

Neighborhood Fellowship Leaders Guide

Genesis Introduction

Context & Credo

Note: We will return to our regular format next week.

As the very first book in the Bible, Genesis is foundational to all that follows.

Genesis is a book of beginnings, explaining the origin of the most fundamental realities of our existence as human beings. The universe exists because in the beginning God spoke and it was so. Humanity exists because God created mankind, male and female, in his image and as his likeness. Marriage exists because it was not good for Adam to be alone.

Sadly, Genesis is also a book of rebellion, detailing the devastating destruction that human sinfulness brought into God's very good creation. Sin exists because Adam and Eve believed the serpent more than their Creator. Human government exists to ensure that the shedding of man's blood does not go unpunished. The nations exist because God scattered the rebellious tower builders across the face of the earth.

Most importantly, Genesis is a book of redemption, laying the foundation for the glorious rescue operation that is even now underway. Though we still live east of Eden, the followers of Jesus are headed back to the Garden City we have been exiled from for so long. Though we still experience the curse mankind's rebellion unleashed, the resurrection power that will destroy that curse is already at work in our hearts. Though the seed of the serpent is still at war with the seed of the woman, the head of that serpent has already been crushed. Though all the families of the earth have not yet received the blessing of Abraham, we ourselves have been given the commission to proclaim the coming of that Promised Seed to all nations.

As we read and study this glorious book of beginnings, may the Lord open our eyes to see the wondrous things to be found in this, the first book of his law.

Content: Reading the Text

Note: Our goal for this week is to preview the structure of Genesis, getting a feel for the book as a whole even as we prepare to work through the individual parts. During the discussion time, work through the outline below, reading the headings while encouraging people to follow along in their Bibles. In each section I've selected certain key verses to be read aloud by the group. These are noted in square brackets below and should be prayerfully read by each discussion leader ahead of time.

I. Prologue: The Origin of the World (1:1–2:3)

Read [1:1; 1:26–28; 1:31–2:3]. This first section of the book of Genesis stands apart from the “generations” structure of the rest of the book (see below), functioning as a vital prologue for all that is to follow. Despite the long rebellion of mankind, God’s purpose for his creation has never changed. He still intends for an obedient mankind to image his life-giving, fruit-bearing dominion over the world that he created for his glory. The resurrection of Jesus is our guarantee that there is coming a day when this goal will finally be fully accomplished.

II. The Origins of the Nations: Five “Toledot” (2:4–11:26)

After the prologue, the book of Genesis contains ten primary headings that introduce sections of greater or lesser length. The same Hebrew word, “toledot,” is found in each of these headings, and can be translated as “generations,” or “family history.” In each case, the focus is on *what resulted* from the individual named in the title, rather than on the individual himself, who has often already been mentioned in the preceding section .

A. The Generations of the Heavens and the Earth (2:4–4:26)

Read [2:4; 3:15]. As the Lord God formed Adam from the dust of the earth, it makes sense to see humanity as “the result” of the creation of the heavens and the earth. While all of Genesis is foundational, this section details the first man, the first woman, the first marriage, the first sin, and the first promise of redemption.

B. The Generations of Adam (5:1–6:8)

Read [5:1; 6:7–8]. In spite of the desperate rebellion of humanity, God did not forget his promise of redemption. Even as he wiped

the earth clean, he bestowed grace and mercy on Noah and his family.

C. *The Generations of Noah* (6:9–9:29)

Read [6:9; 9:1–7]. Noah's flood represented a new start, a clean slate for humanity as a whole. Yet a clean slate and a fresh start were not enough to reverse the curse that Adam's rebellion had unleashed.

D. *The Generations of the Sons of Noah* (10:1–11:9)

Read [10:1; 11:9]. The scattering of the nations represents the climax of the outworking of sin and rebellion recorded in Genesis 3–11. No longer able to walk with each other, let alone with their Creator, mankind seemed farther away from the creational purposes expressed in Genesis 1:26–28.

E. *The Generations of Shem* (11:10–26)

Read [11:10].

III. The Origins of Israel: Five “Toledot” (11:27–50:26)

A. *The Generations of Terah* (11:27–25:11)

Read [11:27; 12:1–5]. In the context of the book of Genesis, the primary purpose of chapters 1–11 is to explain how one particular family came to be the center of God's plan to redeem his rebellious creation as a whole. The call of Abraham was not an abandonment of the nations. It was rather the first step in God's plan to call forth a people from every nation, a plan that will one day be fully accomplished (Revelation 5:9–10).

B. *The Generations of Ishmael* (25:12–18)

Read [25:12]. In this second half of the book, the alternating length of the sections highlights the progressive narrowing of God's covenant people. While the line of promise is highlighted in lengthy narratives, those who are passed over are dismissed with relatively brief genealogies.

C. *The Generations of Isaac* (25:19–35:29)

Read [25:19; 26:1–5; 28:13–15]. Though Isaac continues to be mentioned, this section as a whole focuses on Jacob, whose name would be changed to Israel. Despite the impossible circumstances they faced and even the repeated failures of their own lives, God

never gave up on his promises. No matter what they faced and no matter what they did, God had committed himself, irrevocably, to rescuing his creation through the descendants of this particular family.

D. The Generations of Esau (36:1–37:1)

Read [36:1]. While this heading appears a second time in 36:9, it seems clear that this should not be seen as the beginning of a new section. See also under III.B above.

E. The Generations of Jacob (37:2–50:26)

Read [37:2; 49:10; 50:24–26]. While this section is most famous for its focus on Joseph, in terms of the big story of the Bible, it is the transformation of Judah's character that is most significant. It would be through Judah, not Joseph, that the promised seed would come. In reading the book of Genesis, we must not forget that it does not stand on its own but is rather an integral part of the Pentateuch (the first five books of Moses) as a whole, setting the stage for the events of Exodus.

Conduct: Reshaping Our Walk

Discuss the meaning of the text and then walk through the following application questions as you discuss the difference this meaning ought to make in our lives today.

Despite impossible circumstances and the repeated failures of those to whom the promises were given, God continued to work out his promised plan of redemption. How have you been tempted to doubt the faithfulness of God's promises in your own life?

What aspects or portions of Genesis have you previously been tempted to set aside as boring, irrelevant, or distasteful? In light of the fact that God saw fit to place them in this foundational book of Scripture, are you willing to submit to his wisdom by giving even these passages a second look?

Examples: The genealogy of the nations in chapter 10, Jacob's cattle breeding schemes in chapter 30, and Judah's escapades in chapter 38.