

## Bible Month 2024: Genesis Bible Study Notes

# Bible Month: July 2024

During July 2024, the Circuit will be engaging with this year's Bible Month resources on Genesis. Preacher's/Worship Leaders are invited to use the resources as part of Sunday worship.

We will also be running Bible Studies at The Well (Formally Rowland Memorial) which will also be lived streamed at the same time using The Stream Zoom details:

Meeting ID: 691 907 7079

Passcode: 886382

Please do join us either on site at The Well or online using Zoom, the sessions use the same material whether you join in at 2pm or 7.30pm. Come to one or all of the sessions.

Wed 10/7/24	2pm	7.30pm
Wed 17/7/24	2pm	No Bible Study - Circuit Meeting
Wed 24/7/24	2pm	7.30pm
Wed 31/7/24	2pm	7.30pm

Throughout these study notes you will find Methodist Way of Life "station" badges:



These badges highlight how participating and engaging with the study sessions will equip you in your ongoing journey of discipleship.

For further information about the Methodist Way of Life see the Circuit website here:

[MWOL - ESSD \(essdmethodistcircuit.org\)](http://essdmethodistcircuit.org)

# Introducing Genesis

Do you like receiving invitations? I do. Often, they announce good news like a wedding or a party. I usually feel glad someone has thought of inviting me. The challenge comes when it is time to respond: do I accept? Sometimes there are unfortunate diary clashes. Social inhibitions or fear can cause us to decline invitations, but usually, if you are like me, you respond enthusiastically!

## THE GREAT INVITATION

The book of Genesis provides an invitation like none other, because it stretches across human history, and its recipients include everyone who has ever lived. It invites us to take our place in the great story of God and humanity working together.

The invitation is rooted in two ideas.

1. We first must know with whom we will be working. The Genesis invitation makes two things clear:
  - We all are appropriately qualified because we are all made in the image of God.
  - God wants us to know him through and through, by what he says and does. There is no incongruity between the two: his spoken words and proactive deeds are consistent. And God doesn't get worn down: there is a tireless call to hear his words and witness his actions of creation, revelation and restoration.
2. The invitation anticipates that its recipients realise that accepting it is the only reasonable path. This is because from the Genesis standpoint, we only make sense of human life and experience when God's presence and active engagement in the world are recognised and sought out. The Genesis invitation doesn't attempt to justify its own importance – it assumes its significance is taken for granted and that our lives *only* find meaning when we take

our place in the story of God and humanity, working together in the world God set in motion and continues to create and sustain.

## THE BIBLE'S OVERTURE

Genesis can also be described as an overture to the Bible. Genesis, like the Bible as a whole, is supremely a book of salvation and hope. It provides a template for what life looks like when God, who is in the business of bringing about salvation, is in view. Genesis reads like history but is more than a collection of historical stories because it assumes a faith perspective.

I encourage you to approach Genesis by focusing on the question: where is the good news for people and communities of faith today? Let's attune ourselves to the invitation to live and learn attentively as God shows us *who* he is, *what* he is doing, and *why* he does it. In turn, we will discover *who* we are, *what* we are doing, and *why*.

## APPROACHING GENESIS

We are not going to read Genesis merely as an academic pursuit to discover more about ancient faith but instead, focus on the world in front of the text. What is the God we encounter like? Where does the text interact with *our* lives? Where is the enduring truth relevant to us to be found?

By assuming this focus, we have chosen to set aside the debated questions about the origins of Genesis, so that we have more space to delve into the text itself. My own view is that rather than trying to identify the sources, it is better to approach Genesis as a compilation of woven together oral stories. The book subsequently forms part of the five books of Moses (known as the Torah or Pentateuch).

## GENESIS STRUCTURE

Genesis enables us to glimpse the world of faith before the mechanisms of the Jewish religion were established. Thus, Genesis mirrors the book of Revelation, which we engaged with in last year's Bible Month, a book of the bible which takes us

beyond the other end of human history to the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth. Genesis has retrospective and anticipatory elements: it looks back to the beginning of history so that we can look forward to its end.

Structurally, Genesis is usually divided into two main parts:

- Chapters 1 – 11  
Sometimes referred to as ‘primeval history’, exploring the emergence of humankind at the instigation of God’s creative will.
- Chapters 12- 50  
cover the ancestors of the nation of Israel, focusing on the Patriarchs. Most of the action takes place in Canaan, the promised land, culminating with the nation’s migration to Egypt.



Uniting both sections is a cyclical pattern that reveals God’s plan, sometimes called ‘the mission of God’.

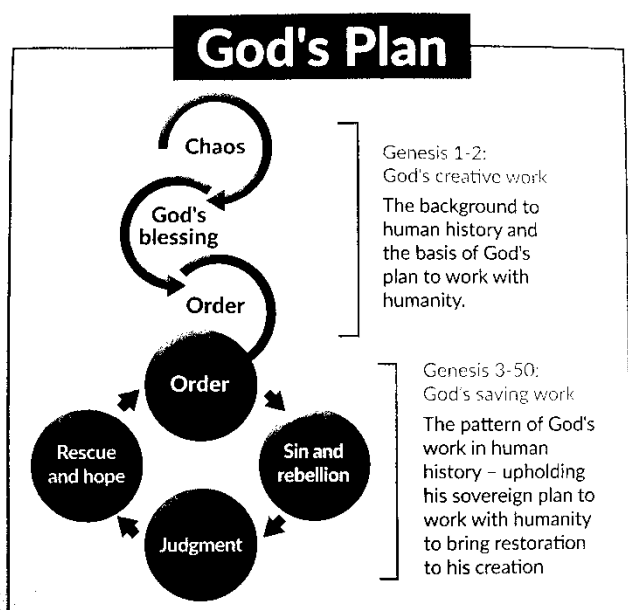


Figure 1: God's plan instigated in Genesis

This cycle reflects the character of God revealed in Genesis: acting through revelation and intervention to bring order, salvation and hope. God’s plan is to instigate, restore and uphold a relationship between all creation and himself, which can be nurtured and celebrated. This plan is not imposed in a dictatorial way because God

seeks to work co-operatively with humanity and is therefore responsive to human behaviour.

This pattern recurs throughout the Bible, becoming the blueprint for the story of God’s involvement with humanity. It demonstrates God’s absolute commitment to creative restoration: there is *chaos* (Genesis 1:1), then God brings *blessing* and *order* (Genesis 1-2); God’s plans are disrupted by humans, who *rebel* against the invitation to live according to his will and choose their own way (chapters 3 – 4); God presses the reset button – initiating *judgement* to deal with evil through their removal from the garden; God forms a new covenant with Noah (*rescues*) to revive his plan to work with human co-operation (chapters 6 – 9). This cycle then restarts with God calls Abraham.

### REFLECTIONS ON THE FLOOD

It doesn’t take long for the reader of Genesis to come to the narrative of the Flood (chapters 6 – 8). Notwithstanding any happy childhood memories of lining up wooden animals ‘two by two’, the reader may come away with some uncomfortable questions. Is God’s ego really so fragile that at the first sign of disobedience he pulverizes his creation into soup? Without denying the legitimacy of such questions, I would argue that there are clues in the text that point otherwise. They are found in two idea clusters.

The first set of ideas centres on Genesis 6:12-13. There is a repeated verb here which our English translations often fail to bring out.

I would translate them like this:

*‘The earth was ruined in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was ruined, for all flesh had ruined their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come in my sight, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. Behold, I will ruin the earth.”’*

Perhaps the force of these verses is now more apparent. The emphasis is upon humanity’s ruin of the earth, which is already resulting in its own

destruction. The only positive actions ascribed here to God are to look, to speak, and then to give the earth over to its own choices.

The 'giving over' of humanity to the trajectory it has set for itself is one of the chief ways in which God judges, as both Testaments show. This is the concept lying behind God's hardening of the Pharaoh's heart (compare Exodus 8:15, 32 and 9:34 with 10:1). The idea recurs in the Psalms (eg 81:12); and then in the New Testament, it forms a key part of the apostolic teaching about judgment (Acts 7:42, Romans 1:24 – 26).

The act of creation, as Genesis 1 conceptualises it, involves the pushing back of the waters of chaos (Genesis 1:2, 6 – 10). Then, as the ancient Near Eastern world viewed it, God continued to hold those waters in check (see also Job 38:8-11). So what is being represented here is that God simply 'takes his hands away', as it were, allowing the earth to return to the chaotic, ruined state that it started with (compare Genesis 7:11 with 1:6-9). Humanity is leaning hard towards chaos and ruin, and God gives it to them.

And this brings us to the second cluster of ideas, which is probably best seen in Genesis 9:1, where God repeats the Edenic blessing (see also 1:28) to Noah. This draws our attention to the way that the Flood is described as a great act of de-creation, followed by re-creation, for Genesis 8 has many features in common with Genesis 1. And this is just the first time we encounter the motif of God re-creating the world.

Does God act with spite and pulverize his creation in soup? Quite the contrary. The wonder of the Flood narrative is not that the earth is destroyed, but that some are preserved. Despite our own self-destructive tendencies, God is continually generating newness. And of course, we see the supreme recapitulation of this theme in John 20, where, following the ultimate act of engulfing chaos, a man steps out into a garden on the first day of the week.

## GENESIS LINKS WITH REVELATION

- Jesus' complete work of salvation perfectly aligns with the pattern of 'rescue and hope' in God's unfolding plan.
- Ultimately, evil is defeated by Jesus, who is declared 'the saviour who defeats chaos and evil'.
- Satan is described as deceitful in both Revelation and Genesis 3. Satan's work continues throughout human history but will finally be defeated and creation restored.

# Week 1: The Sovereign God who Creates

## INTRODUCING GENESIS

1. **Read** through the Introducing Genesis Notes
2. **Discuss** what is your favourite story from this book of the Bible. Why? Where did you first hear it?
3. **Discuss** Genesis is in many ways a troubling text. Do you have any questions about the book, for instance, unsettling stories, places God is portrayed as unkind, questions about science.



## WATCH

Introduction Video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MM5Uvcpndj\\_o&t=3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MM5Uvcpndj_o&t=3s)

Genesis 1 – 11 Video:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/genesis-1-11/>

## READ

1. **Read** Genesis 1: 1 – 2:2  
Now re-read 1:26 – 27 more slowly



## DISCUSS

1. What does this tell us about God as Creator? Notice how the language in verse 26 shifts from the earlier simple commands ('Let there be light') to an internal group discussion ('Let us make humankind in our image.')
2. What does it mean to be created in God's image?
3. How does this principle extend to the rich diversity of people, with differing ethnicities, genders, abilities?

Genesis 1:1-2:2 is less concerned with explaining exactly what characterises someone as an image bearer, and more concerned with how those image bearers should act. Humans are to have 'dominion' over the rest of nature.

4. What does it mean to be God's representatives on earth?
5. What does that mean in an age when we are becoming increasingly aware of the damage that people have done to the earth through our overconsumption?

## CHALLENGE

Who is the Holy Spirit

prompting you to encourage?

Consider phoning or sending a

text or a card to someone this week who needs encouragement to remind them that you see God's image in them.



## PRAY

Praise God for making us all in God's image.

Pray for empathy and compassion

for all people, all of whom are also made in the image of God.

Pray for those receiving any affirmations sent this week.

Pray for those in power who can influence government policies on caring for creation.

Pray for wisdom as we seek to be good stewards of creation.



# Week 2: The God who calls and blesses

## INTRODUCING GENESIS

1. **Share** a story with the group if you would like of a time when they have had to move to a new area or make a big life change.



How did it feel to be uprooted?

## WATCH

The God who calls and blesses Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dzvt5LtnRw&t=2s>

Genesis 12-50 video:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/genesis-12-50/>

## READ

**Read** Genesis 12: 1 – 3

Note how this section makes a structural transition in the book.

The attention focuses on one family line from among the nations (11:8) whose importance cannot be overstated. This line introduces Abraham and provides the link between God's blessing upon humanity at creation (1:28) and his choice of a nation, Israel, to be his work partner. God's unfolding plan is advanced through Abraham, for like Adam and Eve, he receives God's calling to a role and blessing for a role.



## DISCUSS

What is the significance of this section beginning with God's speech? Is it to highlight God's initiative, like Genesis 1:1? Or God's ongoing involvement in the narrative?

The first commandment to Abraham is to 'Go', to leave all that is familiar to him. But the details of where he is to take his family are missing. Instead of concrete plans, he receives a series of

promises, of blessing and provision.

This story is referenced several times in the New Testament.

## READ

**Read** Acts 3:25, Romans 4:13, Galatians 3:8.

## DISCUSS

Why do you think the idea of God blessing all nations was so important in the early years of the church?

## READ

**Read** Genesis 22.1-15

This is one of the most troubling passages in Genesis, and it occurs near the end of the Abraham section. It raises profound theological questions about the nature of God and the nature of scripture.

Draw your attention to chapter 22 verse 1, the sense that this is a test, and that God never intended the death of Isaac.

## DISCUSS

What do you think the narrator of this passage is trying to tell us about God's nature? What do you think are the intended learning points for us today?



## CHALLENGE

Discuss how do you react to uncertainty, particularly when trying to follow God's path?

## PRAY

Praise God for the blessing that you have received.



Pray for those gathered and the wider church, that we might cope better with uncertainty.

Pray for people who are forced to leave their home due to warfare or natural disaster.

# Week 3: The God who comes to people in their struggles

## WATCH

The God who comes to people in their struggles

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJcDWnR3KKQ&t=1s>

## READ

Read Genesis 25: 21 -33

The story of Jacob's birth.

## DISCUSS

How does this story prefigure what is to come?



## READ

Read Genesis 28: 11 – 17

Despite Jacob's trickery, he has this incredible divine encounter.

## DISCUSS

How do these promises compare to those given to Abraham?

## READ

Read Genesis 32: 24 – 32

This is a profoundly mysterious passage; it is never made clear exactly who this figure is that wrestled with Jacob. Jacob's reserve of self-sufficiency finally seems to expire.

## DISCUSS

What do you make of this story? How might this story give comfort to the people of Israel years later, in turbulent times?

Have you ever seen God bring blessing through struggle? Was there a reason it had to happen this way? Can you identify with Jacob, whose own self-sufficiency runs out?

## PRAY

Praise God for patience and grace that gives us good things despite our sometimes poor behaviour.



Pray for one another, that we would have perseverance when things are tough.

Pray for people who are struggling at the moment, that they may feel God's presence in the midst of the trial.



# Week 4: The God who confirms and safeguards divine promises

## WATCH

The God who confirms and safeguards divine promises video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2o9ATDnG1kc>

## READ

Read Genesis 37: 1 – 8

## DISCUSS

Who do you think is most to blame for the family disharmony – Joseph, Jacob, or the brothers?



## READ

Read Genesis 39: 2 -3, 21 and 23

The ongoing family feud ends up with Joseph being imprisoned in Egypt. But despite the dire circumstances, the text repeatedly claims that God was with Joseph.

## READ

Read Genesis 50: 15 – 21

At the end of the story, it appears that all is well: the brothers have been reconciled. Joseph reflects that the harm the brothers intended towards him was intended by God for good, in order to preserve the lives of many.

## DISCUSS

Do you agree that God can work this way, bringing good out of awful situations?

When have you noticed with hindsight that God was working in mysterious, hidden ways in your life? Can you see this as you look back?



## PRAY

Praise God for never leaving you even in difficult times.



Pray that you might know God's presence in the midst of the struggles that you face today.

Pray for people who are affected by famine, that God might provide ways to help, and that people will be kind and compassionate.