



PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

Beginning with God

GENESIS 1-12

BY GORDON CHENG



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Beginning with God
Pathway Bible Guides: Genesis 1-12

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

God's plan, as revealed in his word, unfolds step by step. Every part of it assumes that we know something of what has been said already—the more the better. The single exception to this is Genesis. Here the writer assumes that we will be looking forward rather than back. The word 'Genesis' means 'beginning', and if we really want to find out what we believe as Christians, this is the place to start.

In the early chapters of Genesis, we learn the most basic information about God, his creation, and our place in it as men and women. We learn why the world now is not as it was when it was made. And we begin to see how even at the point where it seemed that all of God's plans for his creation had been ruined by our sin, nothing could be further from the truth. God was already putting into place his plan to redeem the world through the work of the Lord Jesus. Genesis is the bud of this flower.

In this simple series of studies on the early chapters of Genesis, we focus on the beginnings of this plan, with the occasional glance forward to its fulfilment in the work of our Lord on the cross and in the resurrection. By reading Genesis, we are starting to understand the story of God and the story of our salvation from sin.

*Gordon Cheng
July 2006*

1. IN THE BEGINNING

Genesis 1:1-2:3



Getting started

An atheist friend says, “The world is nothing more than a product of random chance and evolution. There’s no meaning or purpose to our existence, and it would make no difference in the big scheme of things if we were all wiped out tomorrow.” What would be your response?



Light from the Word

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3.

1. Use the table below¹ to summarize what gets created in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

Before the first day (1:1-2)	
Form	Use
Day 1:	Day 4:
Day 2:	Day 5:
Day 3:	Day 6:
Day 7: God rests	

¹ Based on Andrew Reid’s useful and simple commentary on Genesis, *Salvation Begins: Reading Genesis Today*, Aquila Press, Sydney, 2000.

2. Do you notice a pattern in the words used to describe the first five days of creation?

a. Use the space below to show the most commonly repeated parts of the pattern (the first one has been filled in).

i. “And God said...”

ii.

iii.

iv.

Other repeated elements:

b. Looking at this pattern, what do you think the writer is trying to convey by telling the story in this way?

3. From the first five days, what do you learn about:

a. God?

b. God’s word?

c. the world?

4. A friend says, “I’m a Scorpio. Of course, I believe in God and the Bible, but I also think we learn a lot by paying attention to the influence of the stars.” Using Genesis 1, how would you respond?

5. If all of creation came about as described in Genesis 1, how does this help us understand:
 - a. the meaning and purpose of the world?
 - b. the goodness of creation?
 - c. evil?
 - d. other religions that claim:
 - there is more than one god?
 - God is in everything?
6. The Bible tells us what is going to happen to this creation in Revelation 21:1-8—it will be replaced with the new creation. Look at this passage and describe what it will look like, and how we can be part of it.



To finish

“Now that we’re Christian, we should be denying ourselves material things and living simple, more spiritual lives.” Do you agree? Talk about why or why not.



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for his good creation and the gifts that we enjoy.
- Pray that we would be able to worship the Creator, rather than the things he has created.

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2. YOU CAN RULE THE WORLD

Genesis 1:26-2:3



Getting started

“As humans, we are just a small part of a giant ecosystem.² In the great scheme of things, we’re no more important than ants—probably less. Our job is to live in harmony with the world and do as little damage as possible.” As a Christian, what do you think of this statement?



Light from the Word

Read Genesis 1:26-31.

1. How does Day 6 break the pattern from the first five days? (Refresh your memory from the first study if necessary.)

2. What job(s) are men and women given to do?

3. How does the work men and women do show that they are like God?

4. What can we learn from these verses about the relationship between men and women?

² An ecosystem is the combination of all the living and non-living things in a particular area.

5. A friend says, "One of the worst things about Christianity is the way people are allowed to exploit the earth's resources. They should realize that they have no more right than any other living thing to be part of this world." How does Genesis 1 help you respond to this? (Also compare 2:15-16.)

6. Read Genesis 1:31-2:3.
 - a. Why does God rest?

 - b. What does God say about his creation?

7. Read Hebrews 2:5-9. How does the Lord Jesus fulfil God's plans for humanity?



To finish

How does this passage help you to think about:

- a. why we work?

- b. how we work?

- c. what work is best to do in God's world?



Give thanks and pray

Yet you have made [man] a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honour.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet... (Ps 8:5-6)

- Thank God for the rule he has given us over this world, and the great standing we have as people made in his image.
- Pray that we may do our work in the world with care in a way that doesn't waste or ruin what God has given us.

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3. MAN AND WOMAN

Genesis 2:4-25



Getting started

“Men and women are more similar than they are different.” Do you agree or disagree? How are they different? How are they similar?



Light from the Word

- i. Look at the description of the creation of man in Genesis 2:7.
 - a. What does this verse tell us about the relationship between us and God?
 - b. What does this verse tell us about ourselves?

Read Genesis 2:4-17.

2. What sort of world did God give us?
3. What was Adam supposed to do?
4. What was Adam supposed to avoid?

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5. Read Genesis 2:18-25.
 - a. Why is it not good for the man to “be alone”? (Compare 1:28, 2:5, 2:15.)
 - b. How will Eve help solve the problem of ‘being alone’?
6. What can you find in this chapter to suggest that men and women are equal? What can you find in this chapter to suggest that men and women have different roles? (Also compare with Gen 1:26-27.)
7. A friend tells you, “My marriage is really having difficulties. I’m thinking of separating and moving back in with my parents.”
 - a. What parts of this chapter are relevant, and why?
 - b. Assuming adultery is not involved, what’s your advice?



To finish

Read Ephesians 5:21-31. What are Christian marriages meant to point towards? How can they do this?



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for the gift of relationships.
- Pray that those who are single and those who are married will look to their relationship with the Lord Jesus for fulfilment.

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4. A FATAL MOVE

Genesis 3



Getting started

When bad things happen, what do people say to try to make sense of it? Think of as many different explanations—Christian and non-Christian—as you can.



Light from the Word

Read Genesis 3:1-13.

1. Compare the serpent's version of God's words with God's words in 2:16-17.
 - a. How did the serpent twist the words of God?
 - b. What do the serpent's words suggest about God's character?
2. Compare Eve's version of God's words with God's words in 2:16-17.
 - a. How did Eve twist the words of God?
 - b. What do Eve's words suggest about God's character?

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3. What does the serpent promise if Adam and Eve disobey God?

4. When Adam and Eve eat from the tree, what are the immediate results of their disobedience?

5. Read 3:14-24 and notice how God curses the serpent, the woman and the man. What do these curses tell us about:
 - a. God?

 - b. what we can expect in our work and relationships?

6. According to Genesis 3:15, what we can expect in the future? (Also see Rom 16:20 and Rev 20:1-10.)



To finish

Think of three examples from present experience of how God's curses have come about. How can we use the insight of Genesis 3 in evangelism?



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that he has crushed Satan's head through the work of Jesus, and that evil will one day be defeated completely.
- Pray that we will be patient as we live life in a fallen world.

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5. SIN THAT SPREADS

Genesis 4-5



Getting started

“With good education and upbringing, we might not get rid of sin completely but we could bring it under control.” What do you think of this idea?



Light from the Word

Read Genesis 4:1-16.

1. What do you think was wrong with Cain’s sacrifice?
2. What is the result of Cain’s sin? Consider the results both for him and for his relationship with the rest of the world.
3. Is there any sign of mercy in God’s judgement? If so, what?
4. Read Genesis 4:17-22.
 - a. What sorts of human activities do Cain’s descendants get involved in?
 - b. Comparing Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:15 with this passage, why do you think the writer of Genesis might write about these activities?

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5. A musical friend tells you, “When I play my trumpet well, I feel closer to God. Do you think that’s just my imagination?” Use what you’ve read in Genesis 4 to help answer the question.
6. Read Genesis 4:23-24. If you were comparing sins, what could you say about Lamech’s sin in comparison with Cain’s?
7. Comparing the events of this chapter with the events of chapter 3, what can we say about:
 - a. the nature of sin?
 - b. how sin is spreading?
8. Read Genesis 4:25-5:3, and 5:29. What hope do these verses suggest for the future?



To finish

Go back to the discussion starter. What could you say to your friend, based on what you’ve learned from Genesis 4?



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that he is patient and loving, and that he provides Jesus as the way of dealing with sin.
- Pray that we would take sin seriously, and that we would not be led into temptation.

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Suggested homework

The flood covers a lot of ground, in more ways than one! So does the next session. If you want to be well prepared, read through Genesis 6:1-9:17 a few times, and note down any comments or questions.

A general word about genealogies

We might wonder why the writer of Genesis would choose to include genealogies at regular points in the story from creation through to the call of Abram in Genesis 12:1-3. One effect of reading these genealogies is that we realize we are not reading fiction. Whether or not we decide that parts of the Genesis story are strictly literal, we don't have the option of dismissing the stories as myth. Another thing we realize as we read is that there is a 'Good news, bad news' aspect to these lists of individuals and their children. The good news is that babies continue to be born and humanity continues to fulfil God's plan that they be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. The bad news is that the curse of death is always apparent. Even though the life spans recorded in Genesis 5 are incredibly long, the refrain "and he died" is repeated time and again. Long life doesn't cure the reality of death. One reason for recording these long life spans may be to invite us to compare these life spans with the genealogies of Genesis 11:10-32. By the time we reach the last member of the family tree—Abram—life spans are coming close to what we would normally expect, and we realize that the curse of God is having its intended effect.

6. WET AND WETTER

Genesis 6-9



Getting started

Share any questions or observations you made from your reading of Genesis 6:1-9:17. At the end of the study, you can come back to discuss any unanswered questions.³

To accompany your own observations, here is a brief summary of the plot that might be helpful as an overview.³

- 1 The scene is set. **God** sees the evil of the world and decides to take action. Noah, who alone is righteous, is to build an ark (6:1-8, 9:21).
- 2 **Noah** builds the ark (6:22).
- 3 **God** speaks to Noah, giving him instructions on how to fill the ark (7:1-4).
- 4 Noah fills the ark with **animals**, as instructed (7:5-16).
- 5 The **waters** rise and cover the earth, killing every living thing (7:17-24).
- 6 The **waters** begin to fall (8:1-5).
- 7 Noah sends birds (**animals**) to check the level of the flood (8:6-14).
- 8 **God** speaks to Noah (8:15-17).
- 9 **Noah** leaves the ark (8:18-19).
- 10 The scene draws to a close, with **God** reflecting on and speaking about what has happened (8:20-9:17).

After this, we get the story of Noah's drunken behaviour and what happens as a result.

³ This summary is based on the one by Walsh, found in Gordon Wenham's commentary, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1987.



Light from the Word

1. Read Genesis 6:1-5. How bad have things become?
2. Read Genesis 6:5-21. What are the two main things God resolves to do?
 -
 -
3. From what you've seen in previous chapters, would you say God's response is expected or unexpected? Why?
4. Look at Genesis 3:15 and Lamech's prophecy in Genesis 5:29. How does Noah meet the expectations presented in these verses?
5. Even though God saves righteous Noah, what do we learn about Noah (and people generally) after the flood? (See Gen 8:21, 9:20-29.)

6. Read Genesis 7:21-23 and 8:20-22. What has happened to creation in the flood?

7. “God has failed.” Starting with the two passages you have just looked at, what’s the evidence for and against this statement?

8. “The Old Testament God is an angry God who loses his temper and lashes out like an abusive parent.” How would you answer this complaint from Genesis 6-9?



To finish

Given what we know of God’s character, how is the flood a warning or an encouragement to us? (Compare 2 Peter 3, especially vv. 1-7.)



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that Noah’s example of trusting God shows us how to respond to Jesus’ salvation.
- Pray that God would help us to fear his judgement.

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7. BIG BUILDINGS AND LITTLE BEGINNINGS

Genesis 11:1-12:3



Getting started

Imagine that you are a young and skilful builder, working out whether you should keep renting (which is relatively cheap in the short term) or build your own house (which is relatively expensive in the short term). How would you make this decision as a Christian? Use the table to help you work out your answer.

Rent		Build	
Advantages	Disadvantages	Advantages	Disadvantages



Light from the Word

Read Genesis 11:1-4.

1. What are the reasons for building the tower?
2. Think back over the first ten chapters of Genesis. What is wrong with these reasons?

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- Comparing the sin of tower-building with the description of people before the flood (Gen 6:5, 8:21), would you say that tower-building is better, worse, or no different? Why?

Read Genesis 11:5-9.

- What is God's response to this plan?

- How is God's response similar to previous responses? How is it different?

- Read Genesis 11:27-12:3.

- What is exceptional or interesting about Abram?

- What has Abram done to deserve God's blessing?



To finish

How is the Babel story a warning to Christians? How is the start of the Abram story an encouragement to Christians?



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for his faithfulness to his promises, and for sending Jesus as redeemer of the world.
- Pray that we would learn the lessons of Babel and not rebel against the purposes of God.

Suggested homework

Try reading the whole of Genesis 12-15 in one go. Write down a summary of what happens, together with any questions you have.

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8. FAITH AND THE FUTURE

Genesis 12 and beyond



Getting started

By the end of the story of the tower of Babel (see the previous study), how are things looking for:

- the future of humanity?
- the future of God's 'creation project'?



Light from the Word

Read Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:1-6.

1. What does God promise to give Abram?
2. Who or what does Abram put his faith in?
3. Genesis 12-24 contains many stories that show Abram's faith in action. At times, his strong trust in God's promise is demonstrated by his obedience; at other times, his faith wavers. Skim through as many of the following episodes as you can, and use the table below to summarize what you find. (If you are in a small group, you might like to divide up the passages between you.)

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Episodes:

12:10-20	Abram and Sarai in Egypt
13:1-18	Abram and Lot divide the land
16:1-6	Sarai and Hagar
17:9-27	Covenant of circumcision
20:1-18	Abraham, ⁴ Sarah and Abimelech
22:1-19	The sacrifice of Isaac

Abram's faith strong		Abram's faith wavering	
Passage	Summary	Passage	Summary
e.g. 12:4-9	Abram obeys God's command to "Go".		

4. Look back through the table. Given what God has promised, how do the various incidents show God's faithfulness to his promises?

⁴ By this stage, God had changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah (see Genesis 17).

In Genesis 11-12, God begins with one man—Abram—and makes some promises that will, in time, bring about the redemption of his fallen creation. One fairly time-consuming exercise we could do now (which we will avoid for practical reasons) would be to move right through the rest of the Old and New Testaments to see how all this works out—how God keeps his promises to Abram not only in Abram's own lifetime, but in the generations to come. God changes Abram's name to 'Abraham', which means 'father of many' (see Genesis 17). The descendants of Abraham, through his son Isaac, become the nation Israel. Then, through the history of Israel in the Old Testament, God continues to make promises to the children of Abraham. Every one of these promises reinforces and adds detail to the original promise to Abraham. Some important examples that you might like to look up in your own time are Genesis 17:1-19, Exodus 19:1-6 and 2 Samuel 7:4-17. Notice how at the beginning of the New Testament, Matthew 1 reminds us that Jesus himself is "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1). Jesus himself, in John 8:30-59, tells his hearers that Abraham looked forward to him. Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment of all God's promises to Abraham.

5. How does Jesus fulfil the promises God gave to Abraham? (See Gal 3:7-14; Heb 11:8-16, 39-40.)
6. Read Romans 4:1-3 and 4:16-25. How is Abraham's relationship to God a model for us to follow?
7. "I'm worried that my faith is not strong enough and that I am not right with God." How does Abraham's story bring reassurance?



To finish

Think back over the series of studies. What have you learned about God and his character? How are these lessons about God seen most clearly in Jesus Christ?



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for his astounding work of creation and salvation.
- Pray that we will be able to share the faith of Abraham by telling people about Jesus.

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