

Beyond Eden

Genesis 1-11



**9 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS**

Beyond Eden

Genesis 1-11

by Phillip D. Jensen
&
Tony Payne



matthiasmedia

Beyond Eden

© Matthias Media, 1990.

Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd. ACN 067 558 365)

PO Box 225

Kingsford NSW 2032

Australia

Telephone: (02) 9663 1478; international: +61 2 9663 1478

Facsimile: (02) 9663 3265; international: +61 2 9663 3265

Email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Distributed in South Africa by:

Christian Book Discounters

Telephone: (021) 685 3663

Email: peter@christianbooks.co.za

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ISBN 1 875245 09 X

All rights reserved. Except as may be permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher.

Typesetting and design by Lankshear Design.

Contents

| | | |
|----------|----------------------------------|----|
| | Introduction | 5 |
| 1 | In the beginning | 9 |
| 2 | God's image: rule | 19 |
| 3 | God's image: relationship..... | 31 |
| 4 | Work and rest..... | 41 |
| 5 | The devil made me do it | 49 |
| 6 | The curse | 57 |
| 7 | The God I don't believe in | 63 |
| 8 | The Tower of Babel..... | 71 |
| 9 | In search of the saviour..... | 77 |

Introduction

A Christian approach to Genesis

To begin at the beginning ...

The beginning seems an obvious place to start, but many Christians are ignorant of the message of the opening chapters of the Bible. Genesis 1-11 may be familiar to us because of the well-known events it relates—the Creation, Adam and Eve, the Fall, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood—but what is its *meaning*?

When we do turn to these chapters, we find ourselves swamped by controversy. How long did creation take? Were Adam and Eve real people? Where did Cain's wife come from? Was Methusaleh's 969-year lifespan the same as 969 of our modern years?

Unfortunately, our interest in these questions of historical detail tends to distract us from what Genesis 1-11 is really about. By asking the wrong questions we come up with the wrong answers.

In particular, we lose sight of the place that Genesis has in the history of God's dealings with the world. Genesis sets the scene. In eleven short chapters, it describes how the world came to be the way it is, and what we should expect as God sets in motion his plan of redemption.

The nine studies in this book offer a *Christian* interpretation of Genesis 1-11. They read Genesis from the perspective of Christ, who is the linchpin in God's unfolding plan. Christ is the key that unlocks the meaning of these eleven momentous chapters.

By looking at Genesis in this way—the way in fact we should read all of the Bible—we hope that you will learn not only what Genesis is saying, but what the whole Bible is saying.

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. The studies will take you through the first eleven chapters of Genesis, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sight-seeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall half-way between a sermon and a set of plain Bible study questions. We want to provide input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot of the exploration and discovery yourself—which is a great way to learn.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The Format

Each study focuses on a particular passage or group of passages, and contains sections of text to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. Interspersed throughout the text are three types of ‘interaction’, each with their own symbol:



For starters

Questions to help you think about society and your own experience, in a way that tunes you in to the issues being raised by the Bible passage.



Investigate

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



Think it Through

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own.

3. Suggestions for individual study

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in Genesis and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. We hope you will be spurred to pray again at the end of the study.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *For starters*, *Investigate* and *Think it through* sections. It is important to think about the sections of text (rather than just accepting them as true) and to ponder the implications for your life. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get your thoughts working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learnt.

4. Suggestions for group study

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and threesomes. Get together with a friend/s and work through them at your own pace. You don't need the formal structure of a 'group' to gain maximum benefit.
- It is *vital* that group members work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-

tracked you get!), but only if all the members have done the work and are familiar with the material.

- Spend most of the group time discussing the ‘interactive’ sections—*For starters*, *Investigate* and *Think it through*. Reading all the text together will take too long and should be unnecessary if the group members have done their preparation. You may wish to underline and read aloud particular paragraphs or sections of text that you think are important.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining important sections of text to emphasize, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they’d like to spend on each part.
- We haven’t included an ‘answer guide’ to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of Genesis 1-11, not a lecture. There is enough material in the studies to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you. (If you *would* like some additional input, there is a series of tapes available that expound the relevant passages. For details, see the pages inside the back cover.)

5. Bible Translation

Previous editions of this Interactive Bible Study have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. So with this new edition of *Beyond Eden*, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

1

Genesis 1:1-2:3

In the beginning

Our questions

When we approach the first book of the Bible, and especially its first few chapters, there are always questions on our lips. Were the seven days of creation seven, 24-hour days? Does the order of creation square with modern theories about the evolution of species? Is there a basic conflict between Science and Christianity? Is this creation account a space-time event or a myth intended to convey a purely religious meaning?

There has been fierce controversy. The Atheists hurl barbs at the ‘head-in-sand’ Creationists. The Creationists retaliate by exploiting the gaps in evolutionary theory. Other Christians distance themselves from the Creationists, arguing that the integrity of Genesis can be maintained without a 24-hour-day, 4004 BC creation. And on it goes. More importantly, in evangelism, we trade arguments about carbon dating and the latest archaeological finds, and Jesus is lost in a sea of quasi-scientific confusion.

As we begin to study Genesis, we cannot help but have these concerns in our minds—concerns that owe more to biology and astronomy than the Bible.

While these questions are certainly legitimate, we must take care that they do not obscure the real message of Genesis. The key to all good research, including Bible research, is asking the *right* questions. If we try to find answers to *our* questions in Genesis—questions that Genesis does not answer—our search will be fruitless. We do not consult a street directory to find phone numbers. Nor should we consult Genesis to find answers to questions it is not the least concerned to answer.

Moreover, if we are too obsessed with modern controversy we may overlook the searching questions that Genesis is asking **us**. These are questions of far greater moment than the details of some primeval chemical reaction. They are questions about the very nature of our lives. Does life have meaning? Do we, as persons, have any meaning? Should we think of ourselves as ‘persons’, or merely as apes that have learned to walk? But more of this in due time.

First, let us turn to the text and examine it more closely.



Investigate

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3.

Summarize the main ideas under the following headings:

God

The creation

Man

Any other observations ...

As you looked at the passage you might have noticed the following things:

1. A structured account

One of the first things we notice about this passage is its highly patterned structure. The account unfolds in a repetitive, orderly fashion, reflecting God's deliberate, orderly work of creation. It is a structured account of the structuring of the world.

The pattern is broken at verse 26 with the creation of man. Is this the climax of the account? Is the seventh day an anti-climax?

2. God

God dominates the passage, as he dominates his creation. He is mentioned 35 times—initiating, speaking, working, creating, blessing, resting. He is the subject of all the action. In fact, the emphasis of the passage could be summarized by its first four words: “In the beginning God ...”.

We should note three things:

a) *God creates everything, both large and small.*

Nothing is outside the scope of God's work. There is nothing 'natural' in the sense of being beyond his creative work. The world is his. He made it—all of it.

b) *He creates in an orderly and purposeful way.*

God does not create arbitrarily or on a whim. Nor is he haphazard. He creates an orderly world, in which we can live orderly, purposeful lives. The prophet Isaiah says:

... the LORD, who created the heavens,
(he is God!),
who formed the earth and made it
(he established it; he did not create it empty,
he formed it to be inhabited!). (Isa 45:18)

The word 'empty' in Isaiah is the same word used in Genesis 1:2 (translated 'void' in the ESV).

As God sees that his world is habitable, God is pleased. He looks at it and sees that it is good.

c) *God creates by his word.*

Although very little is said about the mechanism of creation, one important thing is said repeatedly: "And God said ...". The details are unimportant, even irrelevant. The important thing is that God has only to speak and things come into being.

This is true of any powerful person. If the Prime Minister speaks, things happen. If he decrees that a highway should be built, it will be done. The details of who actually does the dirty work are unimportant. The PM will say, quite rightly, "I built that road".

God, who appoints Prime Ministers to do *his* dirty work, brings matter out of nothing simply by a word. What sort of awesome figure is this? It is hard for us to conceive of a power this great. "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host" (Ps 33:6).

3. Creation

The creation reflects the character of its Creator and fulfils the purpose for which he made it.

a) The creation is dependent on its Creator.

This may seem to be stating the obvious, but in our current climate it needs to be said. Our world is not self-generating or self-sustaining. It owes its existence and its continued operation to the will of the Creator.

Because of the order and predictability that God has built into our world, we are often tempted to think of it as a giant machine that runs on forever, going through the cycle of the seasons with comforting regularity. But we only have to pause and consider the frailty of our own lives to realize how dependent we really are. A microscopic virus can cut short our life in a few days or weeks. The food supply we take for granted is generated by others—we are dependent on them—and they, in turn, are dependent on the seasons and the weather for a successful yield. Ultimately, it all depends on God.

b) The creation is orderly and habitable.

Our orderly, investigatable world eco-system was created, and is sustained, by a divinely reasonable Being. God intended it to be habitable; and it was so.

As with many of the themes of Genesis, we can fail to grasp the implications of this idea. Our whole view of the world is based on this concept of an orderly, reasonable creation. Other cultures have regarded the world as a chaotic, nightmarish place, formed through the chance sexual encounter of some god with some goddess. Western civilization, in contrast, has developed in a world that is understood to be orderly.

c) The creation is good.

The repetition of this phrase throughout the passage should leave us in no doubt that our world, as created by God, is very good. This, too, is a civilization-changing concept. The created world is not an evil thing or a distraction, to be cast

off as we become more spiritual. Nor is it an illusion, as many Eastern religions (along with the Christian Scientists) believe. It is real, and separate from its Creator, and decidedly good.

4. Man

With the creation of man (that is, mankind) in verse 26, the highly structured pattern changes. Is this just another of God's creatures, or is there something different happening?

a) Man is a dependent creature.

Like the rest of the creation, man owes his genesis to God. He does not rise by chemical chance from the primordial slime. He, too, springs from the Creator's mind and will and word.

This is tremendously important for our self-perception. We like to think of ourselves as persons, as somehow more significant than other creatures. Moreover, we want to think that our lives have some purpose; some meaning. Yet without the creative work of God, our lives have no meaning. If we are but a biological accident, how can we hope to have any purpose? An accident, by definition, is devoid of purpose. It just happens.

For there to be purpose and meaning, there must be manufacture. This is deeply offensive to us as humans, especially 21st-century humans. We hate the idea that we are made by someone else, are dependent on someone else, and are given purpose and meaning by someone else. Yet we cannot face the alternative: that we are an absurd accident, a cosmic joke occasioned by time plus matter plus chance.

b) Man is unique.

We will look at this in more detail in the second study, suffice to say at this point that man is created in God's image to rule over the rest of the creation. Does man have any dignity? Is whaling murder? Is abortion murder? These questions all swing on our view of mankind, and in the next study we will look in more detail at what Genesis has to say on this.

5. Christ

There is another theme here, too, lurking just below the surface. Who is it that God consults with in verse 26 when he says “Let us make man in our image ...”? Is this just the royal plural? Or is there another divine figure involved in creation?

This becomes clearer as the Scriptures unfold.



Investigate

Read John 1:1-14.

1. What parallels do you see with Genesis 1?

2. Who is God's creative Word?

Read Colossians 1:15-17.

3. How was Jesus involved in the creation of the world?

4. Why was the world created?

The value of what God is saying in Genesis becomes even more apparent when we consider the alternatives.

6. Ancient alternatives

We cannot know whether the author of Genesis had particular alternatives in mind. Certainly, he cuts across many of the ideas of the ancient world:

- *Astrology.* Many ancient civilizations were convinced that the stars played a dominant role in human affairs. Genesis 1 blows a raspberry at this idea. The stars are not our masters, but our servants. They are part of the creation over which man has dominion.
- *Polytheism.* There is no room in Genesis for a rash of gods each doing a bit here and there. There is only one God (the involvement of Christ notwithstanding).
- *The Seventh Day.* It is interesting to note that in Mesopotamia, the seventh day was regarded as a day of ill, a day of foreboding and evil omen. In Genesis, it is the best day of all, the day when God rests, the day that God blesses and calls holy.

7. Modern alternatives

Current alternatives to the Genesis view of the world abound. Here are but a few:

- *Astrology.* Quite astonishingly, many people still believe in the influence of the stars. 80% of Australians read their star column and 28% profess to believe what it says. From a scientific, or astronomical, point of view the whole thing is a fraud. Yet many still cling to it.
- *Mysticism.* This is the idea that the physical world is an evil place and that true spirituality involves escaping the captivity of our physical environment to soar into the great spiritual unknown. The concept is as old as Plato, who distinguished between body and soul—the soul being the true and immortal principle, and the body being a hindrance.

There has been a revival of this thinking in the Western world thanks to the spread of Eastern mystic religion (e.g. the Hare Krishnas and Transcendental Meditation). In this system, the physical world is not simply evil—it is an illusion which inhibits our spiritual progress. In this kind of system, there is little place for physical beauty or sexual pleasure. In God's world, the physical matter is good, not evil, and sex is to be enjoyed!

- *Materialism.* This is a WYSIWYG world view: What You See Is What You Get. The world is a closed system, in the sense that there is no God outside the creation. There is only matter—matter that was once highly concentrated, exploded with a Big Bang, formed itself into life, and keeps expanding through the endless reaches of space. As we have noted earlier, in this alternative, meaning and purpose and values are disposed of along with God. The honest materialist will eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow he may die, and beyond that there is nothing.

Genesis might not answer all our questions, but it does have some important questions to ask *us*. Here are just a few to get you thinking.



Think it through

1. What sort of God do we meet in Genesis 1?
2. How should we respond to this God?
3. Who am I (as a human being)? What am I like?
4. What is the purpose of the creation?
5. What is the purpose of *my* creation? What is my life about?