

Source Sheet: What is the Theme of the Book of Genesis? **Discussion led by David Benkof (DavidBenkof@gmail.com)**

1. Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:2-8)

And Abel was a shepherd of flocks, and Cain was a tiller of the soil. Now it came to pass at the end of days, that Cain brought of the fruit of the soil an offering to the Lord. And Abel he too brought of the firstborn of his flocks and of their fattest, and the Lord turned to Abel and to his offering. But to Cain and to his offering He did not turn, and it annoyed Cain exceedingly, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen? Is it not so that if you improve, it will be forgiven you? If you do not improve, however, at the entrance, sin is lying, and to you is its longing, but you can rule over it." And Cain spoke to Abel his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him.

2. Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Genesis 9:22-27)

And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness, and he told his two brothers outside. And Shem and Japheth took the garment, and they placed [it] on both of their shoulders, and they walked backwards, and they covered their father's nakedness, and their faces were turned backwards, so that they did not see their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and he knew what his small son had done to him. And he said, "Cursed be Canaan; he shall be a slave among slaves to his brethren." And he said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be a slave to them. May God expand Japheth, and may He dwell in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be a slave to them."

(Genesis 10:21)

And to Shem were also born [children; he was] the father of all the people of the other side [of the river], the brother of Japheth the elder. ("Achi Yefet Hagadol")

3. Isaac and Ishmael (Genesis 17:19-21)

And God said, "Indeed, your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac, and I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his seed after him. And regarding Ishmael, I have heard you; behold I have blessed him, and I will make him fruitful, and I will multiply him exceedingly; he will beget twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this time next year."

4. Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27:35-40)

And [Isaac] said, "Your brother came with cunning and took your blessing." And [Esau] said, "Is it for this reason that he was named Jacob? For he has deceived me twice; he took my birthright, and behold, now he has taken my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" And Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Behold, I made him a master over you, and I gave him all his brothers as servants, and I have sustained him with corn and wine; so for you then, what shall I do, my son?" And Esau said to his father, "Have you [but] one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father." And Esau raised his voice and wept. And his father Isaac answered and said to him, "Behold, your dwelling place shall be the fat places of the earth and of the dew of the heaven from above. And you shall live by your sword, and you shall serve your brother, and it will be, when you grieve, that you will break his yoke off your neck."

5. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah (Genesis 49:3-10)

Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength and the first of my might. [You should have been] superior in rank and superior in power. [You have] the restlessness of water; [therefore,] you shall not have superiority, for you ascended upon your father's couch; then you profaned [Him Who] ascended upon my bed. Simeon and Levi are brothers; stolen instruments are their weapons. Let my soul not enter their counsel; my honor, you shall not join their assembly, for in their wrath they killed a man, and with their will they hamstringed a bull. Cursed be their wrath for it is mighty, and their anger because it is harsh. I will separate them throughout Jacob, and I will scatter them throughout Israel. Judah, [as for] you, your brothers will acknowledge you. Your hand will be at the nape of your enemies, [and] your father's sons will prostrate themselves to you. A cub [and] a grown lion is Judah. From the prey, my son, you withdrew. He crouched, rested like a lion, and like a lion, who will rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the student of the law from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him will be a gathering of peoples.

6. Ephraim and Menasseh (Genesis 48:17-20)

And Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim's head, and it displeased him. So he held up his father's hand to remove it from upon Ephraim's head [to place it] on Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, Father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." But his father refused, and he said, "I know, my son, I know; he too will become a people, and he too will be great. But his younger brother will be greater than he, and his children[s fame] will fill the nations." So he blessed them on that day, saying, "With you, Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh,' " and he placed Ephraim before Manasseh.