



Genesis: The First Word
Study Guide

Week 1: “In the Beginning, God...” (Gen. 1:1-2:3)

Watch the Video

Prayer: *O merciful Creator, whose hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us, we beseech thee, ever thankful for thy loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of thy bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP, 208)*

Opening questions:

1. Let's start by thinking about origin stories. What stories can you think of, and how do they shape and direct the people who tell them? If we think of Genesis as creation's origin story, what can that teach us?
2. Do you have any big questions about Genesis that you hope to learn more about in this study?

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3: The Creation of all Things

3. If God created the heavens and the Earth, then God is not a created being, but rather the source of all creation. What does this mean? Is it different from how people sometimes think about God? What difference does it make for our lives?
4. In the beginning, God creates by speaking His Word, bringing all things into being in peace. How is this

different from other creation stories, where the gods bring the cosmos into being through violence and struggle? What does this tell us about God? What difference does it make for our lives?

5. Does it help to see this chapter as something like a poem? When we read it this way, what does the poetic beauty, harmony, and order of this chapter tell us about God's creation?
6. Do you think we are mindful enough of the cosmos as God's good creation? Or do we forget, and start to assume that we have to make it ourselves into something good and meaningful? How might this impact our daily lives?
7. Let's think about what it means to be created in God's image. If you and I are not gods, but created by God to be good stewards of His creation, what does that mean for how we live?
8. Look closely at what the male and female are asked to do together as partners: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion" over the earth's creatures (1:28). If this is what we're meant to do here, what should that teach us about how to live?
9. "On the seventh day, God finished the work that he had done, and he rested" (2:2). If the climax of

God's creation is rest, enjoying the good creation He has made, what should that mean for how we live?

Read Genesis 2:4-25: The Creation of Humanity

10. "The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (2:7). It seems that we are a sort of hybrid of physical and spiritual, body and soul. If that's true, then what does it mean to live well as embodied souls? What might it look like to tip the scales too far in either direction and try to live as mere bodies or as pure spirits?
11. Reflect on the paths that God set before Adam: that he could eat of every tree in the garden, except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What do these two paths represent?
12. The first thing called "not good" in the Bible is that Adam was alone in the garden! In 1706, the commentator Matthew Henry wrote these lines about Eve's creation from Adam: "Not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved." Add your own commentary to this passage: what do you think it means, and how should it shape our lives?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Week 2: “Ye shall not surely die”: The Fall

Watch the Video

Prayer: *Almighty God, who seest that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.* (BCP, 167)

Read Genesis 3: The Fall of Humanity

1. What does the serpent say (v. 1, 4-5) in order to tempt Adam and Eve into disobeying God? How might we be similarly tempted?
2. Notice how the tree appears to Eve: “good for food, a delight to the eyes,” and “desired to make one wise” (v. 6). Yet its fruit was ultimately bitter and empty. What does this show us about the nature of temptation and sin?
3. It’s curious that somehow eating from the tree of the “knowledge of good and evil” was the one thing forbidden in Eden, and that eating from this tree is what made Adam and Eve aware of their nakedness and ashamed for the first time. What do you think is the nature of this first sin? What does it teach us about the nature of all sin?

4. After Adam and Eve realized they were naked, they tried to cover up with fig leaves. And when they heard the Lord walking in the garden, they hid themselves. What does this *hiding* and *covering up* show us about the results of sin, for our relationship with God and with one another?
5. Notice how Adam and Eve both find someone else to blame for what they did (v. 12-13), which does not fool the Lord. First, we saw *hiding*, and now we see *blaming*. What does this teach us about fallen human nature? How can we get out of this cycle?
6. What does the presence of the serpent teach us about the nature of sin? (Note that although this text does not explicitly identify the serpent with the devil/Satan, various NT verses allude to this: John 8:44; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 12:9, 20:2). Is it all just the serpent's fault, like Eve was trying to say? What should this teach us about sin and temptation today? What should we do in response?
7. Have you or a loved one, perhaps one of your children, learned something "the hard way" through experiencing the consequences of some wrong or careless action? Discuss examples. Does this help us understand what the Lord says will happen to Adam and Eve as a result of their sin (v. 16-19; cf. Rom. 6:23)?

8. Notice what God does for Adam and Eve before sending them out of Eden: He made “garments of skins, and clothed them” (v. 21). Though God lets them experience the consequences of their sin, He also shows mercy by protecting and providing for them. What does this tell us about God?

Read Ch. 4: Cain and Abel

9. We are not told why God was pleased with Abel’s offering but not Cain’s. Regardless, Cain resented it. What can this tell us about the root of his rage? What can it tell us about the sin that is “crouching at the door” for us also?
10. Reflect on the question Cain asks God after killing his brother: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” What attitude does this express? What is the right answer to this question? How then should we live?
11. Why does it follow from Cain’s murder that he will now be a “fugitive and wanderer” on the Earth (v. 12). Is there something in the nature of sin, especially violence, which has this effect?
12. Like we saw with Adam and Eve, God both judges Cain for his sin and shows him mercy, protecting him against those who would kill him (3:13-15). What does this tell us about why and how God judges sin?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Week 3: “Only Evil Continually”: Noah and the Flood

Prayer: *Almighty and everlasting God, who of thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water; and also didst safely lead the children of Israel thy people through the Red Sea, figuring thereby thy holy Baptism... We beseech thee, for thine infinite mercies, that thou wilt mercifully look upon us; that we may be received into the ark of Christ's Church; and being steadfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally we may come to the land of everlasting life, there to reign with thee world without end, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.*** (Adapted from the 1662 BCP)

Watch the Video

Read Genesis 6:5-7:10: The Flood and Noah's Ark

1. In this story, why did God send the flood?
2. Like our discussion of Genesis 1, it may help to consider the literary genre of the Noah story. Some suggest we think of it like one of the parables of Jesus, but in the Old Testament. Some disagree, seeing it as historical. Assuming that it is God's inspired, truthful word either way, which genre do you think best helps us understand this story?
3. We are told that Noah is “a righteous man, blameless in his generation” (v. 9), even though the whole Earth was “corrupt” and “filled with violence” (v. 11). Imagine: what must it have been like to be the

only righteous person who honored God? Have you ever felt something like this? What's it like?

4. Noah must have been a laughingstock, spending years building a massive ship in his backyard! Do you think he ever doubted himself? Even if he was, "Noah did all that the Lord had commanded" (v. 5). What can his example teach us?

Read Genesis 7:11-24

5. Many of us have experienced the fearfully destructive power of floods. Yet many, like in the prayer we opened with, have found comfort here. They've seen the flood as an image of the destructive power of sin and the ark as an image of the church, in which we find salvation and safe passage through "the waves of this troublesome world." Reflect on this: how have you seen sin as having the destructive power of floods? How have you seen Christ and the church as an ark of salvation?

Read Genesis 8:1-19

6. The story turns when "God remembered Noah" and all the creatures in the ark (8:1). After nearly undoing all creation, God now begins re-creating life on the Earth, starting over with Noah's family. The dove bearing an olive branch (v. 11) from this story is one of the world's most enduring symbols of peace and new beginnings. Can you think of other examples in the Bible when God does this kind of thing? Have you experienced this?

7. In verse 17, notice the repetition of God's original charge to Adam and Eve: "be fruitful and multiply on the earth." "This life is a miracle," wrote Wendell Berry, "absolutely worth having, absolutely worth saving. We are alive within mystery, by miracle." Does this story help us see this? Does life's fragility help us see this? How have you seen it?

Read Genesis 8:20-9:16

8. Many commentators argue that we should see the rainbow as God's warrior bow being hung up, now pointing not down at us but up at God Himself. Instead of cursing the ground and destroying us for our sin, now God is promising to take this curse and destruction into Himself. If this is true, how does it change your view of the whole story?
9. The covenant God made with Noah and his descendants (including us!) is described here as unconditional, universal (v. 9-10), and eternal (v. 12, 16). What does this show us about God?
10. After this, we are told an embarrassing family story in which Noah drinks too much, one of his sons treats him with derision and Noah then curses his son. It's not pretty! Clearly, the problem of the human heart has not been solved. What does the story of Noah reveal about God's plan to deliver us?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Week 4: “And thou shalt be a blessing”: Abraham

Watch the Video

Prayer: *Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery hast established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP, 172)*

Read Genesis 12:1-9: The Call of Abram

1. Do you see any reason given in the text for why God called Abram?
2. Imagine being called by God to “go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you,” at the age of 75! What does Abram’s response tell us about him?
3. Look closely at the promise that God makes to Abram: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (v. 2). With this promise, the history of Israel begins. How is this a response by God to the problem of human sin? How is it a new chapter in the story of God’s plan of salvation?
4. Notice the purpose that God gives for his promises to Abram: “so that you will be a blessing.” What is this blessing? How will it be that in Abram, “all the

families of the earth will be blessed”? (v. 4). How might this apply to us today as a church?

Read Genesis 12:10-20: Abram and Sarai in Egypt

5. Though we opened with the well-known story about God’s call and Abram’s faith, Abram does not look quite so faithful in this story! What does this tell us about Abram’s character and faith?
6. A few chapters on, in a verse quoted multiple times by Paul (Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6), we are told that Abram “believed the Lord, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (15:6). How does this episode between Abram and Sarah in Egypt shed light on what this verse is getting at?

Read Genesis 15:1-21: Abram’s faith, God’s covenant

7. By this point in the story, Abram and Sarah have been childless for some time, and they are not getting any younger! What does it tell us about God’s plan of salvation that in human terms, Abram and Sarah “have no power in themselves to help themselves” have children (BCP, 218)?
8. Abram “believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness” (v. 6). What does this mean? How is it also good news for you and me?
9. The story of the flaming torch and fire pot passing through the bloody animal carcasses is, let’s say,

from another place and time. But the meaning is simple: God is passing through the bloody passageway himself, not Abram, thereby taking on the covenant curses upon himself. In Paul's epistles, this is absolutely foundational for how we understand God. What does this tell us about God? (For a hint: see Rom. 4.)

Read Genesis 17:1-8

10. Abram's name is now changed by God to Abraham, from "exalted father" now to "father of a multitude" of nations. What does it mean that this story is so clear that the patriarch of Israel is meant by God to be not just the father of Israel, but of many nations? What does it mean for how we are called by God to live today?
11. God says all of this to Abraham when he is 99 years old! Clearly, the timeframe of God's promises is meant to extend far beyond Abraham's own lifetime. In Abraham's extended family, God is promising to gather together a people over time to bear witness to Him, through which to work His plan of salvation. If we see ourselves like this — in our own families and in this church — how might it change our perspective? What might we be called to do differently?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Small Group Resources

Videos: Each lesson includes a video that should be watched before the group meets or at the beginning of each gathering. This will set the context of the passage that is read. You can either search “Just For” on the church website or find it here: www.stmartinsepiscopal.org/just-for/.

Gathering Expectations: Building relationships and growing in faith are the two main goals of this small group series. Weekly gatherings could be roughly 20-30 minutes for socializing, 30-40 minutes for Bible study and 10 minutes for prayer. But there is no one size that fits all!

Small Group Covenant: We are committed to maintaining a welcoming atmosphere in which each person can be open and honest in the pursuit of the knowledge of how God loves us and cares for us. We will establish this atmosphere by doing the following:

- We will always maintain the confidentiality of what is said in the group.
- We will pray for each other regularly and seek to support each other spiritually both inside and outside of our meetings.
- We will seek to be open and honest with each other and be our true selves. We will, however, not overshare or treat the group as a therapy session.
- We will not frog, hog, or bog. Meaning, we do not jump quickly from one subject to another, hog the conversation, or perpetually get stuck on one subject.
- We will open and close our meetings with prayer, calling on God's promise to be with us when two or

more gather in His name, through the presence of His Holy Spirit. We will be open to the mystery and surprise of God's presence in our group and in our lives.

- We accept that God will speak to all of us through each one's thoughts, and we will listen deeply with our hearts to new perspectives, seeking always to determine God's truth in them.
- We will avoid divisive topics, such as politics, which are not directly relevant to our spiritual journey. We will honor the diversity of thought and feeling among us, and we will treat each other with the utmost dignity and respect at all times. Should conflicts arise, we will respectfully resolve them. We will give advice only when requested.
- We will seek to have all others know us by our love of God and our neighbors. We will seek to become closer to God by listening and sharing within the group and by serving others outside of the group.

Further Reading: There are many excellent resources on Genesis for those who wish to carry this study further. Out of a long list, I recommend:

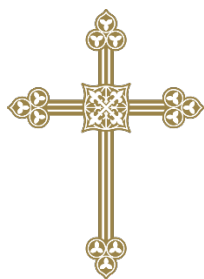
And God Spoke to Abraham, by Fleming Rutledge

'In the Beginning...': A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall, by Pope Benedict XVI

Genesis: A 12-Week Study, by Mitchell Kim (Crossway, 2013)

The Drama of Scripture, by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen

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