

BEYOND EDEN



GENESIS I - III

Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church
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INTRODUCTION:

Genesis has been the cause of fierce historical, literary, theological and scientific controversy down through the ages. It is difficult to come to these first pages of the Bible without a sense of trepidation, and our heads ringing with various questions. While these questions are certainly legitimate, we must be careful that they don't obscure the real message of Genesis

"The key to all good research, including Bible research, is asking the right questions. If we try to find answers to our questions in Genesis - questions that Genesis does not answer - our search will be fruitless. We do not consult a street directory to find phone numbers. Nor should we consult Genesis to find answers to questions it is not the least concerned to answer."

Moreover, if we are too obsessed with modern controversy we may overlook the searching questions that Genesis IS asking us. These are questions of far greater moment than the details of some primeval chemical reaction. They are questions about the very nature of our lives. Does life have meaning? Do we, as persons, have any meaning? Should we think of ourselves as 'persons', or merely as apes that have learned to talk?" (Beyond Eden: Genesis 1-11, p9)

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Genesis is the first of five books called the Pentateuch. The New Testament attributes these writings to Moses. During the last century, many critics have questioned the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Liberal scholarship attributes these writings to unknown authors or redactors long after Moses, probably late in the monarchy. Nevertheless, a strong case can be made for the traditional view that Moses wrote most of the Pentateuch, even though he may have used existing sources for Genesis, and some of the material may have been edited after his death. At any rate, we will assume that the message of Genesis was given to Israel during their years in the wilderness, around 1250 B.C. Therefore, we need to know something of Israel's cultural and religious situation in order to understand what the author intends to teach.

For about four hundred years the Hebrews had languished in Egypt, far from the land promised to Abraham. Those centuries took a spiritual as well as a physical toll. The Hebrews had no Scriptures, only some oral patriarchal traditions. Even after they were miraculously delivered from slavery and led toward Canaan, the people apparently had little knowledge of the God of their forefather Abraham.

When the Hebrews arrived at Mount Sinai, their worldview and lifestyle probably differed little from that of neighbouring nations. Their culture was essentially pagan. Now God was calling them to keep his covenant, to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). Moses faced a formidable task. The people needed a radically different theology to know God and his purpose in history, a new religious institution to guide their worship, another lifestyle for moral and ethical living, and a new cosmology to reorient their attitudes toward the natural world. These five books of Moses were designed to make Israel into a people of God through a new, divinely instituted culture. For this reason the Pentateuch provides strong anti-pagan teaching to help God's people make a clean break with the past, and learn to look at all of life from his point of view.

THE ROLE OF GENESIS

Genesis opens with an account of the beginning of the universe. It strikes hard not only at the nature gods worshiped by Israel's pagan neighbours but also at an array of false philosophies which have led large sections of the human race astray in every century.

The creation of the world culminates in God forming a man and woman. But they soon rebel against their Creator and plunge humanity into sin, with its devastating consequences. From then on, Genesis recounts the drama of God's mighty acts of judgment and mercy as his redemptive purpose unfolds.

Throughout these narratives, a central and organizing motif is the "call of God." His creative word initially calls the whole creation into being. God then calls into existence a covenant community to be his special people, promising to bless them and to be their God. Genesis and the whole Old Testament look forward to his new creation and covenant in Jesus Christ, into whose fellowship we also are called.

GENESIS 1:1-2:3: “AND GOD SAID ...”

1. Read Genesis 1:1–2:3. Summarise the main ideas under the following headings;

God:

The Creation:

Man:

2. In what ways do God's creative commands during the first three days add form to the *formless* earth (1:3-13)?
3. How do God's commands during the next three days add fullness to the *empty* earth (1:14-25)?
4. In what ways do you think God views his creation as being good (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25)?
5. In what ways are man and woman unique among God's creation (1:26-27)?
6. What special commands and provisions does God give to the man and woman in his creation (1:28-31)?
7. According to 1:26, the man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God. What similarities are there between God's own work in creation and the commands and responsibilities he gives to the man and woman?
8. How well are we doing at our responsibilities?
9. Is the creation of man or the seventh day rest the climax of the creation?

10. Look at Exodus 23:10-12; 31:14-17. What reasons does God give for having a rest period? What sort of time is a ‘sabbath’ meant to be? What are its characteristics? Why do you think Sabbath-breaking was such a serious offence?

11. What does this passage say to those who say;
a) That life is pointless and without purpose?

b) That humans are nothing more than apes who have learned to talk?

c) That humans control their own destiny, independent of everything else?

12. Read Col 1:15-17 and Heb 1:1-3. What do these verses teach us about Jesus as the one in God’s image?

13. What does this passage say to you about who you are and how you should live?

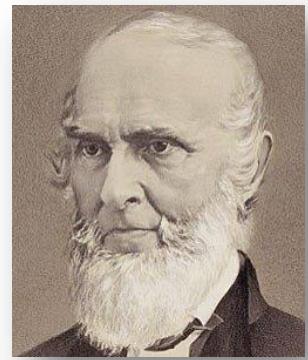
Prayer Points:

Thank God for the magnificence of his creation and for allowing you to play such an important role in it.

GENESIS 2:4-25: THE WAY THINGS WERE MEANT TO BE

*"For of all sad words of tongue or pen
The saddest are these: "It might have been!"*

John Greenleaf Whittier (American Writer, 1807-1892)



These words take on special significance when we consider life as God originally intended it. Genesis 2 still provides the basis for understanding whom we were meant to be in relation to God, nature and each other.

This narrative is different from the first in both content and style. It quickly moves from the world at large to the narrow stage of "a garden in the east." From the telescope to the microscope. The literary style also changes significantly with its more colourful and detailed descriptions. Even the name for God changes from the general title *Elohim* in Ch 1 to the personal name *Yahweh Elohim* - the LORD God - the God who is involved in a relationship with people.

Yet it continues to be history, rather than parable or myth, as it supplements the brief account of the creation of man and woman in 1:26-30.

Genesis 1 is like a computer game viewed from above - all big-picture and distant

Genesis 2 is like a first person shooter computer game, viewed through the eyes of the participants.

Both describe the same reality from a different point of view.



1. Read Genesis 2:4-25. What verse(s) describes the creation of man? How does this compare to the order of description in Gen 1? Any thoughts why?
2. Can you notice any other differences?
3. In what ways is man's creation unique?
4. What are we told about the garden God has prepared for Adam (vv. 8-14)?
5. What responsibility, freedom and limitation does God give to the man (vv. 15-17)?

6. Note the social dimension of being created in the image of God (v. 18). What implications does this have for your relationships with other people?
7. What do verses 18-24 teach about marriage?
8. **Read Eph 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7.**
 - a. If you are married, what do these verses mean for you in the way you should conduct your marriage?
 - b. If you aren't married, what are some characteristics that might make someone a wise choice as wife or husband.
9. How has this passage helped you understand who you were created to be in relation to God, nature and other people?

Prayer Points:

Thank your heavenly Father for making you in his image and likeness.

GENESIS 3: THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT

If God is good and powerful, why does he allow so much evil and pain? Although the Bible doesn't answer this question directly, it shows how sin and its consequences entered the world. The last chapter left Adam and Eve in Eden at peace with God, themselves and the natural world over which they had been given stewardship. They had the freedom to fulfil this responsibility and eat any fruit in the garden, with one exception. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil would be the test of their obedience to the Creator. In this study we see how they met this test and what lessons we can learn from their experience.

1. **Read Genesis 3:1-13.** What was the serpent's strategy?
2. What did the serpent promise would happen if Eve ate from the tree? Was he right?
3. The serpent now becomes more direct (vv. 4-5). What statements does he make about the purpose and results of the command?
4. What do you think was the essence of Adam and Eve's sin?
5. How did Adam and Eve's sin immediately affect their attitude toward themselves, each other and God (vv. 7-13)?
6. In Gen 1-2 God established a certain order in his creation. He is in authority, with man and his helper, woman, ruling over the rest of the creation. Compare this with what happens in Gen 3. What do you notice?
7. **Read Romans 5:12-21.**
 - a. What is the connection between the sin of Adam and our state?
 - b. What comparison is drawn between Adam and Jesus?
8. **Read 3:14-24.** What judgments does the Lord God pronounce on;
 - a. the serpent (vv. 14-15),
 - b. the woman (v. 16)
 - c. the man (vv. 17-19)?
9. How do you see these judgments being present in the world today?
10. **Read 1 Cor 15:20-28.** How does Jesus undo the effects of the fall?

11. Read Romans 8:18-25.

- a. What is the current state of the world?

- b. When and how will this be changed?

- c. What, then, is to be our attitude to suffering?

Prayer Points:

Romans 5:12 and 15 tell us that in the same way that sin entered the world through one person, it is redeemed by one person, our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank him for his love that erased our first sin in the garden and gave his wonderful grace.

Pray for those experiencing suffering at the moment. Pray for the hope and trust to wait patiently for our restoration. Pray for Jesus to return.

GENESIS 4—5: FROM BAD TO WORSE

A Lutheran Bishop in East Germany who suffered persecution first by the Nazis and then the Communists declared: "When God is not God, man is not man!" He had seen how the rejection of divine authority inevitably led to inhuman actions.

In the previous chapter Adam and Eve's disobedience to God fractured their relationship with him. Now we see sin spreading to family relationships as hateful attitudes lead to violent actions. Sin, and its destructiveness, is growing in power, like a snowball getting bigger down a hill. It is growing completely out of control.

1. Read Genesis 4. Compare the following aspects of the sin of Eve and Adam, and that of Cain;

	Eve & Adam 3:1-5	Cain 4:3-7
The prior discussion		
The sin	3:6	4:8
The reaction after	3:7-13	4:9
The punishment	3:14-19	4:10-12
The response to the punishment	3:20?	4:13-14
Grace in the midst of punishment	3:21	4:15-16

2. Why do you think the Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering but not on Cain and his offering (vv. 3-7)?
3. What do we learn about the nature of sin and temptation from v7?
4. In what way is Cain's punishment (4:10-16) a logical consequence of his sin?
5. The lifestyle of Cain's family is a picture of humanity—technical progress matched by moral decline. How do you see this trend reflected in our own civilization?

6. If Cain's attitude and action is beyond that of his parents, how do Lamech's attitude and action expressed in his taunting song go beyond that of Cain's (4:23-24)?

7. **Skim through Ch 5.** It does more than connect the dots from Adam to Noah. Apart from Enoch, how does each generation's description end (5:5,8,11,14,17,20,27,31)? What might the point be?

8. How do you feel about the state of the world at the end of Ch 5? Have a glance forward (6:5-7) to see what God thought of how things were going.

9. How has this chapter helped you to understand the nature and consequences of sin?

Prayer Points:

GENESIS 6—9: WHEN GOD SAYS “ENOUGH!”

Does it really make much difference how we live? Good so often goes unrewarded while evil persists without punishment. No wonder that we find life so perplexing. Even though these chapters don't answer all our questions, they show that eventually God's justice becomes evident in human affairs. Gen 4 recorded how sin became more flagrant in Cain's family. Now the author describes the spread of this moral cancer throughout the human race. He contrasts two radically different ways of living and their results.

1. Read Genesis 6:1-8. These are tricky verses that people have different opinions concerning. Several questions are asked; Who are the sons of God? Who are the daughters of men? What is the spirit in v3? What won't the spirit do? To what do the 120 years refer? Who were the Nephilim (v4)? Whatever answers we come to, what is the main point of these verses?

The sons of God and daughters of men: This could refer to the generations of Seth (God's people) inter-marrying with Cain's line (see 4:25). Sons of God might also be angels (see Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7). 2 Peter 2:4-6 brings together sinning angels who are cast into hell, and the generation of Noah.

God's pronouncement in v3: “My Spirit” could refer to the Holy Spirit, or to the spirit of life God had given mankind. If it refers to the spirit of life, then the 120 years could refer to a reduced lifespan after the flood. If it refers to the Holy Spirit, the 120 years might refer to the remaining time until God would send the flood (see 1 Peter 3:20).

Nephilim: The word literally means “giants” (see Numbers 13:33). It seems they are the offspring of the sons of God and daughters of men. We can't really be any more definite than that!

2. Look at 6:2. What are the three steps involved in the sin? Compare the steps in 3:6. (The word for “beautiful” is literally “good”, and the word for “married” is “took”).
3. How is the pattern of temptation, sin, and judgment repeated in 6:1-7 from Ch 3 and Ch 4?

Read 6:9-7:24.

4. How has God's attitude toward creation changed since the beginning (1:31; 6:6-7, 11-13, 17)?
5. How is Noah different from his contemporaries (6:9; 7:1)?
6. What provisions does God make for Noah and for the various living creatures to preserve life after the flood (7:14-22)?
7. What do chapters 6 and 7 reveal about the severity and grace of God?

Read Genesis 8:1–9:17.

8. What do we learn about God's concern for the passengers of the ark and his activity to end the flood (8:1-5)?
9. What initiative does Noah take during this period (8:6-12)?
10. What is Noah's first task on leaving the Ark (6:20)? What is God's response (6:21-22)?
11. What commission does God now give Noah and his family (9:1-7)? How is this the same as the commission given to Adam? How is it different? (See 1:27-30)
12. In 9:8-17 God makes a covenant as unconditional as it is undeserved. What do we learn about the extent and purpose of this first covenant?
13. Read 9:18-19. Who gets cursed and why?
14. Read 2 Peter 3:3-7. What lessons are we to learn from the flood?

Prayer Points:

Spend time in prayer thanking God for his grace to you, who deserves his judgment.

GENESIS 10:1-11:9: MAKING A NAME FOR YOURSELF

Modern mankind believes he is getting closer and closer to solving his own problems. Advances in disease control, gene-therapy, public health, computer and information technology, diplomatic cooperation and globalisation are all put forward as evidence that we are getting closer to a better world. But will it ever be possible for the dream to become a reality? Can we fix our world?

1. **Skim through Ch 10.** Whose descendants does it describe? What is the outcome of this one family? According to 10:32, are they fulfilling their commission (see 9:1)?

2. **Read 11:1-9.** Does this event happen before, or after, the final events of Ch 10? What is the situation of 11:1 compared with 10:5, 19-20, 31-32?

3. What, then, is the purpose of Ch 10?

4. What action do the people of Babel take? How is this city different from others?

5. What is their motive?

6. How is their action disobedience against God's commission in 9:1?

7. It is amusing that the Lord must come down (11:5) to see this tower that will reach to the heavens. What is his reaction (11:5-9)?

8. Is the action of God punishment, or simply preventative? If it is punishment, what is the sin? If it is preventative, what outcome is God's action preventing?

9. How do you think the story of the tower of Babel should affect our attitude towards technology? The improvement of society?

10. Is all this a charter for non-involvement? Should we just shrug our shoulders in the face of disunity, disease, injustice and do nothing? If not, why not?

Prayer Points:

GENESIS 11:10-12:9: STICKING WITH THE PLAN

1. The genealogy of Ch 10 shows the spread of one family into many nations. **Skim through the genealogy of 11:10-32.** It traces the line from Shem to Abraham. Why do you think the author is beginning to shift from all the families of the earth to one family?
2. What problem is forecast in 11:30?
3. What did God promise Shem in 9:24-27?

In 11:31 it seems like God's promise will come true. But the chapter finishes with Abram stopping short of Canaan in Haran. However, God hadn't forgotten his blessing to Shem.

4. **Read 12:1-9.** This passage has been called the topic sentence of the whole Bible. It sets the scene for everything that follows.
 - a. What does God command Abram to do?
 - b. What does he promise Abram? What are the key repeated words or ideas?
5. In the light of the earlier chapters of Genesis, how would you summarise what God is promising to do?
 - a. Can you spot a reversal of Gen 11:4?
 - b. Can you spot a continued trend with 1:28 and 9:1?
6. Who ultimately is to benefit from God's promise?
7. Abram does as he's told, and takes his family to the land of Canaan. What extra promise does God make in 12:7?

God is starting again! Though man is intent on "making a name for himself" and "playing God", God says he will make a "great name" for Abram - though childless, Abram will become the father of a great nation. God will give his descendants a land of their own. And whoever aligns themselves with Abram and his offspring will share God's blessing. The original blessing of humankind will be restored through Abram and his family line. To Abram, it sounds unlikely - but he does what he's told anyway.

Ultimately, the New Testament tells us how this blessing is fulfilled.

8. **Read Romans 4:16-25.** The Israelites (Abraham's direct descendants) became protective of their special status. But who does Paul say has a guarantee of God's promised blessing?

9. How does Paul define and describe Abraham's "faith" in v18-21?

10. How can his example help you when your faith in Jesus wavers?

Prayer Points: