



ABRAHAM STUDY GUIDE

**A 10 WEEK DEEP DIVE INTO THE
LIFE & WALK OF ABRAHAM**

PART 01

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GENESIS 1-11

AND IT WAS GOOD

The Bible begins with two complementary accounts of God’s creation of the world.^[1] The first is told from a universal perspective, and depicts God speaking the entire universe into existence. Darkness yields to light, the waters are separated, the earth sprouts vegetation, and animals populate the land, sea, and skies. The pinnacle of God’s creative work is mankind, both male and female, who alone among all creatures bear God’s image. Creation springs into being, the cosmos dances with fresh life, and God pronounces all that he had made very good.^[2]

The second account gives a different perspective, picking up on the theme of our special relationships with the Lord and with one another. God breathes life into the man’s nostrils, places him inside a lush, well-watered garden containing the tree of life, provides him with all the plants for food, and assigns him the task of caring for the garden. In the climax of chapter 2, the Lord creates the woman from the man’s side, in order to be “a helper corresponding to/fit for him”—a partner who is both same and different.^[3] The only thing forbidden to them is eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with the warning, “For on the day that

you eat of it you shall surely die.”^[4] For an unspecified period of time, the man and the woman live in a state of perfect harmony with God and each other, and enjoy an intimacy that is described as being “naked but not ashamed.”^[5]

DID GOD REALLY SAY?

Then enters the serpent, who slithers up to the woman and begins to induce doubt and suspicion directed towards God’s goodness and motives. She takes the bait, trusts her own judgment, and casts God’s command aside. In one devastating sentence, something happens that would forever change the destiny of mankind: “She took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”^[6] Immediately, the couple becomes aware of their nakedness, and, for the first time, are ashamed. They hide from one another and from God. They shift the blame for what happened. And even though God mercifully covers their nakedness (which is now a cause for shame rather than intimacy), they are cast out of the garden, barred from the tree of life. Sin has now entered God’s good creation, and its dominance over mankind will be the subject of Genesis up through chapter 11.

But this is also where hope begins to shine through. Genesis 3:14–19 recounts the consequences for sin that God pronounced over the serpent, the man, and the woman. For the humans, these are afflictions directed against certain essential roles God had given them. The man, created to work the soil, will now toil by the sweat of his brow. The woman, on the other hand, will have pain in childbearing, and her good desire for her husband will be spoiled by his sinful tendency towards dominance. However, as part of God’s curse upon the serpent, he utters this promise: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall strike your head, and you shall strike his heel” (3:15). For good reason, this little passage is often called the protoevangelion—the first announcement of the gospel. Though not without pain, the ultimate defeat of the serpent is assured, for a strike on the “head” is more devastating than a strike on the “heel.” And we learn here that this victory over the serpent will come by the hands of an offspring of the woman. As we move through Genesis (and the entire Old Testament, for that matter), this promise, which is merely in seed form here, will continue to grow and grow, until it is finally fulfilled in Jesus.

ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY

The next eight chapters (4–11) of Genesis show the influence of sin on all humanity. The first two descendants of Adam and Eve are their sons Cain

and Abel. The two bring offerings to God, but when Cain sees that God looks on Abel's offering with greater pleasure than his own, his jealousy gets the best of him and he kills his brother. What began as their parents' simple act of disobedience has now become murderous violence.

Then we read an odd account of a man named Lamech. Although very little is said of him and his two wives, what we are told paints a disturbing picture of the worsening condition of man's heart. Whereas Cain was guilty of murder, Lamech openly celebrates his bloodthirsty ways with a twisted limerick, culminating in a distorted sense of retribution, as if injustice is something to celebrate: "If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold."^[7]

The descendants of Adam and Eve are then traced through their third son, Seth.^[8] Despite the extraordinarily long lives of the individuals named in his genealogy, we are soberly reminded, in a grim refrain capping off each generation, that the tragic consequence of sin ultimately overtakes us all: "And he died. . . and he died. . . and he died."^[9] Nestled within this list is a short account of a man named Enoch, who stands as an exception: "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."^[10] Here we are reminded, ever so subtly, that it is through a relationship with God that we have hope to escape sin's curse. Chapter 5 ends with this hope expressed in a child named Noah, and his father's yearning that sin's curse would be lifted: "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands."^[11]

Sandwiched between Noah's birth and the great flood that came upon his generation is a brief but mysterious story about individuals identified as "the sons of God" taking "the daughters of man" as their wives. While space does not allow for us to weigh the alternative interpretations of this account that have been proposed, one thing is clear: as mankind spreads and develops, the disease of sin continues unrestrained.

This comes to a head in the story of the great flood. "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."^[12] Grieved to the heart over the violence that now plagues his creation, God resolves to destroy the earth with a flood and to start over with Noah and his family. In a stunning act of judgment, creation is undone and then reborn, Noah and those given refuge with him in his ark set out to repopulate the earth. God establishes his first formal covenant with all mankind, pronouncing his blessing, while resolving to never again strike down every living thing. This is coupled with an affirmation of the value of human life, as well as the accountability that comes from taking that life.^[13] But no sooner do

we read of God's gracious covenant with creation that we find Noah himself passed out unclothed in his tent in a drunken stupor, and his son Ham advertising his father's shame to his brothers.

The final act of rebellion detailed in the primeval history of Genesis occurs when Noah's descendants assemble in a city to "make a name" for themselves and construct "a tower with its top in the heavens."^[14] For ancient people, such towers were thought to enable communion between mankind and the gods. Seen this way, this was an attempt to regain what was lost in Eden, not through repentance or doing right in God's eyes, but by means of sheer human ingenuity. God judges them by confusing their language and dispersing them over the earth.

HOW FAR WE'VE COME

God created everything good, with mankind dwelling in peace with God and one another. Our refusal to live under God's good rule fractures these relationships, and places us under God's judgment. As the centuries go by, human evil doesn't go away; it gets worse. This creates an intense feeling of hopelessness as we finish the opening section of Genesis.

But not all is lost. Embedded in what can be a very depressing storyline are glimmers of hope. It was also then that "people began to call upon the name of the LORD."^[15] Enoch and Noah, both portrayed as righteous, stand out. God establishes his covenant with creation and continues his commitment to bless us, despite our evil. The image of God, though marred and distorted by sin, is still carried by every human being.^[16] And all of this is placed within the context of the incredible word of hope that one day the serpent and his works will be defeated through an offspring of the woman.^[17] By the time we reach the story of Abraham, it is clear that the sin that plagues God's creation is not going to go away on its own, or through human effort. If what was once "very good" is to be redeemed, God will have to do it.

[1] Genesis 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-25. [2] Genesis 1:31. [3] Genesis 2:18.

[4] Genesis 2:17. [5] Genesis 2:25. [6] Genesis 3:6. [7] Genesis 4:23-24.

[8] Genesis 5. [9] Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23. [10] Genesis 5:24.

[11] Genesis 5:29; cf. 3:17-18. [12] Genesis 6:5. [13] Genesis 9:5-6.

[14] Genesis 11:4. [15] Genesis 4:26. [16] Genesis 8:20-9:17.

[17] Genesis 3:15.





LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE
