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Discover Your Bible Series

Revised
Edition

Discover
GENESIS
CREATION AND COVENANT

LEADER GUIDE



Part One of a Two-Part Study

LEADER GUIDE

Discover
GENESIS
CREATION AND COVENANT




**FAITH
ALIVE**[®]
Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

We thank Carol Veldman Rudie for writing the original lesson material (1989, 1993) for Part One of this revised study of Genesis. We also thank Deb Fennema for her contributions to an earlier revision (2001). This latest revised edition incorporates updates and suggestions by readers and small group leaders.

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To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader but not to substitute for your own work. As you prepare to lead each lesson, work first through the questions in the study guide. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage. Prepare thoroughly before leading each group session so that you can lead without frequent references to notes. This approach will free you to concentrate on leadership responsibilities, keep eye contact with group members, and listen carefully.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions into smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others to truth by questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Help to Apply

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do follow-up reflection at home.

Leadership Training

If more than one group in your setting is using this Bible study, we strongly encourage leaders to meet regularly for discussion of the lessons, for prayer, and for mutual support.

If this study is being used in a Coffee Break Small Groups program, each leader should have a copy of the *Coffee Break Evangelism Manual with Director's Handbook*. This book is a basic "how-to" guide for establishing and leading a Bible discovery group. Reread the book or portions of it periodically and review it at the beginning of each season.

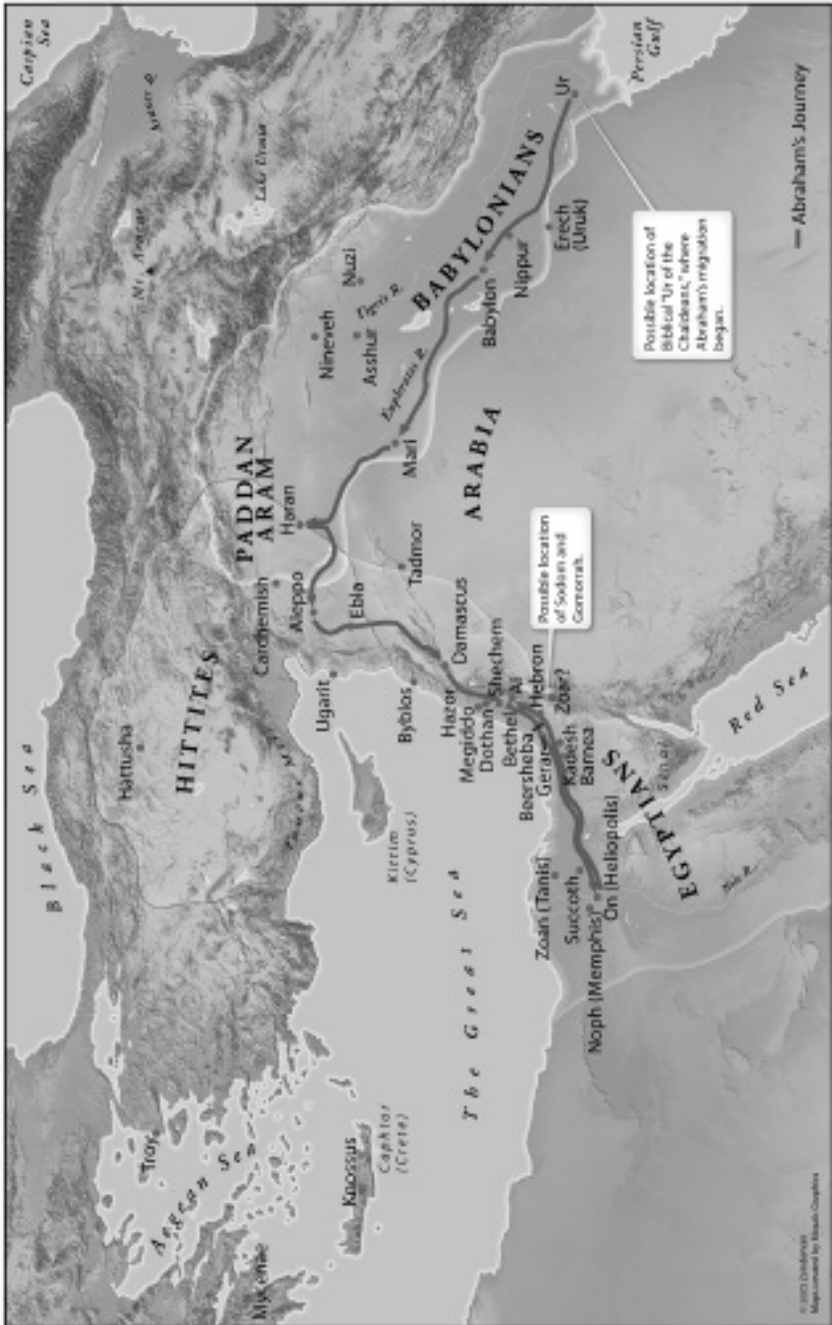
Leading with Love in the Coffee Break Core Values series is another important tool for leadership development.

Leaders will also find it helpful to attend one or more of the many leadership training workshops offered each year in connection with small group ministry.

For more information,

- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail smallgroups@crcna.org, or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org/DYB (for training advice and general information)
- call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org (to order materials)

Map of the World of the Patriarchs



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Introduction

Genesis means “origin” or “beginning.” This first book of the Bible tells of the beginning of the universe, of humanity, of human sin, of salvation, of civilization. *Genesis* tells us about the beginning of just about everything—except God. God has always existed, even before the beginning of time.

The opening section of *Genesis* (chap. 1-11) helps us understand much of the rest of the Bible. It introduces and explains the universal problem of human sin and God’s response to it. In these chapters we see God’s power, perfection, and persistence. We see God’s justice and mercy. We see that God is personal—showing love and joy, sorrow and pain, care and concern. In these chapters we also see the world as God intended it—and what it became because of human sin. Tension developed between God and humanity as people rebelled and struggled against their Creator in their desire to run their own lives and do as they pleased. Yet God consistently called them back to himself. Ever since people first sinned, God promised to provide a Savior who would bear the punishment for sin and restore our relationship with God (Gen. 3:15).

The next main section of *Genesis* (12:1-25:18) focuses on God’s call to Abraham (Abram) to leave his family and country to become the father of a new nation. In that part of *Genesis* we find God’s covenant promises to Abraham and Sarah and their long wait for the fulfillment of those promises (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:5-6; 17:3-8). Their story is about faith, about trusting in a faithful God even when that seems foolish. It’s a story of struggles with doubt, fear, and uncertainty concerning God, and it’s a testimony to God’s faithfulness and power in the midst of human weakness. This story recounts the beginning of a nation called into a special relationship with God so that “all peoples on earth” would be blessed (Gen. 12:3).

The writer of *Genesis* is not identified, but Moses is traditionally accepted as the probable author. The book of *Genesis*—along with *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*—is part of the Torah, the Law of God given to Moses (see Ex. 34:27-28; Deut. 1:1-8; 4:10-14, 44-45; 5:1-6:25).

The promises recorded in *Genesis* are ultimately fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, a descendant of Abraham and Sarah. Jesus, the Son of God, became a human being so that he could die for human sin and make it possible for people of all nations to be saved and live with God again (John 1:1-2, 14; 3:16), as it was in the beginning.

Glossary of Terms

altar—a stone or heap of stones on which people laid animals or grain as sacrifices to God.

blameless—obedient to God’s laws; above reproach.

bless—to show favor and kindness.

burnt offering—a sacrifice laid on an altar and completely burned.

cherubim—angelic beings who carry out God’s commands.

clean—God allowed people to eat certain kinds of animals and to use them for sacrifices. These were referred to as “clean”; all other animals were considered “unclean.”

covenant—a mutually binding agreement between two parties; usually both parties agree to accept certain responsibilities.

curse—to pronounce judgment on someone or something.

faith—taking God at his word and acting on it.

favor—graciousness, kindness.

image—likeness, resemblance.

judgment—God’s pronouncement that a person is either sinful or righteous.

knowledge—The Hebrew word for *knowledge* implies knowing by way of experience, not merely an intellectual knowing.

mercy—free and undeserved compassion.

prophecy—a message from someone who speaks for God.

righteous—free from guilt or sin; conformed to God’s will and moral standards; declared or made right with God.

sacrifice—the act of offering something precious to God. In the Old Testament this was usually an animal (the best of the flock) or the firstfruits of a harvest.

sin—going against God’s will; disobeying God’s command.

worship—reverence and respect given to God; acknowledging God’s worthiness to be praised and served.

A Special Note to the Leader

As you prepare to lead this study, you'll want to keep some important points in mind:

- As leader, try to keep your remarks brief while you introduce your group to the book of Genesis. Group members will be discovering many of the themes of this book for themselves as they work through the Bible passages. Allow them the joy of this discovery, and, if necessary, assure them that they need not understand every detail right away. They'll have several weeks to consider the truths presented here.
- Some of the Genesis stories are familiar even to unchurched people—but some variations of those stories are full of mistakes. To help your group deal with a misconception, ask, "What does the Bible say? Do we find that idea in these verses?" Be sure to clarify what the Bible says before you explore questions about the meaning of the text.
- Note each story's point of view. Through whose eyes are you seeing the events? Why might this be important?
- If your group includes newcomers, remember that this study may well be their introduction to God. Be sure to address questions such as *Who is God? How does God relate to people? What does God expect of us?* As group members explore these questions, they will also discover more about themselves by asking *Who am I? Where did I come from? How did I get to be the way I am?*

Lesson 1

Genesis 1-2

God's Good Creation

Introductory Notes

The drama of God's good creation begins with the first verse of Genesis 1 and builds to a state of blessing and joy as God creates human beings to care for each other and his world. In the story of creation we see amazing works as God creates our universe by speaking things into existence. Then from the dust of the earth God makes plants and living creatures, crowning the creation by making human beings in his own image.

Because this lesson covers a lot of material, you may need to pace yourselves as you discuss the summary of God's creating activity in Genesis 1 and then focus on the more detailed account of God's creation of human beings and their life with him in Genesis 2.

As you begin this study together, it will be important to recognize that you don't need to discuss every verse or its meaning in detail. But you can cover the main themes and content of the book of Genesis. If you have additional questions or a desire for learning that goes beyond the scope of this study, you may want to consult the *NIV Study Bible*, a Bible handbook, or other resources listed at the end of this booklet.

As leader, you probably are aware that your discussion in this lesson could turn into a debate on creation versus evolution. To avoid getting sidetracked, urge everyone to focus on what the text says, noting that the Bible is not intended to be a scientific textbook. Acknowledge that God's plan of creation moves from the less complex to the more complex. Be sure group members understand the central point of the Bible's creation story: the universe and everything in it has been created by God (see Ps. 24:1-2).

In addition, point out the glossary and map and the description on how to study—available in each study guide. Read the introduction together and point out that the lessons in this study will serve mainly as a starting point for further growth and learning. Invite everyone also to pray with you throughout the course of this study, asking God to help each of you see it as a personal journey in which you can grow to know the Lord in new ways.

Optional Share Question

Note: The optional share question in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session or at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt each share question in a way that works best for your group.

When you make something or do something creative, how do you go about it? What steps do you take? Do you make something out of nothing? Do you use materials? Where do your ideas come from? Compare our own (human) creativity with God’s ability to create.

1. *Genesis 1:1-13*

- a. *Describe what happened “in the beginning.” What do these verses tell us about how God created?*
 - **How do these verses describe God?**
 - **Does the author try to explain who God is or prove God’s existence? If not, why not?**

The first two verses of Genesis leave room for many questions. Most of these questions have no answers. For example, what did God do before creating the universe? Is this God’s only creation? If questions like these come up, admit that we do not have answers to them. Encourage your group rather to focus on what the passage does tell us.

The author presumes God’s eternal existence. The central focus on God is apparent in other ways as well. For example, look at the word “create” with your group. The *NIV Study Bible* notes that the original Hebrew form of this word is never used to describe human activity, only God’s. You might note that this word is used again in verses 21 and 27. When you study these verses, note how God’s work changes each time the word *create* is introduced.

Note also with your group that the Hebrew word for “Spirit” means “wind.” If you have time, also point out John 3:8 and Acts 2:2-4, which use this image to refer to the Spirit’s activity.

- **How do the words “formless and empty” and “darkness” contrast with events in the days of creation?**

Light, order, and teeming abundance come into existence through God’s spoken word.

b. *What is similar in the accounts of the different days? What is different?*

Invite your group to look at the verbs in this passage and reflect on their meaning.

- **What action words are repeated? What do they tell us about God's creative work in these days?**

The words *separated* and *gathered* occur several times in the NIV text. It should be clear that God was setting up a framework, boundaries for areas that later would teem with all kinds of life.

Note together also a connection between the phrases "God said" and "it was so."

- **How is God's speaking different from human speech?**
- **What does this tell us about God's power? About the way God creates?**

God calls forth things out of nothing, and they exist. God's spoken word creates the thing itself.

- **What does God say about his work?**

Some group members may question how creation can be good when there is so much evil in our world. Remind everyone that God created the world "good," which means "suited to its purpose," and that evil had not yet spoiled the creation. God saw that what he had created fit his intentions.

c. *In what way is God's act of creation in verse 11 different from the previous ones?*

- **What new potential does God introduce?**

God's command that the land should produce plants and trees differs from previous commands in which God speaks and something comes into existence out of nothing. In verse 12 we see that the land is obedient to the word of God, and the result is an abundance of vegetation.

Help your group see that God is now concerned with filling the different areas of creation that he has established. Teeming abundance is implied in the word "kinds." God commands the growth of plants and trees, giving each the ability to reproduce. Note also that along with the potential for growth and reproduction God also sets some limits: "according to their various kinds."

2. *Genesis 1:14-27*

a. *Why does God create the lights in the sky?*

In verses 14-15 we see again that God creates with a direct word. The account goes into significant detail regarding the purpose of the sun, moon, and stars. You may want to explore further with questions like these:

- **Why might the writer have taken great care to explain the creation and purpose of these things?**
- **How did many early peoples regard the sun, moon, and stars? Do people still have beliefs like that today? Explain.**

If some group members have questions about astrology and the worship practices of ancient peoples, point out Jeremiah 10:1-16 (and read it together, if you have time), which helps to explain why superstition and idol worship are worthless. The biblical writer wants to make clear that God has created the universe and that we must worship the Creator, not the created.

b. *On the fifth day (Gen. 1:20-23), what does God do differently from before?*

The word “create” occurs again in verse 21. As mentioned earlier, this seems to signal a change in God’s creating work. Note together the word “living” in reference to God’s creatures—the first time this word is used in the creation account. Also point out the phrase “God blessed them” and ask,

- **Did God speak a blessing to any part of the creation earlier?**
- **What command or ability is given in the blessing?**

Mention that many passages in the Old Testament speak of fruitfulness as a sign of God’s blessing (see Gen. 1:28; 9:1; 22:15-18).

c. *How is God’s creation of human beings different from the creation of everything made earlier?*

After filling the air and water with birds and fish and sea creatures on the fifth day of creation, God created land animals on the sixth day. And then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule . . .” (Gen. 1:26).

- **In what ways was the creation of humans similar to that of animals? How are humans unique?**

Both humans and animals shared the same day of creation, were made of the dust of the earth, and were given plants to eat and the command to multiply. But humans are made “in the image of God” (1:27), and no other created thing shares this privilege.

- **What might it mean that God created humans in his image?**
- **What command immediately follows these words?**

Help your group see that God gave humankind a special place in his creation and a special relationship to God that no other part of creation shared. (If you have time, read Psalm 8:3-8 with your group.)

Also note that God distinguishes between male and female.

- **Where does God refer to humanity as singular, and where as plural?**
- **Why might it be significant that “man” (humanity) becomes plural in “male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27)?**

There is difficulty in translating the word for “man”; in the original Hebrew text the word is *adam*, which may be related to the Hebrew *adamah*, which means “ground.” The Hebrew *adam* is the name given to the first man, and it is not always easy to tell if it refers to him or to humankind in general. Alert your group to this difficulty if questions arise. (See NIV footnotes on Genesis 2:7, 20.)

Note: God’s statement “Let *us* make man . . .” can also be confusing for group members who may not be familiar with the concept of God as Trinity. Although the three persons of God are not more clearly revealed until the New Testament, it’s beautiful to see the beginnings of that teaching already in Genesis 1. If group members question the use of “us,” note that the Hebrew name for God (*Elohim*) used in this passage is plural.

3. *Genesis 1:28-2:3*

- a. *How does God’s blessing to humans differ from the blessing to other living things?*

Ask your group what elements of God’s blessing to the man and woman are not included in the blessing to animals (see Gen. 1:22). The concepts of subduing the earth and ruling over creation should be the most obvious. Dictionaries define *subdue* as “to bring under control or cultivation.”

- **How have people subdued the earth over the centuries? How have we fulfilled the command to rule?**
- **How does this reflect the fact that we are made in God’s image?**

If you have time, you may also want to discuss briefly how humanity has abused this blessing/command from God.

- **What did God give humans and animals for food?**

Some group members may be surprised that the diet God provided did not include meat—only seed-bearing plants and fruit. If a question arises about whether a vegetarian diet is God’s will for people today, point out that God later gave Noah and his descendants complete freedom in this area: “Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything” (Gen. 9:3).

Make sure your discussion of this passage centers on humankind’s unique place among all of God’s creation. (See again Psalm 8 and perhaps read it together, if you haven’t done so already.)

- What is God’s final statement about creation?*
- How does the seventh day differ from the others?*

In these verses we learn that by the end of the sixth day God had finished his design for creation. It was complete.

Scholars suggest that perhaps the beginning and end of the seventh day are not mentioned in order to teach that the day of God’s rest extends through all the rest of history. As you explore some of the following questions together, you might also mention Exodus 20:8-11, which explains how the Israelite (Jewish) Sabbath grew out of God’s pronouncement of the seventh day as a holy day of rest. The Christian observance of Sunday, the day of Jesus’ resurrection, is in some ways a continuation of this tradition (see Matt. 28:1-10; Acts 20:7; see also Heb. 4 on the topic of Sabbath rest).

- **What does it mean that God finished his work? Does God do no more in the creation?**
- **What does it mean for God to rest? Is God still resting?**
- **In what sense was the seventh day made holy? Is that still important for us today?**

4. *Genesis 2:4-7*

How does God make the man, and why is this significant?

- **What does this creation account say about us as human beings?**
- **What do we have in common with animals? How are we different?**

In verse 7 we find a more detailed description of God's creation of the first man. God forms the man "from the dust of the ground"; note together that in this way our beginning is like that of other living creatures (see Gen. 1:24). Then God breathes "the breath of life" into the man's nostrils, and the man becomes "a living being." In *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Derek Kidner writes, "*Breathed* is warmly personal, with the face-to-face intimacy of a kiss and the significance that this was an act of giving as well as making." Some Bible translations describe the newly created man as "a living soul," and this helps to emphasize how humans are different from other creatures, for we are made "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). Be sure to point out, though, that the NIV's phrase "a living being" reflects the important biblical teaching that the human being is a body-soul unity—not two separate parts, physical and spiritual, but a unified whole.

- **Why does the Bible say that "no shrub of the field had yet appeared . . ." before the creation of the man? Didn't God create plants on the third day and people on the sixth day?**

Group members may be puzzled by what can seem like a contradiction to the account in Genesis 1. Encourage people first of all to bear in mind that the Bible is not intended to be a science book. Note also that translations of this passage vary.

A close look at various translations shows that the emphasis implied in the NIV (also in the RSV and others) obscures the fact that Genesis 2:4-7 is a quick summary of the entire creation account and that it merely skips over many creation details to focus on the making of human beings. If group members are interested, read the following passage from the American Standard Version, noting that this summary helps us see an emphasis on water that is needed for plants to grow and on the need for human cultivation of plants. Note also that verses 4-6 give an introduction similar to Genesis 1:1-2 and that in verse 7 the writer simply jumps forward to focus on the creation of humans and to emphasize their special role in God's creation (described in the rest of Genesis 2).

Genesis 2:4-7 (ASV)—⁴These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Jehovah God made earth and heaven. ⁵And no plant of the field was yet in the

earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Jehovah God had not caused it to rain upon the earth: and there was not a man to till the ground; ⁶but there went up a mist from the whole earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. ⁷And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

5. *Genesis 2:8-17*

a. *Describe the garden and its setting.*

Note the author's emphasis on the location of the garden God prepared. Use the following questions to help your group discover and reflect:

- **What particular details does the author include?**
- **Why is it significant that the garden was in an actual place?**

You might note that although the exact location of the garden is unknown, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers meet in what is today Iraq. Also discuss the two trees mentioned in Genesis 2:9:

- **What could be gained from the tree of life? From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?**
- **What is good? What is evil?**

Rather than jumping ahead to other Scriptures that refer to these trees, try to keep the group focused on what they have already learned about creation. Don't expect to answer these questions fully, especially in a group of newcomers; rather, use the questions to invite discussion. Tell your group that the unfolding story will answer the questions in greater depth.

b. *Why did God place the man in the garden?*

Invite everyone to compare Genesis 2:15 with the statements in 1:28-30.

- **How does the man's "job description" here compare with the blessing recorded in Genesis 1:28-30?**

c. *What did God say the man could do and not do? Why?*

Continue your discussion of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by noting that the Hebrew word for "knowledge" here has more to do with knowledge gained through experience than with knowledge gained through the use of reason or intellect.

- **What significance might this emphasis on experience have?**
- **How would the man gain his knowledge of good and evil?**

Explore also God's command to the man.

- **What does this tell us about God's relationship to the man? God's relationship to us?**
- **Why do you think God gave a "you must not" command to the man he had created?**

Scholars offer several insights regarding God's negative command. First, God is reminding the man that he is under God's rule. God is Lord over all. As our creator, God knows what's best for us. In order for the man to fully honor his being made in God's image, he had to obey God. By not eating from the forbidden tree, the man would have shown that he understood "good" to mean obedience to God and "evil" to mean disobedience. As long as the man obeyed God, he would not "know" or experience evil. Note also that this does not mean that if the man obeyed he would not know the *difference* between good and evil.

A second insight is that God may have wanted to use this command as a test. Would the man choose to obey God? God dignified the man by giving him a choice to make on his own.

Third, the trees do not have power in themselves to grant life or to bring death. Only God gives or removes life.

- **Why might God have made the punishment for disobedience so severe?**

Point out that the negative part of God's command is very strong. Death is inevitable: "surely" (v. 17).

Note especially, though, that God's command is a small restriction among all kinds of freedoms given to enjoy in the garden.

6. *Genesis 2:18-25*

- What did God say about the man's being alone, and what did God do about it?*

Verses 18-25 describe events that took place during the sixth day of creation (Gen. 1:24-31). This passage tells us more about the statement "male and female he created them" (1:27). As you discuss verse 18, ask your group to recall the meaning of the word "good" in relation to God's creative work (see 1:4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25), noting that it means "suited to its purpose."

- **In what way was the man's being alone not good?**
- **What do you think the word "helper" suggests in this context?**

According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, the Hebrew word for "helper" has a variety of meanings: one who surrounds, protects, helps. The following Scriptures may also add to your understanding of the term: Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:26; Psalm 20:2; 121:1-2. In your discussion it should become evident that woman was created not only to enable the man to reproduce but also to provide companionship, partnership in work, mutual love, and support. All these make her a "helper suitable" for the man.

- **Who decided that man should have a helper?**

Lead your group to see that God saw the need for the woman and that after she was created God pronounced the creation "very good" (1:31).

b. What did God want the man to do? Why?

God brought "all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air" to the man so that he could name them.

- **How did this task help to fulfill the man's responsibility cited in Genesis 1:28?**
- **How was the man's authority different from God's?**

These questions should help your group see that the man was placed in a position lower than God and under God's authority, and yet over the animals and superior to them.

c. What does God do next, and what is the man's response?

The "deep sleep" God gave to Adam is a special kind of sleep mentioned several times in the Old Testament (see Gen. 15:12; 1 Sam. 26:12; Job 33:15-18). It was a sleep used when God wished to give a special gift or reveal something special to human beings.

- **What does this say about the making of the woman?**

The most vivid image in this passage is probably God's use of the man's rib to make the woman. Inform your group, though, that an alternate translation of the text, cited in an NIV footnote, would state that God "took part of the man's side." This reading would imply that flesh was taken as well as bone, and the man's exclamation in Genesis 2:23 fits with this wording.

Note that the text has again used the term “suitable helper” (Gen. 2:20). In addition, you may want to ask the following questions to emphasize the way the writer tells the story here.

- **Why does the naming of animals come directly before the creation of the woman?**
- **How is the woman unique in all creation and rightly suited to be the man’s partner?**
- **How is the man’s naming of the woman different from his naming of animals?**

The naming of animals shows the man that no other kind of creature in God’s creation is like him. But when God brought the woman to the man, the man recognized their physical kinship with great joy; they were literally made from the same bone and flesh. Note also that this implies they had the same essential nature. The man could see that the woman was human, like him, and thus uniquely suited to partner with him. This is reflected also in the Hebrew words for “man” (*ish*) and “woman” (*ishah*).

Make sure your group realizes that verse 24 is not part of the man’s speech but rather is the writer’s comment on it.

- **How does verse 24 emphasize the unity between the man and the woman?**
- **What does it say about the strength of the husband-wife relationship?**
- **In verse 25, why might the writer have also included that the two felt no shame in their nakedness?**

People’s answers will reflect their understanding of how good life in the garden is for the first couple. The detail in verse 25 also points ahead to contrast with the shame they will feel after they have sinned by disobeying God (Gen. 3:7-11).

Questions for Reflection

How does the account in Genesis 2 relate to the account in Genesis 1? What themes do they share? How do they differ?

What do we learn about God in these chapters? What do we learn about ourselves and how we relate to God?

Discover Your Bible Series

Revised
Edition

Discover
GENESIS
CREATION AND COVENANT

STUDY GUIDE



Part One of a Two-Part Study

STUDY GUIDE

Discover
GENESIS
CREATION AND COVENANT




**FAITH
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Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

We thank Carol Veldman Rudie for writing the original lesson material (1989, 1993) for Part One of this revised study of Genesis. We also thank Deb Fennema for her contributions to an earlier revision (2001). This latest revised edition incorporates updates and suggestions by readers and small group leaders.

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How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you discover what the Bible says. This is inductive Bible study—in which you will discover the message for yourself.

Questions are the key to inductive Bible study. Through questions you search for the writers' thoughts and ideas. The questions in this booklet are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they discover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this booklet will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Step 1. Read each Bible passage several times. Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about their meaning. Ask questions about the passage.

Step 2. Answer the questions, drawing your answers from the passage. Remember that the purpose of the study is to discover what the Bible says. Write your answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries or Bible handbooks, do so only after completing your own personal study.

Step 3. Apply the Bible's message to your own life. Ask,

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me? Encourage me?
- Is there a promise I should claim? A warning I should heed?
- For what can I give thanks?

If you sense God speaking to you in some way, respond to God in a personal prayer.

Step 4. Share your thoughts with someone else if possible. This will be easiest if you are part of a Bible study group that meets regularly to share discoveries and discuss questions.

If you would like to learn of a study group in your area or would like information on training to start a small group Bible study,

- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail smallgroups@crcna.org, or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org/DYB.

Introduction

Genesis means “origin” or “beginning.” This first book of the Bible tells of the beginning of the universe, of humanity, of human sin, of salvation, of civilization. *Genesis* tells us about the beginning of just about everything—except God. God has always existed, even before the beginning of time.

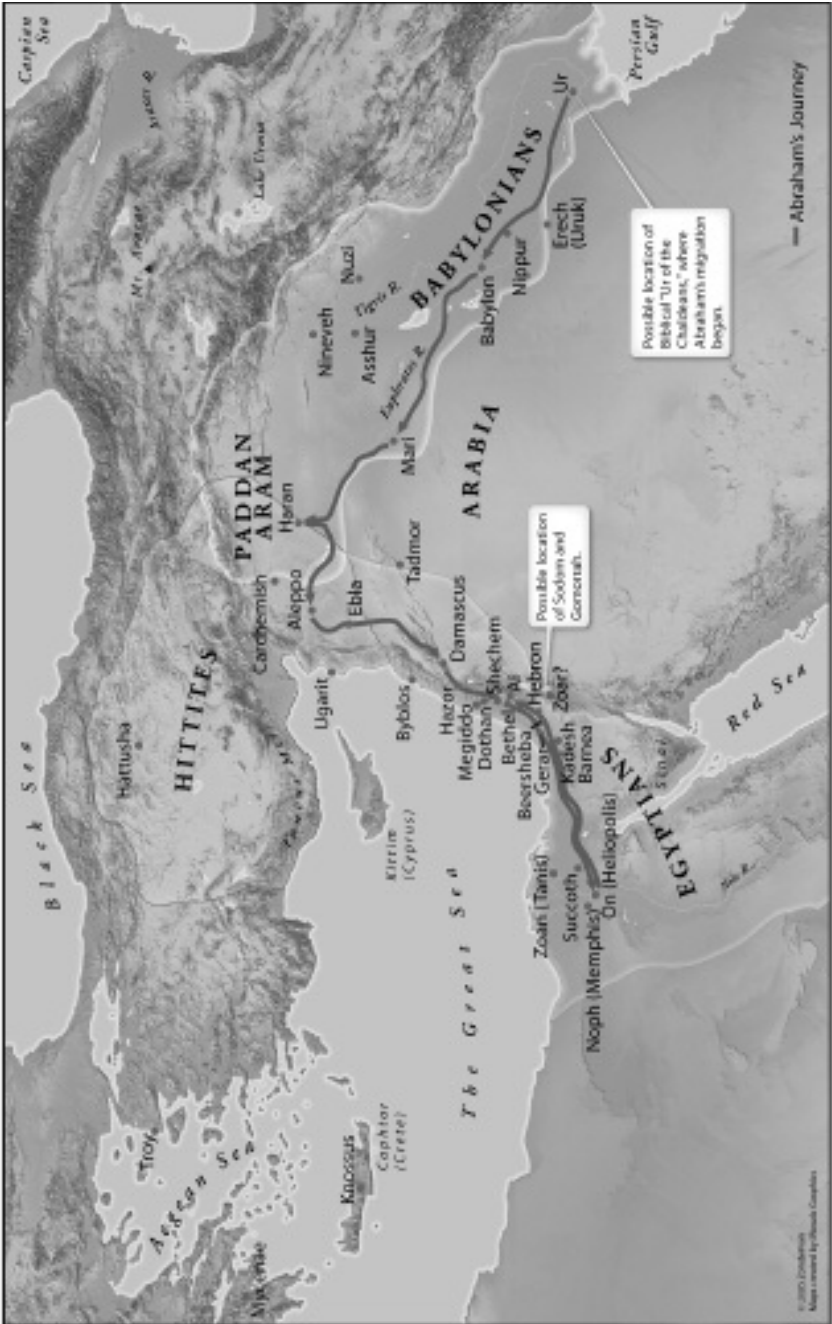
The opening section of *Genesis* (chap. 1-11) helps us understand much of the rest of the Bible. It introduces and explains the universal problem of human sin and God’s response to it. In these chapters we see God’s power, perfection, and persistence. We see God’s justice and mercy. We see that God is personal—showing love and joy, sorrow and pain, care and concern. In these chapters we also see the world as God intended it—and what it became because of human sin. Tension developed between God and humanity as people rebelled and struggled against their Creator in their desire to run their own lives and do as they pleased. Yet God consistently called them back to himself. Ever since people first sinned, God promised to provide a Savior who would bear the punishment for sin and restore our relationship with God (Gen. 3:15).

The next main section of *Genesis* (12:1-25:18) focuses on God’s call to Abraham (Abram) to leave his family and country to become the father of a new nation. In that part of *Genesis* we find God’s covenant promises to Abraham and Sarah and their long wait for the fulfillment of those promises (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:5-6; 17:3-8). Their story is about faith, about trusting in a faithful God even when that seems foolish. It’s a story of struggles with doubt, fear, and uncertainty concerning God, and it’s a testimony to God’s faithfulness and power in the midst of human weakness. This story recounts the beginning of a nation called into a special relationship with God so that “all peoples on earth” would be blessed (Gen. 12:3).

The writer of *Genesis* is not identified, but Moses is traditionally accepted as the probable author. The book of *Genesis*—along with *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*—is part of the Torah, the Law of God given to Moses (see Ex. 34:27-28; Deut. 1:1-8; 4:10-14, 44-45; 5:1-6:25).

The promises recorded in *Genesis* are ultimately fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, a descendant of Abraham and Sarah. Jesus, the Son of God, became a human being so that he could die for human sin and make it possible for people of all nations to be saved and live with God again (John 1:1-2, 14; 3:16), as it was in the beginning.

Map of the World of the Patriarchs



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Glossary of Terms

altar—a stone or heap of stones on which people laid animals or grain as sacrifices to God.

blameless—obedient to God’s laws; above reproach.

bless—to show favor and kindness.

burnt offering—a sacrifice laid on an altar and completely burned.

cherubim—angelic beings who carry out God’s commands.

clean—God allowed people to eat certain kinds of animals and to use them for sacrifices. These were referred to as “clean”; all other animals were considered “unclean.”

covenant—a mutually binding agreement between two parties; usually both parties agree to accept certain responsibilities.

curse—to pronounce judgment on someone or something.

faith—taking God at his word and acting on it.

favor—graciousness, kindness.

image—likeness, resemblance.

judgment—God’s pronouncement that a person is either sinful or righteous.

knowledge—The Hebrew word for *knowledge* implies knowing by way of experience, not merely an intellectual knowing.

mercy—free and undeserved compassion.

prophecy—a message from someone who speaks for God.

righteous—free from guilt or sin; conformed to God’s will and moral standards; declared or made right with God.

sacrifice—the act of offering something precious to God. In the Old Testament this was usually an animal (the best of the flock) or the firstfruits of a harvest.

sin—going against God’s will; disobeying God’s command.

worship—reverence and respect given to God; acknowledging God’s worthiness to be praised and served.

Lesson 1

Genesis 1-2

God's Good Creation

Introductory Notes

The drama of God's good creation begins with the first verse of Genesis 1 and builds to a state of blessing and joy as God creates human beings to care for each other and his world. In the story of creation we see amazing works as God creates our universe by speaking things into existence. Then from the dust of the earth God makes plants and living creatures, crowning the creation by making human beings in his own image.

Because this lesson covers a lot of material, you may need to pace yourselves as you discuss the summary of God's creating activity in Genesis 1 and then focus on the more detailed account of God's creation of human beings and their life with him in Genesis 2.

As you begin this study together, it will be important to recognize that you don't need to discuss every verse or its meaning in detail. But you can cover the main themes and content of the book of Genesis. If you have additional questions or a desire for learning that goes beyond the scope of this study, you may want to consult the *NIV Study Bible*, a Bible handbook, or other resources listed at the end of this booklet.

1. *Genesis 1:1-13*

- a. Describe what happened "in the beginning." What do these verses tell us about how God created?

- b. What is similar in the accounts of the different days? What is different?

- c. In what way is God's act of creation in verse 11 different from the previous ones?

2. *Genesis 1:14-27*

- a. Why does God create the lights in the sky?

- b. On the fifth day (Gen. 1:20-23), what does God do differently from before?

- c. How is God's creation of human beings different from the creation of everything made earlier?

- c. What does God do next, and what is the man's response?

Questions for Reflection

How does the account in Genesis 2 relate to the account in Genesis 1?
What themes do they share? How do they differ?

What do we learn about God in these chapters? What do we learn about ourselves and how we relate to God?