

Early Human History

Listed Scriptures

Gen 1:1-3:24, 6:1-8:19, 10:10, 11:9; Rom 5:12

Lesson Aim

To acknowledge that God is the source of all things and that He has a plan for everyone

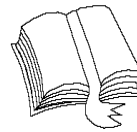
Memory Verse

"O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all." (Ps 104:24)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Genesis 11-20

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D

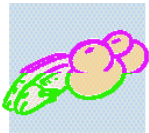


Genesis comes from the Greek term meaning origin or beginning. This is obviously an appropriate choice for the name of the first book of the Bible. Genesis covers the creation of the world to the death of Joseph, spanning some 2500 years. As mentioned in the first lesson, Moses was the author of the book, which was written about 1400 BC. Genesis can be studied in two major sections. Chapters 1-11 provide records of the first several thousand years of early human history. After the creation, we read about how man sinned against God and gradually worsened overtime, with violence and wickedness everywhere. After the flood, the descendants of Noah tried to build a tower to reach the heavens but God foiled their attempt by confusing their language and scattering them all over the earth. From Chapter 12 onwards, the book becomes more focused on God's chosen people. The main characters are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Today's lesson will focus on the first section of Genesis.



What do you think is the greatest invention of mankind? Although things like electricity or the airplane seem like amazing creations, they are in fact not really creations. This is because everything that is made by the hands of man comes from something else that is already in existence. We are so busy with our lives today that we don't stop enough to remember that God is really the source of all things. Let's take a look at Genesis and remind ourselves of God's great power and how, from the first day of creation, He set everything that we now enjoy into motion.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1
The Creation


A . The First Seven Days (Gen 1:1-2:7)

As recorded in Chapter 1, the earth was formless and empty, with darkness covering "the deep." In six days, God created the world.

Day 1: light (so that there was day and night)

Day 2: waters were separated (so that there was water and the sky)

Day 3: land, oceans and vegetation

Day 4: sun, moon and stars as signs to mark the seasons, years and days

Day 5: creatures to fill the sea and air (fish and birds)

Day 6: animals to fill the land, man and woman to care for God's creation

Day 7: rest

After God completed the creation in six days, He rested on the seventh, thus establishing the holy Sabbath. The Bible records that Sabbath was created for man. Therefore, everyone should keep this holy day. It is not just for a certain denomination or church, because God established this day at the very beginning of life.


B . The Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8-3:24)

After God created Adam and Eve, He placed them within the Garden of Eden. This was the world's first landmark since creation. But it wasn't just any old place. The word Eden means "joy" or "delight." It was a paradise, a place that included all things needed to sustain life, including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We can only guess this garden's approximate location based on the names of the rivers mentioned in Genesis 2:10-14 (it would have likely been somewhere in present day Iraq). The climate was also very pleasant since there was no need for clothing (Gen 2:25).

*Pishon River (untraceable, perhaps due to the flood)

*Gihon River (untraceable, perhaps due to the flood)

*Tigris River (located in present day Iraq)

*Euphrates River (located in present day Iraq)

Although Adam and Eve had all the freedom in the world within the garden (they could even eat from the tree of life and live forever!), they were forbidden to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Even though they knew the consequence was death, they chose to defy God and were condemned. Afterward, they were cut off from the tree of life (3:22-24) and cast out of the Garden of Eden. Since they were cut off from God, they became spiritually dead; physical death followed later. After they were driven out from paradise, they gave birth to Cain and Abel but sin continued to grow in the heart of mankind. Cain murdered his brother, and violence and crime increased over time. Consequently, death came to all people because all had sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom 5:12). Although death to all men seemed like the end, it was also the beginning of God's plan of salvation.



Part 2
Early Human History


A . The Flood (Gen 6:1-8:19)

Although Cain's offspring accomplished many worldly feats, they engaged in much bloodshed and violence. By the time of Noah, the people were corrupt and their hearts were full of evil thoughts. After God flooded the earth because of man's

great wickedness, only Noah and his family were saved. Although eight people seems like a small number relative to the population of the entire world, it serves to remind us that, just like in the end times, only the righteous will be saved. We cannot count on God being gracious and saving kind people, helpful people or people who commit only minor sins. Rather, we must believe that Jesus Christ is our Savior, we must be baptized, have the Holy Spirit and lead a life worthy of God's calling.

When the waters receded, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat (Gen 8:4). It is located just north of the Garden of Eden, likely somewhere in the present day mountain ranges of Armenia. It is recorded in the Bible that Noah's descendants traveled southward down the mountains and made their homes in the plains of Babylon (Gen 10). Later on, they moved eastward along the Tigris River and settled in a plain in Shinar (Gen 11:2). Once there, they built a tower in Babel. Up until this point, there was one common language among the people. But because of the pride of man, they tried to use their own efforts to build a tower to reach the heavens. God was probably disappointed all over again at the continual sinful nature of mankind and decided to confuse their language, scattering them all over the earth and spawning the beginnings of different ancient civilizations.

Teaching Tips

Since much of this information is historical, it would be helpful to bring in some visual aids (i.e. photos of ancient cities) to put everything into perspective. A showing of a Greek translation of the Bible may also peak the interest of the students in their endeavor to learn more about the truth.

B . The Descendants of Noah

In the days of Abraham, the people lived a nomadic lifestyle. However, there was a simple system of government. Since it was a patriarchal society, the elders usually took on the roles of the chiefs who looked after the political, economical, military and religious aspects of life. Generally, they lived in tents sewn out of animal skin, ate roasted meat and drank the milk of the livestock. The number of cattle, lamb and camels they owned were their only real possessions. The grassy plain were, in effect, their kingdom. Because of their nomadic lifestyle, the Israelites were all excellent herdsman.

C . Ancient Civilizations

Although many ancient societies were mentioned in Genesis, two civilizations stand out in particular because of their effect on the history of the Israelites: the Babylonians and the Egyptians. The city of Babylon was founded (its exact date unknown) on the River Euphrates. Its location would have been roughly 50 miles south of modern-day Baghdad. It is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 10:10 and 11:9 (Babel), but not much is really known about it at that point. Some people believe that Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, was the founder to this ancient civilization (Gen 10:8-9). Some also considered it to be the very first society governed by a system of law and tribal leaders. As mentioned earlier, Abraham was born into this society, and it was he who brought the concept of the one true God to Canaan. Babylon had a huge effect on the history of the Israelites in a number of ways. Their gods (i.e. Baal and Nebo) turned many of God's people to worship idols. In addition, it came into prominence after Israel split into two, when Judah became Babylon's vassal state and was eventually destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Egypt was one of the earliest civilizations. The people in that society were known to have devised the first system of national structure and governing body of politics and religion (i.e. the succession of the pharaohs and their many gods were already well in place when the Israelites were enslaved). In the Old Testament, the Egyptians lived south of Canaan and their territory extended from both sides of the Nile River up to and including the Sinai Peninsula. The Wadi of Egypt (a watercourse that is dry except during the rainy season) lies between Canaan and the peninsula. While very few cities existed on the Sinai Peninsula, the Wadi was a popular trading route when the land was dry (where Joseph was sold as a slave). Egypt had an important cultural and political influence over Israel. It first came into play in the history of the Israelites when Joseph was sold to Egypt and eventually rose to power as the prime minister of the land. Later, it became the training ground for developing the faith of Moses and God's people. Interestingly, an Ethiopian eunuch is mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 8) and the faith of God's people came full circle when he accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior and was baptized.

As we study these early civilizations, we may find it interesting to learn about their ways of life and how they influenced modern societies. But it is more than just a history class. From these brief chapters alone, we learn a lot about God's plan of salvation. After the fall of man, we can see that all people and cultures are all somehow used by God to spread the Word. God did not just confuse the language of people and scatter them to various parts of the world for no apparent reason. He

had a specific purpose in mind. Similarly, the Babylonians and Egyptians were not just enemies of the Israelites. They helped God's people recognize His power and sovereignty each time they engaged in battle. God's plan also included other civilizations. For example, the Greeks flourished in the time of the New Testament. Many famous philosophers and authors were of Greek origin. But more importantly, they were well known for their advanced developments in the written and spoken word (i.e. writing, speaking, grammar). As a result, they were able to help spread the gospel because they could preserve the integrity of the truth with the least amount of distortion. That is why many scholars turn to the oldest Greek manuscripts of the Bible for the most accurate interpretations. Today, we also play a role in God's plan of salvation. The True Jesus Church often seems to be a "Chinese" church to many truth-seekers. While our members are mostly of Chinese heritage, God chose us in the new era for His reasons. For one, our widespread population all over the world has helped to spread the truth to all corners of the world. Therefore, we are all connected and used by God in different ways, but serve one purpose: to glorify God and preach His living word.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1 Is there any way the creation, in its present order, could have been "done" differently (i.e. the creation of day 3 things before day 2)?

2 List two things you learned about the Garden of Eden that you did not know before.

3 Why do you think God chose to confuse the language of the people when they were building the tower of Babel? How was this a good solution?

4 How did the Babylonian Empire influence and affect the history of the Israelites?

5 List three ways the Egyptians played a role in shaping the faith of the Israelites.

6 What role do the various civilizations, past and present, play in God's plan of salvation?



The Tree of Life

Adam and Eve could eat freely from all the trees (except for one), including the Tree of Life. Of course, they may not have known what it meant to live forever as a result of eating from that tree.

In fact, they probably didn't really understand what death was because there wasn't such a concept at that point. They were, after all, the first people. It was only after they sinned against God that there was physical death and God had to cast them out of the Garden so that they would not try to live forever by eating from the Tree of Life. In many ways, we are like Adam and Eve. We often don't recognize all the blessings and goodness that are surrounding us. Rather, we try hard to make things better for ourselves and forget about how much love and careful planning God has put into each and every one of us. But unlike Adam and Eve, we don't want to wait to lose everything before we recognize its great value. We may not have a physical Tree of Life in our backyard to give us eternal life and abundant blessings day in and day out. But we have God and He is our Tree of Life. When we recognize this great treasure we have within us, how should we respond?

1. We should be thankful and praise God for everything He has provided for us.
2. We should look forward to the heavenly kingdom and view this world as only a temporary place.
3. We should cultivate ourselves by studying the word of God and praying constantly for guidance and strength so that we are not tempted by the world.
4. We should be bold and spread the gospel so that others may also eat from the Tree of Life.
5. We should plan for our lives, but should do so around the will of God so that we do not risk falling away.

Questions to think about:

- 1.** *What can you do, in a practical way, to repay the love and grace of God now?*
- 2.** *Many of you are thinking about university. What is your plan when you start college? God has, from the day you were born, prepared things for you and included you in His plan. How will God play a role in your life when you attend school away from home?*

3. How can we plan our lives and know that we are obeying the will of God?
4. Does it make you more of a Christian if you stand up for what you believe in and less of one if you don't? Explain your answer.
5. Has your faith ever been challenged? What happened and how did it turn out?
6. Can you think of a good answer to someone who might challenge your faith in the future? What would you say that wouldn't offend him and yet would make your point about your love for God?

Encourage your students as you close with these thoughts: We can be confident that the Bible is true, that it is the word of God and that it does not contradict itself. However, we shouldn't base our confidence in God's word on our own ability to explain every challenge someone might bring up. It's perfectly valid to say, "I'm not sure what the answer is, but I'll do some research and get back to you." Don't give up faith in the truth of the Bible because someone raises a question that you can't answer right away.

REFLECTION & PRAYER



1. When we survey the world and its majestic splendor from the day of creation, we may feel like a tiny speck of dust in the grand scheme of life. But God has created each of us for a specific purpose in mind. Think about the role you feel God wants and needs you to play in His plan.
2. Remember that each of us is special in the eyes of God even though each of us is only one person out of the world's six billion people. It is recorded in the Bible that God has counted each strand of hair that is on our heads. There is nothing we cannot tell Him and nothing He cannot do for us. We only need to let His spirit guide us.

Lesson 3

Forefathers of Faith

Listed Scriptures

Gen 12, 15, 25, 26, 28, 37; Pro 16:7

Lesson Aim

To examine our faith more closely and evaluate our relationship with Jesus Christ

Memory Verse

"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." (Heb 12:1b-2a)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Genesis 21-30

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



The previous lesson on the Book of Genesis covered up until the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11) and how God confused the language of the people so that they scattered all over the earth. Today's focus will be on the chosen people (Gen 12 and onwards), starting with Abraham and his immediate descendants. These stories are undoubtedly very familiar to the students, so rather than summarizing their lives from beginning to end, specific aspects of their lives will be studied, with the emphasis on what we can learn from their triumphs and mistakes. They are also mentioned as fathers of faith in Hebrews 11:17-22.

Abraham (born Abram) was born near the lower portion of the Euphrates River, by the city of Ur. Abraham journeyed much of his life. God guided him as he traveled from Ur to Haran (with his father) and along the mountain ranges of Lebanon until he reached Canaan, near the Jordan River. The land through which Abraham traveled was great for farming and for this reason, it was also known as the Fertile Crescent. Basically, it included:

*both sides of the Tigris River