

CREATING LIVING TRUSTING

HEBREWS 10:16 

This is the covenant that I will make with them.

*After these days, says the Lord,
I will place my laws in their hearts
And write them on their minds.*

CREATING

GENESIS 9:12a 

*God said, "This is the symbol of the covenant
that I am drawing up between me and you
and every living thing with you."*

GOD ESTABLISHES THE COVENANT to be in relationship with us. So the first eight weeks, **Creating the Covenant**, examines how the covenant community is created and established—highlighting several examples throughout scripture.

It discusses the story of our origins in Genesis, the Exodus narrative, the teachings of Moses, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, as well as other books from each Testament that focus on the foundation of Christian faith.

In doing so, it lays out the framework for a life lived in concert with God and others.

CREATING

EPIISODE 1

Creating The Covenant

Leader Guide

Participant Guide

EPIISODE 1

Torah: Genesis

Leader Guide

Participant Guide

Meditation Guide

EPIISODE 1

Creating the Covenant

RELATIONSHIPS

Reading the Bible to live and love well

Covenant Prayer

For those who want to learn how to love God and others

They read aloud from the scroll, the Instruction from God, explaining and interpreting it so the people could understand what they heard. (Nehemiah 8:8)

For those whom God makes new

This day is holy to our LORD. Don't be sad, because the joy from the LORD is your strength! (Nehemiah 8:10)

OUR LONGING FOR RELATIONSHIP

Covenant names our yearning to live and belong in loving relationships with self, God, and others.



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We probably have seen scrapbooks or family photo albums (in binders, books, or online). What kind of pictures or mementos do you find in books like this? Did your family keep a scrapbook or photo album from your childhood?



LIFE THAT FITS AND CONNECTS

Covenant Bible Study promises new life that fits and connects with God and others. Life that makes sense. Life that finds its source in God. Life lived together.

The Bible is a book like no other, and reading it is a rewarding experience. The assumption is that reading the Bible will improve our lives. But in spite of this assumption, many of us try to read this book and give up—usually after trying to read it from cover to cover. We often become confused by the strange names, places, and events that seem so distant from our daily lives. It can make us feel defeated, and so we throw in the towel and trust that someone else (pastor, scholar, or teacher) will make sense of this book and pass on the “high points” to the rest of us.

But our anxiety about reading the Bible may be connected to a deeper frustration and longing—a longing to connect with and come alive to something real, something lasting that promises to help us live well. Awash in a world of flickering words and images on glowing screens, we thirst for depth, for something that faithfully delivers on a promise to make a difference where we learn, work, and play. We want more than a superficial faith. Yet for many, the Bible seems like the last place for this kind of reality check.

Covenant Bible Study is one way to dispel this anxiety and reconnect with the deepest realities of our faith. Its goal is to cultivate lifelong trust in God and help participants discover the Bible as a friend for life. Covenant is based on the simple idea that we live well when we love well. When we read it together, we remember and retell the deepest story we know. This is the story of who we are, where we come from, and where we go wrong. And the story ends well because faithful love is at work in everything to restore hope, freedom, and wholeness to our lives.

The Bible follows the sometimes faithful and sometimes faithless responses of Israel and the church, tracking changes in the lives of key people and the community itself as they respond to God’s call. We find ourselves in tales of rivalry and rebellion, and in stories of corruption, catastrophe, and crisis. We see our own anxious desire for security expressed in its narratives of idolatry and rigid tribal boundaries. But we also see our misplaced loyalties graced by God’s restoring love. These grace-filled stories give us hope that God will make beautiful things out of the fragments and dust of our fallen lives.

The Bible speaks in more than one voice. It contains many conversations and perspectives, inviting us to join a discussion that began with creation in Genesis and extends to our street corners, coffee shops, offices, schools, and dinner tables. Covenant Bible Study is one way to continue that conversation. When we ask questions, share stories, and wrestle with some of the biggest issues facing us as human beings, this living conversation is woven into our lives. Reading the Bible together helps us deal with questions like, “How—or even—Is God with us? Is any of this real or true?” Real experiences and real questions come together in our search for something we can trust—a scripture reliable enough to be called a friend for life.

In the process, we discover that God is not anxious about this ongoing discussion, but that God actually shows up in some powerful ways, in loyal relationship, when we open ourselves and risk joining the conversation. Covenant Bible Study is an opportunity to belong to a group of friends discovering how the Bible is a companion for life.

A Covenant Bible Study consists of:

1. A **small group** of adults who pledge to read and study the Bible individually and together for an extended period of time. The group’s purpose is to deepen commitment to live as faithful followers of Jesus Christ.
2. An **experience** that trains participants in disciplined daily Bible reading, prayer, and holy conversation. Participants learn these skills by responding to participant guides, study Bibles, videos, and devotional meditations. The experience becomes accountable at weekly meetings in a group setting for fellowship, learning, and the shared practice of interpreting scripture. This setting is where scripture meets everyday experience within and beyond your church life.
3. A **promise** to cultivate practical wisdom, so that the knowledge of the participant and the group is enlarged when interpreting the Bible and conversing about life. What results is a covenant relationship with God that will redeem a broken world in need of transformation.

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Do your parents or grandparents ever tell competing versions of the same events? Do you have any “memories” that turned out to be the story you’ve always been told? Does that make them more or less reliable?
.....

.....
The Bible is a conversation partner for life. Reading it recalls and even rewrites our deepest stories, helping us recognize and respond to the true God who saves a suffering, shattered world.
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The Covenant Bible experience helps participants:

1. **learn** by dispelling anxiety about understanding the Bible;
2. **grow** by practicing conversation about scripture and relationships in a group;
3. **change** by improving skills for reading the Bible and living faithfully;
4. **discover** by naming your unique identity and purpose through the scriptural witness;
5. **share** by belonging to a group of friends in faith;
6. **experience** by invoking God's power and presence through spiritual reading and listening practices; and
7. **serve** by responding to what you learn and bringing covenant love to others.

Living well depends primarily on the attachments that we form. These bonds can be described in terms of who and what we love. Who and what we love expresses who we are (our identity) and also shows what matters most to each of us (our purpose).

In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy insists that the basic human yearning for healthy relationship is based in faithful love: "Israel, listen! Our God is the LORD! Only the LORD! Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength" (Deut 6:4-5). In the New Testament, Jesus acknowledges Deuteronomy ("love the Lord your God") as the greatest expectation in the scriptures, and then he preaches: "You must love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Matt 22:39). Jesus confirms that you will find it hard to love a neighbor if your well-being (your whole heart and mind) is fragmented or distracted by substitutes for loyal love or by selfish desires.

Love has a learning curve. When we better understand God's faithful love expressed through scripture in the stories, songs, instructions, prophecies, and prayers for help, we find that living well together is always about our relationships.

Covenant is an organizing pattern for studying the whole scripture

“Covenant” is the solemn and enduring commitment made between God and human beings to be in a fruitful and creative relationship. When Christians speak about a relationship with God, we invoke the language and images of covenant. To express the relationship, we might say, “God is my father,” or “Jesus is my friend,” or “I am God’s child.” These expressions invoke commitment and loyalty.

This emphasis on covenant in the Bible is one way to get the big picture. It helps make sense of a long, ancient book that seems very strange and overwhelming. The Christian Bible is actually a library of sixty-six interrelated books. Think of the Bible as a quilt with sixty-six squares. Covenant is a dominant pattern that runs through this quilt because:

1. In the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy), God’s relationship with God’s people is grounded in a series of covenants. Torah is the Instruction (or Teaching; also called “the Law” in the King James Version) that maintains the relationship between God’s word (the expectations established by God) and God’s faithful or loyal people. The Torah shows that what we put in our mouths and consume with our minds will affect our well-being, the health of our relationship with God, and our relationships with others. As you will learn in Episode 2 on the Torah and Genesis, covenant in the Bible is based on the relationships formed by the first human families. Our best (and sometimes most painful) experiences in life come from learning how to love each other in a family.
2. Sometimes covenant is also understood in contractual and legal terms. We use the word *covenant* when describing how a group of neighbors might agree to get along with each other for mutual benefit. This sort of “neighborhood agreement” goes back to ancient times, when a tribal leader or ruler would “cut a covenant” with a neighboring tribe. These legal analogies can stimulate useful conversation about the responsibilities that are embedded in contemporary relationships with our families, friends, and government. However, the legal sanctions and retributions that were prescribed for violating a covenant in ancient societies can raise difficult issues that require thoughtful Christian reflection. A Covenant Bible

The Christian Bible is actually a library of sixty-six interrelated books. Think of the Bible as a quilt with sixty-six squares. Covenant is a dominant pattern that runs through this quilt.



Study group is a safe place to discuss the expectations we have for each other in our homes and communities.

3. Covenant is the dominant theme of the core stories (about the leading personalities) in the Bible, including the five major covenants that are based in promises and fulfilled through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. A story is a great way to show us (rather than simply tell us) what faithful love looks like. The books of Esther and Ruth, for example, are examples of faithful covenant love. The history writings from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings are also based in covenants that show how the well-being of God's people is determined by their loyalty to God and their commitment to this relationship.

4. Many of the prophets, but especially Hosea and Jeremiah, are schooled by covenant theology as they confront leaders who have responsibilities toward God and their communities. A breached covenant is how the prophets eventually explain the exile and the near extermination or scattering of Israelites by Babylon and Assyria. Jeremiah, in the "Book of the Covenant" (Jer 30–33), yearns for a new covenant that is cut into our hearts.

5. We look back at that expectation and yearning for a covenant inscribed on our hearts, and we as Christians realize that this new life is possible through Jesus, the one who reconciles us to God through his faithfulness on the cross. In the Gospels, God's kingdom is a vision of a better future for the new community of Christ-followers.

6. When the early Christians were "born again" and referred to each other as "sister" or "brother," they established their kinship through a family. Covenant life was the context for the letters to the Christian communities (for example, at Corinth or Ephesus) as they grappled with the ethical implications of living in relationships. This kind of covenant community is apparent when referring to Jesus as the head and the church as the body. This is also why Paul often refers to himself as the father of his parishioners. When we think of the most intimate relationships known to human beings—mother, father, sister, brother, lover, child, partner, spouse, friend—each of these identities was and is used by Christians to describe the covenant relationships between the people, their Lord, and their community.

Many Christians make a promise to read the whole Bible in a year. That is really hard to do, especially alone. Most people stall

before Leviticus. To gain an in-depth understanding of the whole Bible, Covenant offers patient and flexible guidance. The three participant guides encourage your group to meet in eight-week segments:

1. Creating the Covenant
2. Living the Covenant
3. Trusting the Covenant

It feels great each time your group finishes working through one of the participant guides, because it means you've also finished working through about a third of the Bible. The books of the Bible are arranged to cover the whole scripture while emphasizing the themes that are drawn from the covenants in the Bible.

The initial eight weeks feature how the covenant community is created and established. The next eight weeks feature how the community wisely lives out their covenant in faithful love. The final eight weeks feature how the community and individuals are restored to hope—to trust God when troubling things happen.

Because the Christian Bible is fixed in a certain order from Genesis to Revelation, people often try to study scripture in that order. Typically Christians end up neglecting the unfamiliar Old Testament books and sticking to the New Testament (and perhaps some of the psalms). While it might seem surprising to mix the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament, this Bible study's three-part covenant pattern will help us see that the New Testament writers are in conversation with the covenant themes of the Old Testament books.

Loving others in your group

Holy conversation about the Bible is vital to your spiritual health. You are part of a covenant group. In a group, the participants get more than knowledge about the Bible. Knowledge isn't enough to sustain or deepen trust in God. Group participants actually form covenant relationships with each other as they examine and practice what it means to stay in love with God. As you learn to share and love and serve together, the members of the covenant group make a commitment to each other. They learn to forgive each other if offended,



and they make a commitment together to deepen their relationship with God.

Your leader will convene the covenant group each week and help you develop a transforming conversation about the scriptures. This conversational approach is modeled for you in the weekly video episodes about the books you are studying. The Bible is most transformative when it is read and discussed together. Your understanding and life experience is shared, and as you listen to another's understanding of the story or hear about their practical experience, God's presence (the Holy Spirit) begins to turn and change hearts and minds. Amazing hope suddenly seems possible because God's love is discovered through these personal relationships.

Resources for the Covenant experience:

1. *Participant Guides*: The three Covenant participant guides show you what to read and offer space to interact personally with the daily Bible readings, the prayers, and the weekly covenant meditations. The guides are available from Cokesbury as a print set (or individually); or as enhanced eBooks in the Covenant Bible Study app (iOS and Android) for tablets and personal computers from CovenantBibleStudy.com.
2. *Covenant Meditations*: Many participants find great personal benefit and contentment in an intimate connection with God through "praying scripture." In addition to the once-weekly meditation in the participant guides (on Day 6), a set of fifty-two additional covenant meditations is available in print or as an eBook.
3. *Covenant CEB Study Bible*: Participants and leaders are encouraged to obtain and use this study Bible (published in 2013) to inform the daily readings and the group meeting experience for Covenant. The *CEB Study Bible* is available in print, and it is also an option within the Covenant Bible Study app.
4. *CovenantBibleStudy.com*: Encourage your leader to collect everyone's email address and register your group online. In addition to

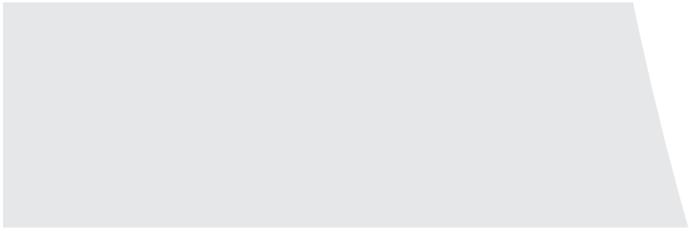
meeting reminders, benefits include a daily e-mail of the assigned Bible reading to everyone in the group. You can also download the daily Bible readings for Covenant as a navigable MP3 audiobook, based on the enhanced audio edition of the Common English Bible. At the website, participants can also download or stream the weekly video episodes (for a small fee), perhaps for a weekly meeting that was missed or to see what is ahead in the next weekly episode. Bonus videos (including Bible stories retold) are mentioned occasionally in the text of the participant guides. These are also located at the website for personal or group viewing.

Guidelines for reading the Bible

Covenant is explained above as the key pattern throughout this in-depth Bible study. However, many participants will come to the Bible with further questions about how we got the Bible, when the stories or writing of the Bible took place, why we have an Old Testament and a New Testament, or who decided that we should read the Bible. These questions are answered in the articles of the *Covenant CEB Study Bible*. When you feel lost, get your bearings from the following articles, cited by page number and found toward the end of the *CEB Study Bible* (after the book of Revelation and before the phrase concordance):

The Authority of Scripture	527–31
The Bible’s Unity	532–37
How We Got the Bible	538–44
The Bible and Its Chronology	545–50
Guidelines for Reading the Bible	551–55

You can find more Bible study resources with the Covenant smartphone/tablet app or by visiting CovenantBibleStudy.com.



Next week in Episode 2 we will start with a fundamental human question: Who are we? In Genesis and the rest of the Torah, we learn about creating covenants with God and others. You will encounter God's covenant with all creation and then God's particular covenant with the people who descended from Abraham and Sarah.

SIGNS OF FAITHFUL LOVE

Covenant people read the Bible together to learn how to love God and others better.

WHO ARE WE?

Creating covenants with God and others

Bible Readings

Day 1: Genesis 1–3

Day 2: Genesis 6:5–9:17; 11:1-9

Day 3: Genesis 12; 15; 17; 22

Day 4: Genesis 27; 28; 32; 33

Day 5: Genesis 37; 41; 43; 45; 50

Day 6: Covenant Meditation on Genesis 1:26-31

Day 7: Group Meeting Experience with Genesis 9:7-17

Covenant Prayer

For those who are suffering in chaos

*Hear my prayer, LORD! Listen closely to my cry for help!
(Psalm 39:12)*

For those who celebrate new creation

Your word gives me new life. (Psalm 119:50)

OUR LONGING FOR RELATIONSHIP

*We get into trouble—
hurting ourselves,
those we love, and
the world—when we
forget who we are
and to whom we
belong.*



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The Torah presents the instructions or teaching for worshipping God and living in a covenant community.
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In the new era of history following the flood, three great covenants redefine the human community and the role of the people of Israel within it.
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TORAH

The Christian and Jewish communities consider the first five books of the Bible as a separate portion of scripture. Christians call these books the Pentateuch, or “five books.” The books tell stories about the earliest events in God’s relationship with God’s people. Jews call these books the Torah, which the Common English Bible translates as “Instruction.” Beginning with the King James Version, however, *Torah* was often translated as “the Law.” By calling these books the Torah, our attention is focused on the great covenant God made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai—described in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Torah presents the instructions or teaching for worshipping God and living in a covenant community.

The aim of the Torah is to answer the question, “Who are we?” and the answer is vast and all-encompassing. Torah explains not only the unique character of the people of Israel and of God’s relationship to the people, but also their role in the larger world. To do this, the Torah explains the nature of humanity in all of its cultural diversity. The Torah also explains God’s relationship to Israel, and even more broadly, God’s relationship to the created world in which Israel lived. The Torah’s authors do all of this by telling the story of their own past, of how God brought nature, humanity, and Israel itself into being at the very beginning of time.

The Torah story is structured around crucial, community-shaping events. It begins with the creation of the natural world and the human role within it, followed by the first age of history, in which the human community fell into violence and perished in the great flood (Gen 1–8). In the new era of history following the flood, three great covenants redefine the human community and the role of the people of Israel within it.

Optional: *A bonus video on the tower of Babel and the unique role of Israel is available for download from www.CovenantBibleStudy.com.*

The first is God’s covenant with Noah, humanity, and all living things (Gen 9:1-17). The second is God’s covenant with Abraham and with his descendants, by which God selects a particular line of humanity for a particular role within it (Gen 15; 17). And the third is God’s covenant with Israel itself, the descendants of Jacob’s twelve sons, at Mount Sinai (Exod 19; 24; 31), where the great body of

instructions that would define Israel as a community were collected and recorded.

The Torah, like many books in the Old Testament, and like the Old Testament as a whole, is the product of multiple voices from ancient Israel. Jewish and Christian traditions eventually came to regard the entire Pentateuch as transcribed by a single individual Moses, but biblical scholars in recent centuries have noticed evidence of multiple authors: double accounts of the same event, contrasting styles and theological perspectives, and knowledge of events later than Moses' time.

The liveliest stories in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers come from the Torah's two earliest authors, who both lived during the Israelite monarchy: the Yahwist, so named because he used God's personal name, Yahweh (rendered "the LORD" in the CEB); and the Elohist, so named because he used the common word for "God," *Elohim*, in his narrative. The third contributor, a Priestly Writer, added his own traditions to the Yahwist's and Elohist's stories and organized them around God's three great covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Israel. He also contributed most of the expectations and instructions related to the Sinai covenant in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The fourth contributor's work, the book of Deuteronomy, was included in the Torah because it provided another record of the Sinai covenant. But based on style, theology, and vocabulary, we can tell that it was originally intended as the introduction to the historical books (Joshua through 2 Kings) that follow it. For this reason, it has been placed with the historical books in Episode 8.

GENESIS

The book of Genesis tells the first two parts of the larger Torah story: (1) how the world came into being and what role Israel's ancestors were given within it; and (2) how Israel itself emerged as a distinct community within the human race.

The first part of this story is described especially in the creation narratives at the beginning of Genesis (Gen 1–3). The authors of Genesis describe who they are in relation to the natural world, which they inhabit. In these creation stories they show themselves not merely as members of the Israelite community, or even of the human community, but also as members of the larger community of life in the entire creation, within which they are given clear roles and responsibilities. These roles and responsibilities reflect Israel's



.....
*The stories of Israel's
origins and identity are
family stories.*
.....

own understanding of its connection with nature and its place in the particular landscape and environment it inhabited.

In the second part of this Torah story in Genesis, when the new world is re-created after the flood, the authors of Genesis explain who they are in relation to the larger world of human cultures that they inhabit. To do this, they employ a complex web of genealogies with family stories to accompany them. These genealogies provide a comprehensive cultural map that documents how all of the peoples descended from the single family of Noah. This map shows how the different peoples are related to each other within the cultural world experienced by the authors of Genesis, and where exactly Israel fits into this larger human family.

In these genealogies and family stories, the main characters stand not only for themselves but for the people who descended from them and who made up the nations with which the authors of Genesis were familiar. Jacob and Esau, for example, in this week's reading for Day 4 (Gen 27; 28; 32; 33), represent the brothers in a family, but also the nations of Israel and Edom that descended from them.

In the stories of Genesis, community is conceived in terms of family and kinship systems. The stories of Israel's origins and identity are family stories, largely because the family is its basic unit. Its families are grouped into clans, its clans into tribes, and its tribes into a people, the nation of Israel. The authors thought carefully about their relationships in terms of the privileges and responsibilities of kinship.

They examined Israel's relationship to God and its covenants with God, Israel's relationship to other cultures, and the family, clan, and tribal relationships within Israel itself. This kinship culture had consequences for entering into covenants and building community.

Day 1: Genesis 1–3

Creation and the human role within it

The Bible begins its account of who Israel was as God's people by describing who they were in relation to their environment, the world of nature that surrounded and sustained them. By starting their story at the creation of the world, the biblical authors affirm that the first and most basic community of life is the entire natural world.

Genesis actually preserves two traditions about the world's beginnings and Israel's place within it. Both of these traditions view the world from Israel's ancient understandings of the world and their particular geographical location within it—not from the new knowledge of the cosmos gained by modern science.

The first creation tradition (Gen 1:1–2:4a, probably from the Priestly Writer) describes creation in seven days. This description establishes the Sabbath on the seventh day as part of the world's own rhythms and orders. It's written in a very orderly style that may have been intended for reading in a worship setting. It gives humans a high role in creation: We are made in God's own image and commissioned to take charge of the animal world. The second creation tradition (Gen 2:4b–3:24, and probably from the Yahwist, who uses the divine name Yahweh) describes creation in a small, local garden. It's more earthy and is written in a more informal, story-like style. And it gives humans a much more modest role in creation: They are made out of the earth's topsoil and commissioned to farm (or “serve”) the fertile land from which they were created.

As you read these two creation stories, note their similarities and differences and consider how more than one perspective provides a deeper understanding of the world and humanity than a single account could.

Day 2: Genesis 6:5–9:17; 11:1-9

End of the old world—beginning of the new world

Biblical writers shared the common ancient idea that a great flood brought an end to the first age of human history and introduced the new age of history in which they themselves lived. In these ancient stories, something went wrong in the first age that required starting over. Humanity had become violent and corrupt. So God selected Noah, the moral and exemplary man of his time, together with his family and a pair from each species of animal, to survive the flood and begin the world anew.

God begins the new world by establishing a covenant relationship with all living things. The covenant offers them life, protection, and a



relationship with God for all time (Gen 9:1-17). Included in the Bible's first covenant are the entire human race descended from Noah's family and all of the living things who survived the flood. The story of the city of Babel that follows (Gen 11:1-9) explains how the human members of God's first covenant became culturally diverse, even though they descended from a single family and wished to preserve a single culture. Because some readers have misread the story of Babel as a story of human pride and God's punishment for it, they have claimed that God rejected God's covenant relationship with the human race in order to make a covenant with Abraham alone. This biblical story, however, tells us that God's covenant with Abraham was a particular covenant within God's larger covenant with the human race as a whole.

What feelings do you have about cultural and racial differences in your neighborhood? In your church?

Day 3: Genesis 12; 15; 17; 22

Abraham and nationhood

God's covenant with Abraham is the Bible's second covenant, preserved by the Yahwist (Gen 15) and the Priestly Writer (Gen 17). It shows that within God's larger covenant with all of humanity and all living things (Gen 9:1-17), God established a particular kind of relationship with this line of Noah's descendants. This relationship is one that will define the people of Israel as a unique community within the human race as a whole. That community will be established as a nation among other ancient nations (Gen 12:2; 17:6), with a flourishing population (Gen 15:5; 17:2), and a land to sustain them (Gen 12:7; 15:18).

This model of a community in covenant relationship with God is based in kinship, culture, and politics. It mirrors the religious life and practices of its time and place, when culture, politics, and religion were a single integrated system. It contains a number of powerful ideas that sustained the lives of these people: the confidence in an enduring relationship with God, the belief that their lives and identities played an important part in God's world, a strong national and communal solidarity, and a

close relationship to the land. At the same time, this model of community is packaged with specific cultural, ethnic, patriarchal, and political aspects that contemporary Christians may no longer wish to define in their own communities.

Both the Yahwist and the Priestly Writer have preserved records of the covenant with Abraham. Compare the Yahwist's style and theology of covenant in Genesis 15 with the style and theology of his creation story (Gen 2:4b–3:24). Compare the Priestly Writer's style and theology of covenant in Genesis 17 with the style and theology of his creation story (Gen 1:1–2:4a) and his record of the covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1-17).

Compare the covenant story in Genesis 15 with the covenant story in Genesis 17.

Day 4: Genesis 27; 28; 32; 33

Jacob and the biblical family

While Abraham is Israel's most typical ancestor to whom the promises of nationhood were first made, Jacob, his grandson, is the ancestor who received the nation's name, Israel, and whose twelve sons became ancestors of the twelve tribes that made up the nation (Gen 29–30). These stories about Jacob explain how he, rather than his older brother, Esau, became Isaac's primary heir, and they reveal traits of biblical characters and their families that puzzle and trouble modern readers. Jacob, Israel's namesake, and his mother, Rebekah, had to deceive Isaac and Esau to acquire the blessing that God gave to Jacob.

Community in ancient Israel, as in these stories of its ancestors, is grounded in family structures. These structures privilege the oldest male member of the family, the patriarch, and his oldest son, the family's legal heir. These same structures exclude women and secondary sons from the status and agency to participate in family decisions and to carry on the family's legacy. Rebekah and Jacob find ways to subvert traditional structures in order to claim their voices and their places in the family. Against convention and cultural expectations, God sides in each generation in the book of Genesis with those excluded from power and privilege



within these kinship systems. The story of Rebekah and Jacob is one example of this (Gen 25:21-23; 28:13-15).

What puzzles or troubles you in the family stories about Jacob and Rebekah?

Day 5: Genesis 37; 41; 43; 45; 50

Joseph and his brothers in Egypt

The stories about Jacob's sons that conclude Genesis are some of the most colorful and emotional in the book. A key theme in them, as in every family story in Genesis, is sibling rivalry. As the first and most basic conflict in life, sibling rivalry in Genesis represents the conflicts that arise not just in the family, but also within the larger community of Israel, and even between Israel and its neighboring nations. The conflicts between Jacob's sons also represent the conflicts between the later tribes made up of their descendants, just as the conflict between Jacob and Esau also represents in a larger scope the conflict between their descendants, the Israelites and the Edomites.

In every family in Genesis but one, this deep and primal conflict that threatened to tear apart the fabric of the community was resolved through generosity and a great capacity for understanding. The one exception is the family who lived in the troubled age before the flood when Cain killed his brother, Abel (Gen 4:1-16). In all of the other family dramas, bloodshed was averted. In the stories of Jacob and Esau and of Joseph and his brothers, the wronged brother, with good reason and enough power to take revenge, instead forgave and restored the relationship that was broken.

The other key theme in these concluding stories in Genesis is God's protection of Jacob's family from death by famine. This protection extended beyond Jacob's family, however, to include all of Egypt and all of the known world that came to buy grain (Gen 41:57; 45:5). Before Egypt became a furnace of oppression in Exodus through Numbers, it was a refuge from hunger that shared its bounty with the world.

How did Jacob's troubled family resolve their conflicts?

Day 6: Genesis 1:26-31

Covenant Meditation: Who are we?

Each week on Day 6, we will approach and encounter scripture in a different way than in our study on Days 1–5. Through the following exercise, we will practice one form of spiritual reading that has been taught in the church for many generations—the practice of using our imagination. This practice is designed to deepen our ability to listen for what God is trying to reveal to us through scripture. It represents one way that we can learn to read the Bible devotionally, while also participating in study of the texts.

Read Genesis 1:26-31 again, but do so slowly, paying attention to each word, phrase, and action. In this passage, God addresses our question, “Who are we?” even before humanity is added to the scene of creation. Notice that what God says, God then does, and that we as human beings take form in God’s imagination and words before we become part of the created order on earth.

Now read these verses of Genesis once more, using your imagination to place yourself nearby as God speaks and creates. What do you see? What colors, shapes, animals, and movements? What do you hear? What sounds come to mind as you read these words? Are there aromas or scents that you might associate with this scene as you take your time reading: the scent of the earth, of water, of animals? Can you imagine the feel of any textures, objects, or movements: breeze, rain, dirt? Allow all of your senses to bring your imagination to bear on this passage in Genesis, and notice what is stirred up for you. If you would like, write down your reflections as you follow this practice of spiritual reading, and then look back over how this way of reading may have opened the passage to you in a new way.



Group Meeting Experience

Genesis 9:7-17 | The Bible's first covenant

At the beginning of the new world following the flood, God makes the covenant that becomes the foundation for the Torah covenants that follow: the covenants with Abraham and with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai.

1. To gain an appreciation for the style of the Priestly Writer who structured the Torah around three great covenants, compare the language, vocabulary, and style of this covenant with the covenants with Abraham in Genesis 17 and with Israel in Exodus 31:12-18. Also compare to these the Priestly account of the world's creation in seven days in Genesis 1:1–2:4a. What are the key words, phrases, and features of Priestly style and thought?
2. With whom does God enter into relationship in this covenant?
3. What does this covenant claim about God's relationship to the world as a whole?
4. The Priestly Writer probably lived during the time of the exile (after 587 BCE), when his people's past had been destroyed and their future was in doubt. In this context, how might such a covenant provide hope for survival and a way forward?
5. In the Bible's first covenant, how might God's relation to the world, to all its forms of life, and to all its people inform our own understanding of our place and role in the world?

SIGNS OF FAITHFUL LOVE

God's covenant with us returns us to our true selves—made in the image of God—and sends the Covenant people out to be a blessing to the world God loves.