

# In the Beginning, God...



**Genesis 1-11:**

**The Start of God's Story with His People**

*Bible Study/Sermon Series Guide*

September 14- November 23, 2014

## Genesis: Origin, Creation, Source, Race

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

Genesis 1:1

Dear Friends in Christ,

Stories are a huge part of who we are. They connect us to our world—with the present and with the past—and connect us as individuals in community with one another. Our story—and all of humanity’s story—begins in these first eleven chapters of the Bible where the story of God’s relationship with humanity unfolds.

To say that Genesis has been contentious over the years would be an understatement. There are well-meaning, biblically faithful groups that are all over the map on how to read and apply Genesis. We’ll be exploring some of the ‘issues’ Genesis presents more in depth during our Bible Study time.

It is easy to be drawn to the issues of debate in these chapters—the historicity of the flood, literal or figurative reading of the days of creation, the date and authorship of the book—and yet miss the overall point. We can get so caught up in trying to make these chapters fit our scientific, historical, or rational ideas that we forget about God. As always, I would encourage you to read Genesis 1-11 with an open heart and mind, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your study and understanding.

In these chapters we are given an amazing picture of God’s creative, restoring, unconditional love for His people and world; God is the central actor in this story, the One who initiates, sustains, and redeems relationship. The minute we forget the centrality of God and take our focus off of Him is the minute we will lose track of everything Genesis has to offer.

And so, we begin the story of our lives—the story of God and His people—with the uncreated, timeless God at the centre of it all.

May this study guide help to focus your thoughts as we journey through the opening chapters of God’s story with His people.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor J-M". The letters are cursive and fluid.

Pastor J-M

## Background to Genesis 1-11

**Title:** The general naming convention for books in the Ancient Near East was to use the first words of the book, Genesis is no exception. The Hebrew title translated to English means, “in the beginning.” While the English title we have is translated from the Greek where Genesis means *source, race, origin, or creation*.

**Author and Date:** This is one of the difficult things about working with a text that is over 3000 years old and a culture that passed down history orally. Traditionally, it has been thought that Moses (1400-1300 B.C.) authored the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Old Testament). More recent scholarship has suggested a date during the reign of David or Solomon (1200 B.C. or later).

There are a few reasons for this line of thinking. Examining the structure of the book, one will find unique styles of writing and language contained in different sections of Genesis. The theory is that this reflects an editor compiling different sources to form the text we have today. The idea of a later composition could make sense of some anachronisms (chronological inconsistencies) within the text, such as an introduction of a people group which did not exist until later.

The burden of proof remains on those who argue against the historical consensus of Mosaic authorship. An argument could be made in favour of a later or earlier authorship but it does not change the fact that God inspired the author/compiler so that the text contains exactly what God wants.

**Literary Genre:** Another contentious issue is the way in which Genesis 1-11 is intended to be read. Everyday we unconsciously categorize all we read which tells us what we should be taking away from it; you would read and process information from a history textbook differently than you would a letter from your spouse.

We as Bible believing Christians want to follow the text of Scripture as closely as we possibly can (this is a good thing!)—trying to find the literal meaning of the text. However, as we do

that, we impose our own understandings upon the text. For instance, when we read in Genesis 1 about the days of creation, we immediately think chronological history because that is the way our modern minds work, whereas a pre-Modern Israelite would not be thinking in terms of chronology but would be focused on the idea being presented.

Therefore, this book could be classified as history insofar as it deals with the story of God and the forming of His people into a family. It would be wrong of us to impose our own way of reading to make this text an historical-chronological-scientific textbook. The whole point of the story is not about dates or time but about God's family story (see **Structure** below).

**Structure:** The basic structure of the (whole) book of Genesis could be simply outlined as:

- 1:1- 2:3      Creation & Introduction to the Story
- 2:4-4:26     Generations of the Heavens & the Earth
- 5:1-6:8      Generations of Adam
- 6:9-9:29     Generations of Noah
- 10:1-11:9    Generations of Noah's Sons
- 11:10-26     Generations of Shem
- 11:27-25:11 Generations of Terah (and Abraham)
- 25:12-18     Generations of Ishmael
- 25:19-35:29 Generations of Isaac
- 36:1-37:1    Generations of Esau
- 37:2-50:26   Generations of Jacob

Each of these generational sections begin with the line: "These are the generations of..." The structure of the book clearly demonstrates God's chief concern in Genesis is to give a family

history—to trace its development and God’s continued faithfulness.

### **Things to Keep in Mind:**

The Sovereignty of God is perhaps the central theme of these chapters. It is out of God’s creative choice and power that He created the world and set about gathering His people to Himself. Everything is set in terms of God’s action.

Chaos & Creation is an obvious theme as God created the world out of nothing (or out of the chaos of emptiness). However, this theme extends beyond the opening act. The same theme is on display when the effects of the fall are on display (chaos) and God’s merciful provision and care for his people (creation and/or re-creation). This is evident most prominently in the flood: the sinfulness of humanity (chaos) is recreated in the renewal of the flood (creation).

Relationship to other ANE documents: There are other Ancient Near East stories that share a lot of similarities to the creation and flood accounts. Some understand this to mean the Bible copied those accounts. However, having several very similar stories gives support for the events contained within. The important difference found in the Genesis creation and flood accounts is that God is a benevolent, caring deity. It is God who creates and sustains humanity, not for self-gain but as motivated by His love.

Who & Why vs. What & How: Instead of devoting a lot of time to sorting out scientific fact or accurate measurement or precise dates (none of which are of chief concern for the book of Genesis), focus on the big picture story. What does each passage reveal about God? About his faithful gathering of His people? How do I apply the big picture to my life?

### **Week 1: Genesis 1:1-13**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage? What is the key point of this passage?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for common words/themes/stories)?

What are the repeated words?

Where is God active in this passage?

What do we learn about God & the cosmos (earth & heavens)?

How is God speaking to you through this passage?

Notes: Genesis 1:1-13



## **Week 2: Genesis 1:14-2:3**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage? What is the key point of this passage?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for common words/themes/stories)?

What are the repeated words?

Where is God active in this passage?

What is different about these days than the previous 3?

How is man (humanity) made? What is their command?

What is unique about day 7?

How is God speaking to you through this passage?

Notes: Genesis 1:14-2:3

### **Week 3: Genesis 2:4-25**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage? What is the key point of this passage?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for common words/themes/stories)?

Where is God active in this passage?

What is different about this creation account from the first one (who is this text focused on)?

How might the purpose of each creation account reconcile the perceived irregularities?

How is God speaking to you in through this passage?

Notes: Genesis 2:4-25

### **Week 4: Genesis 3:1-24**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage? What is the key point of this passage?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for common words/themes/stories)?

Where is God active in this passage?

How does the serpent trick Adam & Eve? What does Eve get wrong (vs. 3)?

What are the immediate effects of eating from the tree?

What are the longer-term effects of eating from the tree on: the serpent, the ground, the woman, and the man?

What might be significant about vs. 21 (thinking especially in terms of Old Testament sacrifices)?

How is God speaking to you through this passage?



Notes: Genesis 3:1-24

### **Week 5: Genesis 4:1-26**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage? What is the key point of this passage?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for common words/themes/stories)?

Where is God active in this passage?

Why did God reject Cain's offering?

How does God show mercy to Cain even through his punishment?

Where is the theme of creation out of chaos evident in this passage?

How is God speaking to you through this passage?

Notes: Genesis 4:1-26

### **Week 6: Genesis 5:1-6:8**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage? What is the key point of this passage?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for common words/themes/stories)?

Where is God active in this passage?

Why should we bother reading a genealogy? Why is it here?

Enoch is the one person described differently. What is said of him?

What was the growing corruption on the earth? How does God respond?

Where is the hope?

How is God speaking to you through this passage?

Notes: Genesis 5:1-6:8

### **Week 7: Genesis 6:9-8:19**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage? What is the key point of this passage?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for common words/themes/stories)?

Where is God active in this passage?

What was God's command to Noah and how did he respond?

As opposed to other flood stories, how do we know God is in command and is the central character? (6:18, 7:16, 8:1)

How is God speaking to you through this passage?



Notes: Genesis 6:9-8:19

**Week 8: Genesis 8:20-9:29**

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage? What is the key point of this passage?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for common words/themes/stories)?

Where is God active in this passage?

What is the first thing Noah did upon leaving the ark?

What repeated words from the creation account are spoken by God?

What does God establish with Noah? Who is it for?

After being chosen as the righteous one of God, what does Noah do (vss. 20ff)?

What does Ham do and how does Noah respond?

How is God speaking to you through this passage?

Notes: Genesis 8:20-9:29

### Week 9: Genesis 10:1-11:26

What is/are the main idea(s) of this passage? What is the key point of this passage?

How does this passage fit with the surrounding passages (look for common words/themes/stories)?

Where is God active in this passage?

What happens to the clans of the Canaanites? (vs. 18).

What is the problem God has with the people at Babel (focus especially on the repeated language of the first 4 verses).

How does God respond to them (not the word used in vs. 7)?

What notable character highlights the final genealogy (he's the focus of the next 8 chapters)?

How is God speaking to you through this passage?

Summarize the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

Name a few things you have learned as a result of the close reading of Genesis 1-11.

Notes: Genesis 10:1-11:26