

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

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G E N E S I S



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INTRODUCTION

Where did we come from? How did we get here? What is the purpose of our existence? The Book of Genesis provides many of these answers for us. It discusses the beginnings of our universe, and explains why life in this world is so difficult and dangerous.

Much criticism has fallen on the first eleven chapters of Genesis. These events occurred long before and were passed down by oral tradition from generation to generation, before being recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by Moses. But just because it was transmitted orally does not make it suspect. In cultures where all communication is oral, memory becomes geared toward that process. Also, if the Holy Spirit is overseeing the transmission of God's promises through the preflood generations of believers, He can guarantee the accuracy of that word.

PURPOSE

Moses does not come into the Bible's storyline until the first chapter of Exodus, the book that follows Genesis. So when he is writing Genesis, he is writing to the freed Israelite slaves, explaining their history and how they came to be slaves in Egypt. Moses does not offer arguments for God's existence because the Israelites have already seen God's mighty hand in the ten plagues on Egypt and in the dividing of the Red Sea so they could pass through on dry ground while the Egyptians pursued them and were swallowed up when the waters returned to their place. They saw His glory on Mount Sinai and heard His thundering voice giving them the Ten Commandments.

Moses writes Genesis to reveal God's interaction with His human creatures, especially the grace and mercy He showed by promising the Savior immediately after the first man and woman disobeyed God and fell into sin.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CREATION

Read 1:1–2:3.

Q 1: How would you describe God’s relationship to His creation?

- Unlike many ancient creation myths where the cosmos has always existed (often before the gods came into existence), Moses teaches us that God has always been. In all eternity—before and beyond time—God was, is, and forever shall be.

All creation had a definite starting point. The power of God’s word alone made it spring into existence, out of nothing. On the first day, God created the raw materials of the heavens and the earth, and on each succeeding day He ordered and formed that creation. He created an intricate habitat that is a suitable and lovely habitation for mankind, which He created in His image so we could bear His image and have a relationship with Him, with our fellow humans, and with our fellow creatures He placed on this earth.

Q 2: Where do we see evidence of the three persons of God in chapter 1?

- In verse 26: “Let US make man in OUR image, after OUR likeness.” These plural pronouns demonstrate more than one person, but the unity of the Godhead is shown in the one work the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit set out to do—creating mankind.

Many theologians see wisdom’s discourse in Proverbs 8:22–36 as Jesus discussing His part in creation. As you read verse 30, notice the great joy and exhilaration the persons felt toward one another as God created the universe. Note also the Lord’s delight in mankind in verse 31. Jesus demonstrated that delight throughout His earthly life.

Q 3: When God created humans, He made us in His image and in His likeness. In what way does that connect us with God and the spirit world above?

- God’s image and likeness refer to His holiness and purity, and the ability to be in a relationship with God and the angels in heaven.

ADAM AND EVE

Read 2:4–9, 15–25.

Some Bible critics have argued that this passage presents a second, conflicting creation account. But it is better seen as a close-up look at the sixth day of creation presented in broad brushstrokes in Genesis's first chapter. God shows how He made man and woman. Both were composed of a body formed from the ground (a part of the material creation), animated by a spirit created by the breath of God.

When God formed Adam's body, He chose to sculpt it from earth's dirt or clay, rather than create him out of nothing by His word alone.

Q 4: What does this indicate about our relationship with and responsibility to our earth and the nonhuman creatures with which we share it?

- God made us to be dependent upon the earth and its resources from which God provides us with food, clothing, shelter, and our livelihoods. We owe it to our Creator to use His world responsibly, and to preserve, protect, and care for our nonhuman creatures who were also formed by God's hands (Genesis 2:19).

When God formed Eve's body, He could have chosen another lump of dirt and clay from which to sculpt it. Instead, He took a rib and surrounding tissue from Adam's body, joined more dirt and clay to it, and sculpted her body.

Q 5: What does this indicate about our relationship with and responsibility to our fellow humans?

- Adam and Eve shared a common substance, and all humans as their children likewise share that common substance. All of us are equally their children, and each given dignity by the fact that our original parents were both made in God's image. Further, Jesus Christ has come into the flesh as our Brother and ransomed each of us by His suffering, death, and resurrection. We owe it to one another to love and care for one another, and to share the saving story of His salvation with everyone.

God also united Adam and Eve in marriage, providing the building block for all of human society. He gave us the Fourth Commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," to maintain honor, love, and peace in the family and a safe harbor for children to grow into mature, loving, faithful, and caring adults who will raise families of their own.

Q 6: Take some time to contemplate and share what this human family in the world would have looked like and how it would have developed if sin had never come into our world.

- There would still have been the development of crafts, building, engineering, design, music, and the arts, but all would have been done for the glory of God and the benefit of mankind. Mankind would live in perfect harmony with nature and be a delight to one another—and be delighted with one another—especially the variety of personalities and gifts God has given to each of us. That will give you a glimpse into the new heavens and the new earth and our life together when Christ comes to restore His creation and glorify all believers.

THE FALL

Read 3:1–15.

Q 7: Satan’s first temptation aimed at making Eve doubt God’s word. In what way is such doubt at the heart of all temptations to this day?

- God’s Ten Commandments give us clear guidelines to things that will be harmful for us and things that are of benefit. Each temptation invites us to sit in judgment on God’s word—to be God—and decide what is right and wrong for us. It often takes humility for us to bow to God’s will and trust His divine wisdom.

Moses makes it very clear that Adam was standing with Eve throughout this temptation (v. 6). St. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:14, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” At first glance, that seems to cast Eve in a worse light than Adam. But upon further reflection, it is the opposite.

Q 8: Seeing that Adam was not deceived by Satan’s temptation, why is his guilt greater than Eve’s?

- Eve believed the serpent was telling her the truth. Adam knew it was all a lie. Adam knew better, but refused to exercise His God-given dominion over this creature (the serpent). More than that, he failed to love and protect his wife, who was in error. And even further, he ate the fruit in defiance of God’s clear word—which he knew was right.

God could have disowned and destroyed His fallen human creatures. Instead, He had mercy on them. He gave the first promise of the coming Savior—His Son—who would be one of Eve’s offspring.

Q 9: How was the prophesy of verse 15 fulfilled on the cross?

- Satan bruised Jesus’ heel through His suffering and death on the cross. But the wound was not mortal. Jesus rose from death on the third day and lives and reigns forever. Satan was given a mortal injury—he will be cast into hell on Judgment Day and be punished with eternal death.

Read 4:1–16.

In a very short time, we see the tragic results of Adam and Eve’s fall in their firstborn son, Cain.

Q 10: How did God try to protect both Cain and Abel before Cain acted on his anger?

- Such powerful anger, hate, jealousy, and rage were something new to humanity. Cain had no idea how strong his emotions were—or how fragile human life is. God let him know sin's desire was to make him its slave. But God had given him the ability to master it through repentance and prayer. And God promised He would accept Cain's future sacrifices if he offered them in true repentance and faith.

Q 11: What is the significance of the phrase “Cain went away from the presence of the LORD” (v. 16)?

- A person can never truly go to a place where God is not present. The phrase means that Cain turned his back on God's gracious offer of forgiveness and salvation. Cain felt that the punishment laid on him by God was greater than he deserved. Justifying himself, he missed the fact that God did not punish him as he deserved—but placed the mark on his forehead to spare his life. God loved Cain and reached out to him like the father of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Sadly, this prodigal son never returned. This is especially tragic because Cain's children would follow in his footsteps—leading to the devastating flood.

LONGEVITY DISCUSSION

Many people who read Genesis find it difficult to accept chapter 5 as literal, historical truth.

Q 12: Scan chapter 5. On average, how long were the lifetimes of Adam and his offspring before the flood?

- Some Bible scholars contend that these are exaggerations. Some argue that they may have meant months instead of years, but then you would have men like Kenan (v. 12) and Enoch (v. 21) fathering children when they were five or six years old. Could the Bible be correct that humans actually once enjoyed such long lifespans?

Consider the fossils and remains of large plant eaters (mammoths, mastodons, and dinosaurs) uncovered in arctic regions (Siberia, Canada)—some with tropical plants still found in their stomachs. This is clear evidence that the climate on earth was vastly different in ancient times. A huge number of plants and animal species have gone extinct because of drastic climate change.

Modern science uses large comet strikes to explain this drastic climate change. The Bible provides an alternative—the flood of Noah's day. If dinosaurs shared the longevity of humans, and continued to grow throughout their lifespans as many reptiles do presently, then perhaps this is the best explanation of the giant sizes for the dinosaurs.

One last thought for consideration: if we assume God created Adam and Eve with perfect health and genetics and a climate vastly different from that experience in the world today, couldn't the longer lifespans in Genesis be feasible? For further information, do an Internet search on creation science.

THE FLOOD

Read 6:5–22.

Verse 5 is a chilling condemnation of the sinful nature that lives in each of us, “every intention of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually.” Reread that verse and pay attention to the words “every . . . only . . . continually.”

Q 13: What is your reaction to those words when you think of the stories in the news every day? What is your reaction when you think of yourself, your family, your friends?

- We can easily see it in other people, but we would like to say it isn’t so for all people, certainly not for us individually. We would like to think that—and many people claim that all of us are basically good. But that is not how the pure and holy God sees us. And He is the only one whose judgment counts. Just as the unbelieving people of Noah’s day were not able to escape the devastating flood when it came, neither will humanity be able to stop Jesus’ judgment when He returns.

God looked at all the humans on earth and reached that conclusion that filled Him with sorrow that He had made man in the first place. But then He looked at Noah.

Q 14: Look at verse 9. What three differences from other people does the Bible point out about Noah?

- First, Noah is righteous. Of course, like all of us, Noah was not righteous because he lived a perfect life. He was a sinner. But he was righteous through faith in God’s promise to send His Son as our Savior, God and man.
- Second, Noah was blameless. This means that Noah’s way of life stood out as very different from the people among whom he lived. No one could blame or accuse him of an immoral life.
- Third, Noah walked with God. This means Noah was publicly known to worship the Lord God. He did not hide his faith. And we know from 2 Peter 2:5 that Noah told people about the coming judgment of the flood, warning them to repent.

It took many decades for Noah and his sons to build the ark. Through those years, the ark was a silent sermon—slowly taking shape and growing closer and closer to completion—testifying to the flood, which burst out shortly after it was completed. A further, more urgent sign came when Noah’s neighbors saw all those animals come together at the ark (God brought them to Noah). Yet they did not repent or believe Noah’s warning until it was too late.

Read 7:11–24.

Noah and his family entered the ark, and the Lord shut them in. Then the flood came. Interestingly, the tragedy of the flood is not Moses' focus—but God's grace in sparing humanity from complete annihilation through a believer named Noah. Despite all the destructive rage and power of the flood, Noah, his family, and the animals could rest secure—God had given Noah the design and no harm would come upon them.

Q 15: Some people look at the acts of God in the Old Testament and consider Him cruel and evil. How can we call Him a God of love if He killed so many people and animals—and created a place like hell to punish unbelievers in fire forever?

- The Bible teaches that God is loving and gracious—but He is holy and just. Being pure and spotless, God will not tolerate sin and evil in His presence. And like a husband who is completely devoted to us and our welfare, He is angered when we give other things the love and devotion we owe to Him. From the beginning, God showed His love and grace to fallen humanity by promising a Savior—His own Son. But Cain turned his back on God's promises—as did his descendants, who were destroyed in the flood. God offers His salvation to all people for Jesus' sake. But when a person rejects that one way of salvation, they bring God's wrath upon themselves.

Some people have relegated the account of Noah's ark and the flood to myth and fable. They ask where all the water would come from. Here are a few thoughts to consider:

1. If the climate of the earth was different before the flood, there is no reason why the earth's topography had to be the same. What if the mountains were much shorter in those days? Conversely, what if God made the ocean floors rise and the land sink down—in a reversal of the way He gathered the waters in one place on the third day and made dry land appear (Genesis 1:9)?
2. On the second day (1:7), God created the expanse between the waters below and the waters above. It could well be these waters above that came down as rain for forty days and nights.
3. Remember that about 71 percent of the earth's surface is already covered with water.

4. Moses wrote about all the fountains of the great deep bursting forth in 7:11. Some scientists speak about a subterranean water reservoir holding more water than all the oceans lying hundreds of miles beneath the surface. What if this water came to the surface and the land sank down?

The Christian Church has been compared to the ark, with the waters of our Baptism compared to the floodwaters. In the water of Baptism, our old, sinful nature was drowned and destroyed, while the new creation was born and gathered in the ark of the Christian Church. Church architecture has often utilized design elements to remind us of the ark. For example, the word *nave*, which describes the main seating space for the congregation, comes from the Latin word *navis*, which means “ship.” Often, the wood beams in the ceiling are reminiscent of a ship’s bottom.

Read 8:1–19.

The last verse of chapter 7 tells us “the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days.” Of course, the waters rose through the 40 days when it rained, then for the next 110 days the water level stayed high. Then God remembered Noah and allowed the water to gradually begin seeping down into the ground again—including those huge reservoirs deep inside the earth. That whole process made the whole flood event last longer than a year.

Q 16: What is the significance of the phrase “But God remembered Noah” (8:1)?

- The flood was a powerful demonstration of God’s wrath at human sin. But now we see God’s mercy and grace. On the limitless expanse of water covering the entire globe, God remembers the one man, his seven family members, and the small grouping of animals floating in the ark. That means God remembers each of us in those trying circumstances when His love is hidden behind grief and suffering.

Q 17: Why is it significant that Noah waited to leave the ark until God told him to?

- The dove brought back the freshly plucked olive leaf sometime in the eleventh month after the flood began. Noah waited for God to tell him and his family to leave the ark even though the mountainside had been dry for some time, and dry ground was starting to appear in the valley below. Sometimes God makes us wait for things we want right now, but it is always wisest to pray and ask for His timing.

Read 11:1–9.

God told Noah and his family to leave the ark, come down from the mountain, and spread over the earth. But his descendants chose to remain together and build a huge tower.

Q 18: What was so bad about the tower they were building?

- They were disobeying God's command to spread and fill the earth. More important, they sought to make a name for themselves, to make sure future generations remembered them and what they had accomplished. God knew the thing most important for all generations is to remember the great works of God and His gracious promise of salvation through Jesus Christ. Anything that distracts from that is not good.

God also shows a concern with grandiose human projects that push God and His loving salvation away.

Finally, some scholars propose the goal of the tower was not really to reach up into heaven to seize God's throne, but to build a structure so tall that they would be safe from another flood. If that is true, then they didn't trust God's promise to never again send a flood to destroy the world.

THE PATRIARCHS

ABRAHAM

Read 12:1–7.

Q 19: What stands out to you about God’s calling of Abram (later renamed Abraham) to be the father of a great nation?

- God chose an unbelieving descendant of Noah’s son Shem to become the father of a nation in which He would safeguard the promises of the coming Savior. To preserve the message from dying out under the pressure of other nations, God prepared a place where they could live radically different lives from the nations around them, yet be in the “middle” of the world (with access to Africa, Europe, and Asia) to share the promise of the coming Savior.

Q 20: What are the three promises God gave Abraham?

1. His descendants would become a great nation.
2. All those who blessed him would be blessed, and those who cursed him would be cursed.
3. Through Abraham, all nations would be blessed. This was the greatest of the promises, for it promised that Jesus would come from Abraham’s offspring.

Read 21:1–7; 22:1–14.

Q 21: What is striking about God’s command for Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac?

- Abraham waited twenty-five years for God to keep the promise of a son, which He had first given in Genesis 12. Now, God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac. This was more than a test of Abraham’s love and devotion to the Lord. It also foreshadowed God the Father sacrificing His beloved Son for the sins of the world. Notice how the ram is a male sheep; its head was caught in thorns, and it was sacrificed on the same mountain where Jesus would die on the cross.

ISAAC

Isaac returned home with Abraham and grew to manhood as a shepherd. After Sarah died, God provided a wife for him: Rebekah, the granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nahor. For a time, Isaac and Rebekah were childless, but eventually God granted their prayers. But after experiencing a difficult pregnancy, she consulted the Lord, perhaps through her father-in-law Abraham, who is called a prophet.

Read 25:19–28.

Q 22: What does it say of Isaac that he favored Esau over Jacob, even knowing God had chosen Jacob to be the one through whom the Messianic line to Jesus would continue?

- It shows that Isaac was not nearly as spiritually minded as he should have been. From the text, it appears that Isaac's favoritism toward Esau was based on selfish motives—Esau's love of the outdoors, hunting, and cooking wild game. Rebekah's favoritism toward Jacob was based on his being a homebody, but also likely because of God's promise.

Read 26:1–5.

Q 23: What is important about this particular passage?

- Even though Isaac is far more worldly minded than spiritually minded, God expressly passes the promise of His blessings and the Messianic line to him from Abraham.

JACOB

The following two passages explain how God overcame Isaac's favoritism of Esau to assure that the blessing promised to Abraham and Isaac would continue through Jacob instead.

Read 25:29–34; 27:1–45.

Q 24: Both accounts involve trickery and deceit on the part of Jacob first, then on the part of Rebekah. How can God sanction the use of such selfish, sinful motives to accomplish His will?

- The Bible is full of accounts of God accomplishing His purposes despite the selfishness and evil intentions of His enemies, as well as His own people. The clearest example of this is Jesus' crucifixion—a horrific, selfish crime that God turned to the salvation of the world. Clearly God's original intention was for

Isaac to obediently humble himself and give the birthright and blessings to Jacob instead of trying to give them to Esau. The fact that Jacob and Rebekah felt forced to use deceit and trickery reflects as much on Isaac's worldliness as their own.

- Even though Jacob seemed to prosper because of his trickery, the actual path of his life shows there is a price to be paid when we use sinful, selfish means to accomplish our goals. Jacob would flee from his family to escape Esau's murderous hatred, and apparently he never saw his mother again. He would face twenty miserable years being the victim of deceit and trickery as he served Rebekah's deceitful and manipulative brother Laban. Even worse, his marriages and family life were full of strife and tension.

TWELVE SONS

Jacob loved Laban's younger daughter, Rachel, and promised to serve him seven years for her hand in marriage. Laban agreed, but changed his mind after he realized God's blessing on Jacob benefited him. He deceitfully gave Jacob his older daughter, Leah, in place of Rachel, so he could get another seven years of service and blessings from Jacob. Jacob resented and hated Leah, and favored Rachel. The tumultuous story of the birth of eleven of his twelve sons is laid out in Genesis 29:31–30:24.

When they returned to Canaan, Rachel died giving birth to Jacob's twelfth son, Benjamin. She was buried near Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus.

Read 37:1–28.

Q 25: Describe the tension and hostility among Jacob's twelve sons.

- Jacob's four oldest sons were born of the older sister, Leah; then two were born of each of Rachel and Leah's servants; then Leah had sons five and six. Finally, Rachel had Joseph and Benjamin. The four sons of the two servants were on the bottom of their father's list. Leah's six sons were not far above them. But Jacob held Rachel's sons in high esteem—especially her firstborn, Joseph. Jacob's obvious favoritism of Joseph (coat of many colors) wreaked great devastation among his children—great suffering for Joseph sold into slavery, nagging guilt for the brothers, and heartbreak for Jacob as Leah's sons deceived him into believing Joseph had been killed by wild beasts.

Read 39.

Q 26: How do you think Joseph was able to rise above the circumstances of his slavery?

- Unlike his father and grandfather, Joseph demonstrated a spiritual-mindedness in his slavery (though not in his father's house) that helped him focus on serving God as he served his masters. God's hand was obviously at work in Joseph's life, despite the circumstances in which he found himself—and the incredible injustice done to him by Potiphar's wife. Through his hard work and integrity, Joseph shows wisdom, organizational skills, and natural leadership. As a result, wherever he goes—even in the prison—he is quickly promoted.

Read 41:1–41.

Q 27: What lesson of faith can we learn from Joseph's patient endurance of his slavery and imprisonment?

- Throughout his slavery, it was impossible for Joseph to see God's ultimate plan. Yet through prayer and faith, Joseph saw little by little the good things God was accomplishing through him—first for Potiphar, then for the prison keeper. Now Joseph can see the purpose of his slavery and imprisonment—to prepare him to save Egypt and even more, his own family.

Often in our lives, we face reversals and setbacks and can find ourselves wondering where God is. But our loving heavenly Father is carefully arranging all those details of our lives and making them work together for our good and the good of those around us. It just may take years to see God's bigger plan—or we may not see it until we are with Him in heaven.

With all this time passing by, Joseph's brothers seem to have concluded that he died in slavery. When they go to Egypt to buy food for the famine, the last person they are thinking about seeing is their long-lost brother. Joseph is in his late thirties, wearing the clothing of an Egyptian prince, and his hair is cut like an Egyptian. He speaks only the Egyptian language and uses an interpreter to hide the fact that he understands every word his brothers are saying to one another.

Read 42:1–25; 43; and 44.

Q 28: At first, it seems Joseph is getting back at his brothers for the way they mistreated him. But when you look closer, what do you see?

- Joseph is really testing them to see if they are truly sorry for what they have done. He makes them go through the circumstances of

his slavery (being in that same prison for three days, with no idea if they would get out or not; Simeon being kept in custody while they go home; giving them the chance to go free while Benjamin is imprisoned). When he sees they are truly repentant, he reveals himself to them, assures them of his forgiveness, and urges them to quickly bring their father before he dies.

In Joseph, we see some wonderful parallels to Jesus. Just as Joseph was sold into slavery to go and prepare a place to keep his brothers alive, Jesus was sold into betrayal to suffer and die for our sins and go and prepare a place for us in heaven. Both were condemned as criminals. Joseph was released from prison and Jesus rose from the dead. Both were exalted to high leadership positions to provide for and protect their people: Joseph became Pharaoh's right-hand man; Jesus is seated at God the Father's right hand.

This brings us to the end of the Book of Genesis. But like every other Old Testament book, it closes with an expectation of something to come. Jacob's twelve sons are growing into a great nation, but they are away from the land God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.