



Reverend Dr. Charles L. McNeil, Sr., Senior Pastor  
15 E. Charleston Avenue Lawnside, New Jersey 08045  
[www.gracetemplebaptist.org](http://www.gracetemplebaptist.org)

## A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

### THE BOOK OF GENESIS

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#### **An Overview**

In the Book of Genesis, God's purposes for the heavens and earth, distorted by sin spreading through all the land, are focused on one man: Abraham. Through him and his family God would bring blessings to all nations.

Despite God's good purposes for creation, sin enters and fills the earth (the primeval history; chs. 1-11), and so God moves His plan forward to bless the nations through the offspring of Abraham (the patriarchal history; chs. 12-50). Genesis is foundational to the whole Bible, and to every human life. It tells us who God is, who we are, how things went wrong, and the plan that God has put in place to return the earth to the way it was originally meant to be.

#### **Placing It in the Larger Story**

Many readers miss the forest of God's larger purposes when immersed in the trees of each individual story. In creation, God creates humanity in His own image as His representatives to fill and rule the earth on His behalf (Gen. 1:26-28). Even after Adam and Eve sin and are punished, the promise is given that the offspring of the woman will defeat the serpent and restore the earth (Gen. 3:15). This promise is traced throughout Genesis in its genealogies, which provide the backbone of the entire book.

Key divisions are traced by "These are the generations of," tracing out the stories of key figures, starting with "the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 2:4-4:26); and going on to Adam (Gen. 5:16:8), then Noah (Gen. 6:9-9:29); then the sons of Noah (Gen. 10:1-11:19); then Shem (Gen. 11:10-26); then Terah (Gen. 11:27-25:11); then Ishmael (Gen. 25:12-18); then Isaac (Gen. 25:19-35:29); Esau (Gen. 36:1-37:1); and then Jacob (Gen. 37:2-50:26). The line of God's blessing is emphasized (e.g., Adam, Noah, Terah, Isaac, Jacob), while the stories of other lines receive less attention (e.g., Ishmael, Esau). The individual stories of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph are illustrations of how the promise of Genesis 3:15 begins to be fulfilled.

God desires to bless the nations through a future king. Adam is portrayed in the image of God, a phrase probably signifying a royal representative of God. Abraham would become a "great nation" (Gen. 12:2), and "kings shall come from you" (Gen. 17:6). God's original command to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28) is fulfilled in detail as "Israel settled in the land of Egypt . . . and were fruitful and multiplied greatly" (Gen. 47:27; cf. Gen. 1:28).

Israel fails, however, in its calling to be a "kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6). This priesthood is ultimately fulfilled through the church in Jesus Christ as a "royal priesthood" of all nations (1 Pet. 2:9). Through this priesthood, God's purposes for creation as detailed in Genesis 1-2 are finally accomplished, as is seen in Revelation 21-22.

## Date and Historical Background

With the other books of the Pentateuch (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), Genesis has been ascribed to Moses. Although Mosaic authorship has been questioned by some, numerous parallels with other ancient Near Eastern literature in the second millennium BC confirm the plausibility of the traditional view.

## Book of Genesis Outline

1. Primeval History (Gen. 1:1-11:26)
  - a. God's creation and the ordering of heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1-2:3)
  - b. Humanity and sin in the world (Gen. 2:4-3:24)
  - c. The downward spiral of sin in the world (Gen. 4:1-11:26)
  
2. Patriarchal History (Gen. 11:27-50:26)
  - a. Abraham and the covenant (Gen. 11:27-16:16)
  - b. Abraham and obedience (Gen. 17:1-22:24)
  - c. From Abraham to Isaac (Gen. 23:1-26:33)
  - d. Jacob: consequences of deception (Gen. 26:34-31:55)
  - e. Jacob: reconciliation with Esau (Gen. 32:1-35:29)
  - f. Joseph: dreams and affliction (Gen. 36:1-41:57)
  - g. Joseph: reconciliation with brothers (Gen. 42:1-47:31)
  - h. Blessing of Jacob (Gen. 48:1-50:26)

## Discussion Questions

— Besides the individual stories in Genesis, how do you see the themes and trajectories laid out in this book developed in the rest of the Bible? In your view, how does Genesis play a foundational role for the entire Bible?

— The entire book of Genesis is framed by genealogies. What important role might be played by these otherwise boring lists of names in tracing out the many promises that we find in this book?

— What perplexes you about this book? What questions do you hope to see answered by this study of Genesis?

## Key Verse

“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” (Gen. 1:28)

## Glossary of Terms

*Primeval History: The earliest history of the Bible from the creation of the world (Genesis 1) to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11).*

*Patriarchal History: A history of the patriarchs (fathers) of the Old Testament, primarily Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

## A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE : GENESIS (OVERVIEW) WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

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Read the Introduction and Chapter 1 in the book, *The Whole Bible Story*.”

Read Genesis 1:1–2:3 in a modern translation of the Bible and be prepared to discuss the following repeated phrases:

— “*And there was evening, and there was morning, the \_\_\_\_\_ day*” (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). What does this rhythm and balance of God’s orderly creation communicate?

— “*And God said*” (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29). This word which God speaks creates. The creative power of God’s word is stressed throughout Scripture (e.g., Isa. 55:10-11; John 1:3; Rom 4:17). How does the creative power of God’s word strengthen our resolve to meditate on the written Word of God in our own lives?

— “*God saw that it was good*” (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25), culminating in God seeing “everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Some idolize creation as God, while others despise creation as evil. But these are two equally wrong extremes. What suggestions for a proper relationship between humanity and creation are provided in Genesis 1?

Answer the following:

— Although “the earth was without form and void” (Gen. 1:2), God forms the earth (days 1-3) and then fills it (days 4–6). Place the days of creation on the following chart.

Day	What was created (God Forms)	Day	What was created (God Fills)
1		4	
2		5	
3		6	
7 God rests			

— Chapter 1 climaxes with the creation of humanity (Gen. 1:26–31). Note the ways in which this final creative act of God is different from the previous creative acts of God. How is the creation of Adam different from the creation of other living creatures?

— Based on your reading of Genesis 1:1–2:3, what do you see as the distinctive purpose(s) for humanity in God’s creation?

