

Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

By Joelee Chamberlain

Do you like to hear stories? I know that I do. I think everyone likes stories, don't you? But the best kind of stories, I think, are true stories, ones that really happened. And do you know what I think is the best book of true stories? It's one that God had men write, stories that God thought were good. Do you know what book that is? That's right. It's the Bible. So I thought it would be fun to tell some of God's stories to you.

But where should we start? There are so many good stories in the Bible. Well, there's a song that says, "Let's start at the very beginning. It's a very good place to start." So let's start at the very beginning of the Bible. The very beginning of the Bible is called the book of Genesis. And do you want to know something? "Genesis" means "beginning" in another language. Genesis is named that because it is the beginning of all sorts of things. The beginning of the world, the beginning of the sun and moon and stars, the beginning of plants and animals and of people, and the beginning of God's special people, the Jews. Now, of course, God didn't have a beginning. God was always there. That's hard to understand, but it's true.

In the very, very beginning the world didn't look like it does now. It was all dark and covered with water. God made everything in the sky and on the world in only 6 days. On Day One, God made light. He called the light time day and the dark time night. On Day Two, God made the sky with the clouds in it, leaving water all over the world still. On Day Three, God made dry land and plants. On Day Four, God made the sun, moon, and stars to hold the light. On Day Five, God made the birds and fish to fill the oceans and sky. Then on Day Six God made all sorts of animals to fill the dry land, and then God made a man out of the dirt to take care of the animals. The man was very special, even more special than any of the animals, because the man was made in the image of God. That means just a little bit like God. God looked at everything He had made, and He saw that it was all very good.

God planted a beautiful garden, called the Garden of Eden, and the man and the animals were going to live in that garden. It was full of all kinds of fruit trees and other plants. God named the man "Adam," and He had Adam give names to the animals. God had made both a mama and papa animal of each kind, but poor Adam didn't have anyone like himself. God saw that it wasn't good for Adam to be the only person on earth, so God had Adam go sound asleep, and then God took out one of Adam's ribs and made a woman. Adam woke up, and God gave Adam the woman He had made for him. This made Adam very happy. God told the animals and Adam and his wife to have lots of children to fill the earth.

Then God told Adam and his wife that they could eat from any of the trees in the beautiful garden except for just one tree. That was the tree that would make them know good and bad. You see, Adam and his wife didn't know about good and bad things; they only knew about good things. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from that tree, so God had to punish them, didn't He? They had sinned, done something bad, by disobeying God. He sent them out of the Garden and they

couldn't go back in it. But God still loved Adam and Eve and told them that someday a Saviour would come who would save people from their sins. We know that Saviour is Jesus. If we trust Jesus, He will save us from our sins, too.

Well, after a while Adam and Eve had lots of children. Two of their sons were named Cain and Abel. Abel loved God, and Cain was jealous of Abel and killed him, so God punished Cain by making him have to go away from most of the other people. Then God gave Adam and Eve another son named Seth who also loved God. Cain and Seth and all of Adam and Eve's other children had lots of children, too. And soon there were lots of people on the earth. And nearly all of those people were very bad. They didn't love God and they did all sorts of bad things.

This made God's nice world a bad place. So God decided to make the world a good place again. He decided to send lots of water, a big flood, all over the world to wash the world all clean again.

There was one man, though, who did love God. His name was Noah. God told Noah to build a big boat, called an ark. So Noah did just as God told him. He built a big boat. And when it came time for the flood, God had Noah put lots of food in the ark. God had animals and birds come to Noah and go into the ark. Then God told Noah and his wife and their three sons and their wives all to go into the ark, and God closed the door for them.

And then the big flood came. It rained and rained and rained. For 40 days it rained. And God had water cover all over the whole earth, even up over the mountains, and it washed the world all clean again. But Noah was safe in the ark with his family and the animals. Finally the waters started to go down again. And after being in the ark a little over a year, the water was gone and God told Noah and his family and the animals they had with them to go out of the ark. They opened the door and went out, and they thanked God for taking such good care of them. And God promised them that never, ever again would God send a flood all over the whole world. And so that we can know that promise and remember it, God made a rainbow. And every time we see a rainbow, we can remember that God promised never to send a flood all over the whole world again.

Well, God wanted Noah and his sons and their wives and all of the animals to go out and start having lots of children again and to fill the earth with people and animals. But after a while their great-grandchildren, who, of course, all spoke the same language, didn't want to go all over the world as God had said, they wanted to stay together. So they started building a big tall building so they could see this big building and stay near it and not be scattered all over the world as God had told them to do. We call this building the tower of Babel.

God then decided to make the people go all over the world as He had told them to do. So God made it that they all started speaking different languages. They couldn't understand each other anymore then, could they? So they began going to different parts of the world to live, and they didn't finish the tower of Babel.

Well, after a while people started doing lots of bad things again. But there was a man who loved God. His name was Abraham. God told Abraham to go to a land that God was going show him. So

Abraham took his wife Sarah and some of his relatives and started traveling. After a while Abraham got to the land of Canaan, and God told Abraham that someday that whole land would belong to Abraham's descendants. Descendants means a person's children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren. God also told Abraham that one of his descendants would be a blessing to the whole world. Again, we know that descendant is our Saviour, Jesus.

Well, Abraham didn't have any children then at all, and Abraham and Sarah were getting to be very old. But God had promised them that would have a son, and when the right time came, God gave them a son, and they named him Isaac. Oh, they were so happy!

We are supposed to love God more than anything else in the world, aren't we? Well, Isaac grew up, and one day God decided to test Abraham and see if Abraham really loved God more than anything else and if he trusted God to keep His promises. So God told Abraham that he was to take his son Isaac up onto a certain mountain and there Abraham was to kill Isaac as a sacrifice to God. Abraham knew that God had promised that he would have lots of descendants through Isaac, so he knew that some way God would make be Isaac alive again and able to have children, and Abraham trusted God and loved God very much, even more than he loved Isaac. So Abraham took Isaac and went a long way to the mountain and went up the mountain with Isaac. Just as Abraham was going to kill Isaac, God called out to him and told him not to hurt Isaac at all. And God showed Abraham a sheep that was caught in the bushes there, and Abraham sacrificed the sheep to God instead of sacrificing Isaac. Then Abraham took Isaac and they went back home again. God loved Abraham, and God blessed Abraham and was with Abraham.

Well, after a while Abraham sent a servant back to their relatives, and this servant found a beautiful cousin of Isaac. And this cousin agreed to come marry Isaac. Her name was Rebecca. Isaac and Rebecca loved each other, and they got married, and after a while God gave them twin boys. They named their boys Esau and Jacob. God loved Isaac, and God blessed Isaac and was with Isaac.

When Esau and Jacob were big men, they didn't get along, and Jacob went up to where his Uncle Laban lived to get away from his brother Esau. Up there Jacob saw Uncle Laban's daughter Rachel, and he wanted to marry her. So Jacob worked a long time for Uncle Laban so he could marry Rachel. But Uncle Laban tricked Jacob and gave Jacob another daughter named Leah for his wife. But after a while he let Jacob marry Rachel. In those days sometimes men had more than one wife. Jacob had only wanted 1 wife, Rachel, but he ended up finally with 4 wives, but Rachel was the one he loved the most. His wives all had sons, and Jacob ended up with 12 sons and one daughter. Two of those sons were sons of Rachel, the wife Jacob loved most. Those 2 sons were named Joseph and Benjamin.

God loved Jacob, and after Jacob was a big man and was married and had children, God gave Jacob another name. God called Jacob "Israel." Israel means Prince of God. So now Jacob had two names, Jacob and Israel. Often Jacob's descendants, his children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren are called children of Israel. That means that they are descended from Jacob, from Israel. Even today many Jews call themselves Israelis. That means that their great-great-great-grandfather was Israel, Jacob.

God blessed Jacob and was with Jacob. In fact, one of the names God calls Himself by is that He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were very important men. They were important because they were the beginning of God's special people, the Jews.

Now, one of Jacob's sons was his favorite son. His name was Joseph. Joseph was a very good boy and always obeyed his father Jacob. Joseph's brothers didn't like Joseph because their father liked Joseph the best. They were jealous of Joseph. So one day when all of them except Benjamin were alone with Joseph, they did a very bad thing. They sold Joseph to some traveling men, and those men took Joseph way far away to another country called Egypt and sold him as a slave in Egypt. Poor Jacob thought Joseph was dead and cried and cried.

But in Egypt, God was still with Joseph. God had the man who had bought Joseph like Joseph and be good to him. Joseph worked hard for the man who had him and soon Joseph was taking care of the whole house for the man. But one day the man's wife told some lies about Joseph, and Joseph was put in jail. But God was with Joseph in jail, and soon Joseph was taking care of the whole jail.

Joseph was not only a good man, he was also a prophet. A prophet is someone to whom God tells things that others don't know. One day the king of Egypt, called Pharaoh, had a bad dream. Usually our dreams don't mean anything, but this was a very special bad dream that meant something important. And Pharaoh was very upset because he didn't know what the dream meant. Remember, though, that Joseph was a prophet, and God told Joseph what the dream meant, so Joseph was able to tell Pharaoh what his bad dream meant. The dream meant that there were going to be 7 years when lots and lots of food would grow. After that there would be 7 years when no food at all would grow.

Joseph told the Pharaoh that during the 7 years of lots of food that Pharaoh should save all of the extra food so that they would all have food in the years when the food didn't grow. Pharaoh liked this idea, and Pharaoh had Joseph be the man who would take care of saving the extra food. Pharaoh made Joseph to be very, very important in Egypt, almost as important as the king himself! So Joseph was taking care of all of Egypt! Wasn't God being good to Joseph! You see, God had a plan for Joseph.

Well, during the 7 years when lots of food grew, Joseph saved all of the extra food in special buildings. Then the 7 years came when no food grew. So people would come to Joseph and buy food from him. And guess what? Back where Joseph's father and brothers lived, the food wasn't growing either. They didn't have any food left. So Joseph's father, Jacob, told Joseph's brothers to go to Egypt and buy food.

Joseph's brother all went down to Egypt except the youngest brother Benjamin. Jacob didn't want Benjamin to go, because Benjamin was the only one of Rachel's sons that he had left. So the 10 brothers went into Egypt to Joseph without Benjamin. When Joseph saw them, Joseph knew who they were, but they didn't know who he was! He didn't tell them that he was Joseph, their brother that they had sold as a slave! Joseph sold the food to his brothers, but he told them they couldn't

come back for more food unless they brought Benjamin with them.

So the brothers went back to Jacob their father. After a while their food was all gone and Jacob wanted them to go to Egypt to buy more food. But the brothers told their father Jacob that the important man in Egypt (who they didn't know was their brother Joseph!) told them they couldn't buy any more food unless they brought Benjamin with them. Poor Jacob didn't know what to do. But finally since they were all out of food, Jacob had to let them take Benjamin with them. One of the older brothers named Judah said that he would take care of Benjamin.

Well, the 11 brothers got to Egypt again and came to Joseph to buy food. Joseph was so glad to see Benjamin. Joseph still didn't tell his brothers who he was, but he had them go to his house to have dinner with him. After they had eaten, Joseph sold them the food they wanted and sent them home. But Joseph had their money put back in their sacks of food and had his own silver cup put in Benjamin's sack. Now, why do you suppose Joseph did that? Well, he had a plan to find out if his brothers were really sorry for having been so bad to him!

After the brothers started to go back home, Joseph sent a man out to chase after them and ask them why they had stolen Joseph's cup. The brothers knew they hadn't stolen anything, and they said that if the man could find the cup, then the one who had the cup would be Joseph's slave. So the man looked in all the sacks, and last of all he looked in Benjamin's sack. And, of course, there was Joseph's cup, right where he had put it!! Well, the brothers were all very upset. And they all just loaded up their donkeys and ran back to Joseph. They all fell on the ground in front of Joseph, and Judah told Joseph, "Take us all as slaves!" Joseph said, "No, I'll only take as a slave the one who had my cup." But Judah said, "Oh, sir, please listen. Benjamin, this brother of ours is our father's favorite son now since our other brother is dead." (He was talking about Joseph as being dead!) "I told my father that I would take care of Benjamin, and I can't go home without him. Please, sir, please keep me as a slave and let Benjamin go home to our father. Our father will die if anything happens to Benjamin!" You can see that Judah and the others were all very sorry that they had been so mean to Joseph years before when they had sold him as a slave. They knew there was no way they could give Joseph back to their father, Jacob, but they didn't want anything to happen to Benjamin now.

Well, Joseph knew from what Judah said that his brothers were really and truly sorry for what they had done to him, and he forgave them. Joseph began to cry, and he said to them, "I am Joseph, your brother!!" The brothers didn't know what to think! Here was this very important man in Egypt saying that he was their brother! So Joseph said, "Yes, I am your brother Joseph. The one you sold as a slave to Egypt. You thought you were being mean to me, but God had that as a plan so that you would be saved alive when there wasn't any food!"

Then Joseph told his brothers that there were more years of famine, and they should go back and get their father Jacob and their families and bring them all down into Egypt, and there Joseph would take care of all of them. And Joseph grabbed Benjamin and hugged him and kissed him, and Benjamin and Joseph hugged each other and cried. Then Joseph cried more as he kissed his other 10 brothers, the ones who had sold him to be a slave. Joseph had truly forgiven them and only

wanted to help them.

Well, Pharaoh heard about this, and Pharaoh liked Joseph very much and wanted to make Joseph happy, so Pharaoh told Joseph to send wagons down to get his father and his brothers' wives and children and to bring them into Egypt where he could take care of them. So that's what Joseph did.

Joseph's brothers took the wagons and went back home to Jacob, their father. And they told him how Joseph was alive and was very important in Egypt. Jacob could hardly believe it! Why, Joseph wasn't dead after all! Jacob was so very happy! Then the brothers took their wives and children and Jacob their father into the wagons and took them all back to Egypt. And Joseph took care of them all during the years that there was no food. They all lived in a good part of Egypt where there was lots of grass for their sheep and cows. And they all lived there in Egypt and were happy there in Egypt.

Jacob was a prophet, too, and when Jacob was very old, he told his son Judah that one of Judah's descendants would be a great king. We know that this great king would be our Saviour, Jesus, who would come and die for us and be made alive again.

But years before God had also promised Abraham that someday God would bring Abraham's descendants back to the land of Canaan, the land God had promised to Abraham. And we know that God always keeps His promises, don't we? So Joseph (remember, he was a prophet) knew that someday all of Jacob's great-grandchildren would go back to the Promised Land, to Canaan, just as God had promised. And he told them that. When Joseph was going to die, he told his brothers that when God took them back to Canaan, that they were to take his body back there and bury it there. So the book of Genesis ends with Joseph dead in Egypt, his body in a casket waiting to go back to the Promised Land of Canaan just as God had promised.

So that is the end of the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings. The beginning of the world, the beginning of the sun and moon and stars, the beginning of plants and animals and people, the beginning of the clean world after the Flood, the beginning of God's special people, the Jews, and the beginning of God's promises of a Saviour for us. Weren't there some interesting stories in Genesis? And the best part is that they were all true, they really happened. And, yes, Genesis is really the book of beginnings, isn't it? The beginning of the world and people, the beginning of the Jewish nation, and the beginning of God's promises to people that He would send a Saviour to save people from the punishment of their sins. This Saviour's name is Jesus, but we find that out later in the Bible.

Now, there are a few names that you should remember from the book of Genesis. Of course, we always remember God. God is all through the whole Bible. But from Genesis, we need to remember Adam and Eve, Noah, then Abraham, his son Isaac, Abraham's grandson Jacob, and Jacob's 12 sons who are Joseph and his brothers. So, Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph and his brothers. If you remember those names, you'll be able to remember about the first book in the Bible, the book of Genesis, the beginning of everything.