

Living the Message

OPEN THE BIBLE *Make the Connection*



February 2012 Genesis 1:1 – 12:9 Reading & Discussion Guide

February Dates to Note:

MEETING WILL BE HELD:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

PASTOR'S INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 1:1 – 12:9:

- Mpls:** Monday, February 6, 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
- West:** Thursday, February 2, 7:00 p.m., Room 310 CFL Bldg.

BEFORE YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Read Genesis 1:1 – 12:9

- a) We suggest you read through "Genesis 1:1 – 12:9: Theme and Purpose" and the glossary "Who or What Is . . . ?" on pages 4 and 5 before you begin your reading.
- b) Use the "To Guide Your Reading" section on pages 6 - 8 to help you think through what you have read, paying particular attention to questions in boldface.

2. If possible, **attend, listen to, or watch the DVD of the Pastor's Introduction.**

3. Read and recite **this month's memory verse** often! **It is:**

I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing. – Genesis 12: 2

Our goal and prayer is that you will walk away from each study having had at least one important insight that informs your faith and your knowledge of God's Word. In other words, we hope you will discover a "message" just for you!

AT YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Welcome

Welcome to the February meeting of your *Living the Message* Bible discovery group. In order to keep to your agreed-upon time frame, place a clock where it is clearly visible, or ask someone to be “timekeeper” and let the group know when 15 minutes remain for discussion and closing.

Opening Prayer

Pause to quiet your hearts and minds with a few moments of silent prayer. Then have someone open with his or her own prayer or pray the following together:

Dear Lord,

Calm our hearts with a deep awareness of the blessings you have bestowed upon us. Bestow peace, love, and healing where there is disquiet, fear, worry, or pain. And grant us now your presence, opening our minds and guiding our words, so that in and through them we will learn what you would have us know. Amen.

This Month’s Memory Verse

Recite this month’s memory verse (including the book, chapter, and verse) together as a group.

I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing. – Genesis 12: 2

Getting Under Way

Take time for each person to share thoughts on the following:

- Share an experience of seeing a particularly beautiful rainbow and how it made you feel or thoughts that came to mind upon seeing it.

Setting the Scene

Before beginning discussion, invite your small group facilitator and anyone else who attended, listened to, or saw the DVD of the Pastor’s introduction to Genesis 1:1 – 12:9 to share what they learned.

Discuss Together

Go to “To Guide Your Reading” on pages 6 - 8. Discuss together the questions in boldface and/or others of the questions that are of particular interest to your group. Remember, a good discussion on fewer questions is better than rushing through all the questions. If you wish, ask if any of the questions (boldface or not) were of particular interest to someone and begin there.

Closing Remarks and Prayer

FOR NEXT MONTH

Our next meeting will be in March:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

March's Reading Assignment: Genesis 12:10 – 50:26

March's Memory Verse:

"Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good." – Genesis 50:20a

Save the date! Next Pastor's Introductions:

- Mpls:** Monday, March 5, at 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
- West:** Thursday, March 1, at 7:00 p.m., Room 310, CFL

CLOSING PRAYER

Gather requests for prayers, encouraging both things for which God's help and guidance are needed and also things for which people are grateful. If someone is comfortable doing so, ask that person to pray aloud a prayer bringing these concerns to God, or take time for silent prayer during which these concerns can be brought to God. End with a prayer of your own, by reciting the Lord's Prayer, or by praying the following together:

Dear Lord,

We are ever grateful for the opportunity to gather and ponder your Word together. Thank you for what we have learned together here and also for the many ways in which we will continue to be blessed by it. Grant us, we pray, such a depth of your presence and love in our lives that others cannot help but see it shining through us. In your name we pray, Amen.

FOLLOWING YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Ponder

Re-read and ponder Genesis 12:1-3. What prompted Almighty God to initiate a covenant of blessing through Abram (and Sari) and their descendents? How is this working out in our world today?

Genesis 1:1 – 12:9 Theme & Purpose

Genesis is a book about beginnings. It moves from the creation of the world and humankind to the ordering of families and nations to the birthing of the fathers and mothers of Israel. The ancestral stories begin with Abraham and Sarah and continue with Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah/Rachel, and the sons of Jacob, particularly Joseph. While God always was present, Genesis speaks of a “new day” for God and his creative activity in the world.

Significantly, Genesis deals with the beginning of sin and of God’s desire to save us from it, laying the foundation for the biblical message as a whole. Issues of evil, sin, judgment, faith, redemption, and God’s promises occur and reoccur time and again, as we explore relationships between God and creation and God and humanity.

While Moses traditionally has been considered the author of Genesis, even as early as the Reformation, the question of authorship was seen to be more complex, and is now usually understood to be the product of many authors and editors over more than 500 years of development. Many scholars identify four underlying sources—J or *Jawhist* (so-called because they use *Jahweh/Yahweh* in referring to God); E or *Elohist* (because they use *Elohim* in referring to God); D (Deuteronomic writers); and P (Priestly writers). It thought to have been completed sometime during or shortly after the Babylonian exile (587-538 B.C.E.).

Biblical scholars will tell you that in order to interpret a text appropriately, a key question must be asked of every text: *What kind of literature am I reading now?* While some poetic pieces are present, basically there are two types of literature in Genesis: narrative and genealogy. It is reasonably clear that the narratives in this book are not historical narrative in any modern sense, though they do possess features associated with history writing, and perhaps “story” (or story of the past) is the most helpful term in describing how these materials functioned for ancient readers. Because the primary character of the book is God, “theological narrative” also may be a suitable description, and virtually every characteristic of God that is found in the Old Testament is present in Genesis. From the beginning of the book and throughout, God is seen to be present and active, among both chosen and nonchosen peoples. God’s work is always seen as purposeful, directed toward what is in the best interests of the people involved, and indeed the entire creation.

The genealogies in Genesis, of which there are five in the first eleven chapters (5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27), provide one of the basic structures of the book. While their historical value is much debated, the writers of Genesis probably meant them to provide some sort of “anchor” for the larger story. Israel was greatly concerned, after all, about tracking family origins and “pedigrees,” especially for important figures. These lists also demonstrate how Israel was thought to be related to all surrounding peoples, linking everyone into one creational family.

As you read Genesis 11:1 – 12:9, look especially for themes of creation, fall, sin, covenant, and blessing. For more on these themes and others, see the next section, “Who or What Is . . . ?”

Information on this page and in “Who or What Is . . . ?” is drawn primarily from Luther Seminary’s www.enterthebible.org’s introduction to Genesis, written by Professor of Old Testament, Terrence Fretheim. Used with permission.

Who or What Is . . . ?

Abram. Later known as Abraham, God chose Abram to go to the land that God would show him, and promised to make of Abraham a great nation.

Adam and Eve: God created Adam, the first man, from dust and placed him in the garden of Eden to till the earth. Seeing that it was not good for the man to be alone, God created Eve, the first woman.

Cain and Abel. These were sons of Adam and Eve. Cain, the elder, was a farmer and his brother Abel a shepherd. When they brought their offerings to the Lord, Abel's offering was accepted but Cain's was not. In anger Cain killed his brother.

Blessing: The concept of blessing is pervasive in Genesis. It is a gift of God, usually mediated through creaturely agents, which empowers recipients to experience and bring forth life, goodness, and well-being.

Covenant. In Genesis, *covenant* is basically divine promise. It refers to both universal promises such as those to Noah and all creatures, and specific promises to the elect family of Abraham. God thereby assumes obligations to remain forever committed to the world and to this family, with attendant blessings. In the stories of Genesis, we come to know a God who is faithful to his promises through thick and thin.

Creation. Creation is most fundamentally the activity of God in bringing the cosmos into being. This includes both originating and continuing creative activity. Creation also includes the activity of creatures (human and nonhuman) in and through which God works to create in ever-new ways.

Election. God "elects" or chooses creatures in and through which God will work in the world. The special election of Abraham (and his descendants) is for the sake of "all the families of the earth" (12:3). This initially exclusive divine move is for the sake of a maximally inclusive end.

Fall/Sin. Human beings are created good and responsible creatures in the image of God. This reality continues (Psalm 8), even though they choose to violate their relationship with God, causing sin to become an inevitable dimension of their life. This "fall" into sinfulness results in ill effects on all creatures.

Judgment. Judgment may be defined as the divinely mediated consequences of sin. Initially in Genesis, sin and judgment come to a climax in the flood. In the wake of this disaster, God promises never to allow for such an extensive judgment again (8:21; 9:8-17), though more targeted judgments on sin will continue (for example, Sodom and Gomorrah, 18:16-19:29). It is wise not to refer to such judgments as punishments; rather, they refer to the natural consequences of sin that are integral to God's creational moral order, an order that God continues to mediate.

Nephilim/Sons of God. *Nephilim*, often translated as "giants," were the offspring of human women and "sons of God," who "were not literally God's sons, but rather were members of God's heavenly court, that some scholars believe were "fallen" angels who became earthly demons (see Genesis 28:12; 1 Kings 22:19-22; Job 1:6; 38:7; Psalm 29:1; 82:6; 89:7).

Noah. Noah was a righteous man whom God told to build a boat or "ark" to save his family and every kind of animal, bird, and creeping thing from the flood that would destroy life on the earth.

Sarai. Later to be known as Sarah, she is the wife of Abram, later known as Abraham.

To Guide Your Reading

Use the following divisions and questions to guide your reading and personal reflection, jotting down your thoughts in the space between each question. For those who wish, we have suggested a three-week schedule to help you in your reading and reflection.

Questions in boldface are the ones we suggest for consideration at your small group meeting. Groups are free, however, to focus on whatever questions are of most interest.

WEEK 1 – Genesis 1:1 – 4:26

1. As you read the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, what actions, words, or phrases make you feel good about who you are and God's love for you?

2. **In writing about Genesis, Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim says that "human beings are created both *in* the image of God, the Creator, and *to be* the image of God in the life of the world. . . . All humanity--male and female and with no regard to race or class--belongs to this sphere." What does that say to you about how God wants us to treat others and about the relationship God wants with us?**

3. Just as he does us, God gave Adam and Eve instructions on how to live, but also gave them free will. In Chapter 3, we see what happens when free will goes against God's will. What are some things or aspects of life in today's world that might tempt people to exercise free will in ways that go against God's will?

4. In 4:1-16, what problem between Cain and his brother Abel leads to Abel's death? As you think about what happens to Cain, where do you see God's judgment? Where do you see God's faithful love?

WEEK TWO – Genesis 5:1 – 8:22

1. Even a quick skim of Genesis 5 reveals something quite surprising: the incredible longevity of those listed. Some have argued that this longevity contributed to an overpopulation that along with other factors necessitates the flood and causes God to number the lifespan of humans to 120 years (6:3). In addition, “sons of God” mate with earthly women who bear their children. Possibly, then, there seems to be a situation in which humanity’s response to God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” and fully enjoy the world has become both irresponsible and detrimental to creation as a whole. What are some ways the world might be acting irresponsibly and to the detriment of creation today or possibly heading in that direction?

2. In the Old Testament, faith is understood to entail both a belief in the one true God and also a complete obedience to God’s will. Noah is a perfect example. Without hesitation (6:22; 7:5), he does what God asks, even though it must have seemed an almost ridiculous request. As a result of Noah’s faithfulness, God not only finds favor with and “remembers” him (8:1), but makes a covenant with *all of humanity* to never again destroy life as he did in the flood. **What are some ways in which the faithfulness of others has brought blessing and promise to you?**

3. In the flood story (Genesis 7-8), several images of God emerge:
 - God expresses sorrow and regret
 - God brings down heavy judgment reluctantly
 - God shows compassion by saving some people and animals
 - God promises to never again bring such severe judgment

Which of these images remains with you most strongly? What other image of God, if any, did you discover in the story?

WEEK THREE – Genesis 9:1 – 12:9

1. In Genesis 11:1-9, ego, pride, and self-importance cause humanity to believe it does not need God. In response, God uses language to cause confusion between people and scatters them throughout the earth. What does this demonstrate about the relationship between God and humanity?

2. **Genesis 12:1-3 provides a key link between the first 11 chapters of Genesis and the rest of the book. Having established “all the families of the earth,” the focus now will become God’s promises to and purposes for them—and us. Using Abraham as his agent, God will demonstrate to the world his great love and hope for all of creation, in spite of the continual problem of human sin. What are some ways you have experienced God’s love for you or have felt assured of his promises to you?**

3. **What are some things you recall from Genesis 1:1—12:9, that support the idea that the main character of the book is God, not humanity?**