Christ our Lord.

I'm struck by the privilege of witnessing their existence. The number of Christians in the world today is estimated at 2.2 billion. This colorful, wide-flung family of believers is more than just an impressive statistic — it's the living, breathing evidence of the faithfulness of God to fulfill His promises, to do exactly what He says He will do. It's the modern-day generation of an ancient family line that stretches back more than three millennia.

How familiar are you with your family history? Do you know your ethnic heritage or the names of your ancestors? In recent years, the business of tracing genealogies has exploded, with technology allowing us to research and connect our ancestral dots like never before. By mailing off a small DNA sample, hundreds of thousands of people

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have been able to peer into their personal history and learn about their forebears. Because of our natural curiosity about our origins, an entire industry has emerged, happy to present us with easy access to answers that were once hard to obtain.

### In the Beginning

As Christians, we possess a distinct spiritual family history, one traceable not through a DNA test but through an ancient text. Tucked into the Book of Genesis is the story of our forebears, carefully preserved for us so that we might understand who we are and why we're here. But it does something more significant than just orient us to our past. It orients us to the God who has sovereignly shaped our past, present, and future. It tells us not just where we come from, but whose we are — the ransomed children of a covenant-keeping, faithful God.

It's a stirring, sweeping history, more easily accessed than DNA testing results — it only requires having a Bible and the ability to read. But if we're honest, it doesn't pique our curiosity the way our personal DNA trail might. For one thing, we tend to think we already know it. The stories of our spiritual ancestors — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph — are likely to have been taught to us in childhood on a felt board. Some of us manage to read through them each January before our well-intended New Year's Bible reading plan resolutions have started to fade. They feel just familiar enough to us to dull our sense of curiosity that they might teach more than what a casual reading reveals.

### The Word, Written for You

I want to suggest that we return to the written Word with a fresh set of eyes, with an eagerness worthy of its value. These stories offer us much more than a quick morality lesson or a passing glimpse of an ancient culture. According to the apostle Paul, "For whatever was written in the past was written for

our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures" (Rom. 15:4). The history of Genesis, our history as the children of God, is intended to instruct, strengthen, encourage, and give us hope.

The more time I've spent learning history, the more I've found Paul's words to be true. It instructs us in God's character and how He relates to His children. It strengthens us to endure when the hand of God is difficult to trace in our circumstances. Scripture encourages us to live upright lives among unbelievers and to trust God's plans. And it gives us hope that the God who has been faithful to all generations will certainly show Himself faithful to ours. This history, written for the fledgling nation of Israel to guide and instruct them, was also written for us.

If Paul's commendation isn't enough, we have another compelling reason to pay closer attention to the record of our spiritual pedigree: Jesus taught that Scripture spoke not merely of those who had gone before, but of the One who was to come. Jesus taught that it spoke of Him. (See Luke 24:25-27.) In tracing out the stories of the flawed characters of Genesis, we learn our need for a true and better deliverer. We need a true and better Joseph whose humiliation and exaltation save not just an ancient nation but a multitude across the ages.

We need the final answer to the covenant God made with Abraham that through Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The story of Genesis should cause us to enter into the longing for a deliverer and to sense with deeper awareness the astounding truth that, at just the right time, the Deliverer came. It should cause us to marvel that long before we drew breath, God determined to remedy sin and to redeem for Himself a holy people. And then God did exactly what He said He would do.

We must step into the earliest pages of our Bibles — not as detached spectators of someone else's family history, but as avid learners of our own.

### Promises Fulfilled

Imagine yourself with a chalkboard that stretches on for miles and a limitless supply of chalk. Now imagine that you draw one star on that chalkboard every second until you've drawn a star for each of your Christian brothers and sisters alive today. You'd be drawing for 70 years. And at the end of that 70 years, you'd realize that you hadn't begun to draw enough stars to represent your family, because your family stretches back across 3,500 years.

This is why Genesis is so stunningly significant. On a dark night in a distant desert some 3,500 years ago, Yahweh told a former idol worshipper from Ur of the Chaldeans to turn his gaze skyward and do the impossible: count the stars. Have you ever been in the desert at night? I have. The absence of light pollution reveals the heavens in staggering array, a sky crowded to every horizon with glimmering points of light. Abraham looked up and must have beheld just such a sky. And God said, "Your offspring will be that numerous" (Gen. 15:5).

And it was so.

No, not immediately, and not without difficulty.

Abraham and Sarah would go to their graves the parents of one child, born to them in their old age against every odd. Isaac would have only two sons, and Jacob would go into Egypt with only 70 recorded family members. A meager start toward a massive promise. But we know the end of the story: "Therefore, from one man—in fact, from one as good as dead—came offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and as innumerable as the grains of sand along the seashore" (Heb. 11:12).

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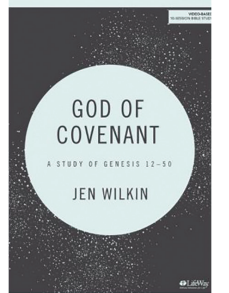
We're the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. We're the children of the promise. Where have you lost faith that God will act? What promise does He seem slow to fulfill? Look on the pages of Genesis and be reminded that the Alpha and Omega isn't slow in fulfilling His promises — He does what He says he will do. No, perhaps not according to our preferred timelines, but at just the right time.

Knowing where we came from shapes the way we think about who we are and why we're here. So turn to Genesis with renewed curiosity about your family history and with expectancy that your faith will be strengthened as you witness again the record of our covenant-keeping God.

Friend, one of the stars Abraham saw was lit for you. And that changes everything. □

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### God of Covenant: A Study of Genesis 12–50 by Jen Wilkin



In Genesis 1–11, we see our God as Creator of the universe. In Genesis 12–50, we see Him as the Covenant Maker.

Starting in chapter 12, Jen Wilkin walks through the stories of the fathers of our faith — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. We discover how God is working everything together for His glory and for the good of His people. Through these chapters, we witness image bearers sin and struggle to maintain trust in the only One who will fulfill every promise, the One for whom nothing is too hard.

In every page, we learn to see Jesus through the stories of His people. Through this 10-week study, discover how the God of creation and covenant is the same then, now, and forever.

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