

Moulton Parish Church

Home Groups



Genesis: Bible Studies in the Early Chapters of the Bible January 2008

GROUP BIBLE STUDY

The priority of any Bible study is to seek to understand what the Bible is saying to the people to whom it was first written as well as to understand it for our particular day and generation. So, the top priority is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. Here are some pointers to help you as you study the Bible:

PRAY

Our preparation for any Bible study should begin and end with prayer. We need to ask God, through the help of the Holy Spirit, to guide us as we read the Bible and prepare for a study.

ASK

In order to understand the Bible properly, we need to keep in mind six important questions:

1. **Who is speaking?** Everything in the Bible was written by men who were inspired by God. Though God inspired every writer of the Bible, sometimes the writers record words which come from the hearts of evil men. So, dealing with the question "Who is speaking?" will help us to know whether the words we are reading are words that we should obey today.
2. **Who is spoken to?** We need to realise that not every command that comes in the Bible is a command for us today. For example, the command by God to Noah to build an ark is obviously pertinent and relevant for Noah, but not for us.

3. **When is the Bible writer speaking?** In answering this question, we will need to make a distinction between those who are living under the law and those who live under the guidelines and principles as outlined to us in the New Testament, the way of Christ. Therefore, the principles we see with regards to worship in the Old Testament have a relevance to us, but we need to read them in the light of the New Testament. It is always important to bear in mind that one part of the Bible can often help us to understand another part.

4. **What type of language is the writer using?** The languages used are usually one of two types: either literal or figurative. Sometimes both will be mixed together in one passage – for example, Jesus is spoken of as the Lamb of God, which is clearly a figurative form of speech. However, he is also described as the one who takes away the sin of the world, which is literally true for those who believe. So, Jesus was not an actual lamb, but he was the one who became the offering for our sins.

5. **What are the conditions or circumstances in which this writing is given?** If we can get to grips with the particular circumstances the writer is facing when he writes, it helps us to understand what he is saying.

6. **What is the context of the Bible passage?** Think about what has just been said and what is about to be said in the particular book of the Bible, as well as the context of the Bible passage within the whole of the Bible.

The Bible is indeed God's inspired word – it is his revelation to all mankind. So, in order for us to understand the Bible we must seek to study it properly. Only then can we “*correctly handle the word of truth*”. And if we keep these six simple questions in mind as we prepare our study, we will find that we can indeed get to grips with God's word.

PLAN

For those who are preparing and leading a study, the following steps should prove helpful:

1. Try to break the passage into parts or sections so that you can clearly divide up the passage you are looking at.
2. Think about what you don't understand in the passage and therefore what others might not understand as well. What parts do you need to gain more background and information about? Be ready to deal with puzzles that people will ask you about. So, for example, when studying John 3, people might ask 'What is the kingdom of God?', 'What is a Pharisee?'. These are obvious things that people might need to have some more information about.
3. Having broken the passage up into sections, we then come to thinking about questions. You can use the questions that are in this book. However, you may want to write your own, which is of course perfectly all right. Questions can be one of three types.
 - A **Understanding.** The first type of question should be aimed at trying to draw out our understanding of what the passage is saying.
 - B **Significance.** Only once we have begun to understand the passage can we move on to questions that try to highlight the significance of the passage in the light of the particular book or letter, and of course against the backdrop of the whole Bible.
 - C **Application.** Then we move on to questions which apply to the situations we are facing today.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- Do make use of clergy and commentaries and other Christians who have a maturity which you can rely upon when you are seeking to tackle Bible passages.
- It will sometimes prove helpful to have more than one translation as this will give you some fresh insights into the verses which you are focusing on.
- As we come to study the Bible we need to keep in mind that all the books of the Bible have one great theme: that is God's plan to save mankind from his sins through Jesus Christ.
- Fundamentally, make sure that whatever you do, you seek to do it to honour and glorify God.

Let us not forget::

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Genesis: Bible Studies in the Early Chapters of the Bible

Introduction

This term we have the exciting opportunity to explore the opening chapters of the book of Genesis. They take us back to that period of history where man was in his infancy. It is the story of how God brought the world into being in all its glory. All too often the focus is on creation but we need to realise that this story reveals our creator to us. During these studies, don't get bogged down in arguments about the how and when of creation! Instead, be taken up by the miraculous circumstances which lie behind creation itself: that it was by God's very word that the world was made.

The world that we see, the universe that was made, is a reflection of the creator God. He is the God who is infinite, all-powerful, bringing order out of an empty space (Genesis 1:2). He is the God who not only put the stars into the sky but also created the millions of galaxies that make up our amazing universe. Before we get too lost in the complexity and size of God, let us also remember that this infinite and all-powerful God is concerned with you and me, with the men and women who walk this planet. He not only created the animal kingdom, he also created human beings, male and female (Genesis 1:26). The heart of his creation, the very pinnacle of the creative process, was the making of men and women.

At once, we see that men and women are not like other animals, since they are made in the very image of their creator. He is the one who has set us apart. In these studies we will explore how our relationship with him began and how it went wrong. We will see how, from the very start, God plans to redeem us and to bring us home. It will be a study full of important characters: Adam and Eve, Satan, Cain and Abel, Noah. We will also look at some great events, which brought both wonder and confusion to our world (eg the Tower of Babel).

Books that we may use in our studies for Genesis

1. Genesis by John Calvin, publisher: Crossway/Good News
2. Genesis by Derek Kidner, a Tyndale Commentary published by IVP
3. The book of Origins: Genesis Simply Explained by Philip Eveson, Welwyn Commentary Series
4. The Beginning Of Everything - A Study In Genesis 1-11 by Dinnen Marie, publisher: Christian Focus
5. Genesis 1-11: Beginning with God by Gordon Cheng, publisher Matthias Media

Study 1 - Creation: Genesis 1-2:3

Introduction

Creation is the work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When we speak of creation, we are speaking of all things spiritual as well as all things material. We need to grasp that what is created came out of nothing. When we begin to think about the act of creation, our minds turn to these opening chapters of Genesis; but, if we know our Bibles, we will quickly realise that the act of creation is referred to right across the pages of the Bible (Psalm 90, Psalm 102, Isaiah 40, Jeremiah 10, Amos 4, John 1, Colossians 1). It is important to note that God does not need the materials of the universe to pre-exist for him to create them.

All three persons of the Godhead were involved in the process of creation. It is common among many Christians to divide the work of God amongst the three persons of the Trinity as follows: the work of creation to the Father, the work of redemption to the Son and the work of sanctification (holiness) to the Holy Spirit. However, it would be better to say that each member of the Trinity co-operates in this work together. So, in the work of creation, it is said that God the Father was the one who laid the foundations of the world and that is why we read here in Genesis 1 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. But it is also written of the Son 'For by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible' (Colossians 1:16). And yet we also read about the work of the Holy Spirit in Job 33:4 'The Spirit of God has made me'. So we see here in the work of creation, how Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved.

What can this first chapter teach us? We need to realise that the opening chapters of Genesis form not only the introduction to Genesis but also the opening books of the Bible. The story that will unfold is of the coming of the patriarchs and how God is going to set about establishing a people in his promised land. We will also learn that God's work establishes a proper relationship with us after the Fall had caused such a rupture in that relationship through disobedience.

Creation – How long did it take?

This issue has been much debated over the history of the Church. There are several theories. Some of them reject the reliability of the biblical account. Let me take a few moments to outline some of the various ideas which have been put forward:

1. that the entire work of creation was accomplished in 6 literal days of 24 hours. As you will appreciate, no one who believes in an all-powerful, miracle-working God could doubt the possibility that this could be done. We need merely think how Jesus turned water into wine to realise that, even if we were to wait years, water would never evolve into wine. This was a miracle, a work of God.
2. that there was an original act of creation, followed by a catastrophic judgement which rendered the earth formless and empty, as described in v2. After this there was restoration and re-creation, v3-27.
3. that the 'days' of Genesis 1 as geological eras. We are not to think of them as merely periods of 24 hours. The very first verse of the Bible describes the original creative act and then v2 goes on to describe the primitive condition of the earth when first created. Of course, what we then witness is God's continuing activity in bringing about life as we understand it today.
4. that the 'days' were in fact days of 24 hours in which God initiated various creative processes, but they were separated by long periods of time. This view seeks to hold on to the idea of what the Bible says but also seeks to include the idea of the fossil records showing long geological periods of activity as science leads us to believe.

What should Christians think about evolution?

We need to say at once that there is no single view of evolution. We can make a separation between macro-evolution and micro-evolution. Macro-evolution suggests that all life evolved fortuitously from a single cell. This idea is built around the understanding that the lower simplistic form of life came about and developed into a more complex form of life over a period of time. Eventually, that would become the human race. This sees the way in which the world and human life have developed as a cosmic accident. It does not take a genius to realise that this view raises a number of important questions that need to be answered. The idea of micro-evolution has more substantial evidence to support it and can be grasped within the biblical narrative.

'In the beginning, God', 1

The passage starts with a clear statement about the Creator and his creation. Its simplicity has hidden depths. The opening words of the very first verse are a foundation on which the rest of the Bible will be built and this verse is a statement with a threefold purpose: (1) to identify the Creator; (2) to explain the origin; and (3) to link the work of God in the past to his work in the future. Clearly the writer wants to leave us in no doubt that God is both the Creator and sustainer of the world.

The first day, 2-5

These verses describe the condition of the land just before God prepared it as the place for men and women to dwell. It is not yet fit for humankind. In vv 3-5 God says "Let there be light", yet the passage doesn't yet tell us of the making of the sun. Most probably, the sun would have been included in the creation of the heavens and the earth in v1. At that moment, there was darkness which the light of the sun would pierce. In v4 we read the word 'good'. This word is repeated throughout the chapter, causing us focus on the benefits we will have from God's creation. We will also see that God is the one who knows what is 'good' for us and that his intention is to provide only 'good' things. In some ways, this prepares us for what will happen and unfold in chapter 3, when tragedy will strike at the relationship between God and mankind.

The next four days of creation, 6-23

Creation is one form of God's self-revelation; it is one way in which we can know him. As we have already discovered, God stands at the beginning of all things. Thus the account here of the next four days of creation, as we have already glimpsed from the opening verses of this chapter, is of God himself. Everything else is an object which is being created. We see that the light, the air, the water, the dry land, the vegetation, the sun, the moon, the stars, the fish, the birds, the land animals are all the focus of God's creative power and he alone is the one who brings them into existence. Important words for us to notice throughout this chapter are words like 'saw', 'separated', 'called', 'made'

and `created'. At the end of the chapter, we discover that God explains to man and woman all that he has done (vv28-31). Finally, we should notice that God does his work of creation by speaking. Note the repeated phrase `And God said'. This underlines the importance of revelation being a spoken or verbal account. We are living in a time and an age when words are becoming devalued. Not so for God and his creation. I hope we are beginning to grasp that chapter 1 teaches us that creation was an unfolding process, revealing both the mind and the purpose of God. We also learn that God repeatedly recognises that what he has done is `good' (vv10, 12, 18, 21 and 25). The importance here is that the object is not just `good' for mankind, the object is `good' in itself.

Our study of creation should lead us to be thankful for the world that God has made and we should praise him for it. We should also delight in creation and appreciate the beauty of the world that God has made. Our response should be to demonstrate our responsibility for this world, seeking to bring it to its full potential.

The sixth and seventh days, 1:24-2:3

We see the account of the creation of various types of land animals and of man on the sixth day (vv24-26). Mankind is distinguished as both male and female (v27).

The creation of man is set apart from the previous acts of creation because God intends to portray him as a special creature. This marks us off from the rest of creation. We are told that the man was made in the image and likeness of God. It is interesting to see in v27 that it is said twice that man was created in God's image and also that man was created male and female. We should not overlook the blessing that comes in v28. This theme of blessing will continue not just through the book of Genesis but also through these opening books of the Bible.

What do we learn? We are instructed to `be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it'. (v28).

On the seventh day God rested from his work of creation. He also set apart this day as holy (2:1-3). It may seem somewhat unusual to us that the Lord, who is all-powerful and doesn't grow

tired, should need to rest and relax after his work of creation. On his Sabbath, God no longer performs the work of the preceding six days when he created all things by his word. There is no morning or evening on the seventh day. This suggests to us that God's rest is eternal and he therefore sustains us even on this day. Genesis gives us a pattern for working for six days and resting on the seventh. We should set apart one day in seven as holy and use it as an opportunity publicly to gather with others to worship God who has created and redeemed us and will return again.

Study 1 Questions

1. What aspects of life make you marvel at God's creation? God is at the heart of this passage, being mentioned over 30 times. What does this tell us about the purpose of creation?
2. What do we learn about God from studying creation? We know that when we look at a picture, we can learn things about the artist who painted it. What does creation teach us? How do the things we create compare with God's creation? How do we differ from God when we are involved in the creative process?
3. The word 'good' appears repeatedly in this passage. How do we determine whether something is good or not? Does this first chapter of Genesis enable us to look at what we create and what we see around us in a different light?
4. 'And God said . . .'. This phrase is found many times in this first chapter. We can also find it elsewhere in the Bible, eg Psalm 33: 6 & 9. What does this phrase suggest concerning the way God created? How do these verses compare and contrast to the opening verses of John's Gospel (John 1:1-3)?
5. In what ways do we see the image of God in ourselves? In what ways is God, as revealed here in this opening chapter, both infinite and personal? Why is it important that he is both?

Study 2 - Adam and Eve in the Garden Genesis 1:27-2:25

I need to say at once that many scholars believe the Garden of Eden to be a myth. However, it seems quite extraordinary that Moses, the author of Genesis, goes out of his way to describe the geographical location of Eden and this certainly gives us one reason for believing that it is, or was, an actual place. We discover that the Garden of Eden was near the sources of both the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. Man's first environment is unveiled in this chapter. God himself prepared and planted this area intending it to be a garden, that is cultivated land, as compared to and in contrast with the rest of the earth. The word 'Eden' means 'delight'. Adam was given the responsibility to work and take care of this garden (2:15). This did not mean that he was to be idle, rather it was there that fruitful labour was to be undertaken to sustain Adam's physical life.

Genesis 1 described mankind as the climax of creation. Now in Genesis 2 we see the same theme from a different perspective, this time showing man in relation to God, creation and woman, the helper made from Adam.

Man (Adam) was created from the dust of the ground and the Lord gave him life, literally breathing life into him (2:7). He had all that he needed for food in the garden, but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil tree was prohibited to him (2:17). This symbolic language is not explained. He is placed in the garden in order to work it and care for it; therefore, from the beginning, work is part of God's purpose for mankind. Adam is given the responsibility for naming the animals and began to exercise his stewardship over creation. Yet when he looked for a 'helper', he found nothing suitable in the animal kingdom. This should not surprise us as man was made distinct from the animal kingdom and also he was made in the image of God.

What comes next is a plain statement that this part of creation was 'not good' (v18). The loneliness of man was seen as

something to be avoided. What we discover, remarkably, was that the helper was not another man but rather a woman. 'Helper' does not imply someone who is a lesser or an inferior person. The Bible uses this term most often to describe God as the 'helper' of Israel. The woman is created to complement man, providing what is lacking in man when on his own.

What do we discover?

She was formed from him. Thus they were both created from the dust by God (v21). We discover that that man was not just made for dominion but also for fellowship. Though he was placed in authority over all he surveyed, there was an aspect of his nature that could not be satisfied with this power. Here we discover the importance of relationship between human beings. This in itself is a reflection of the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Please do not miss the significance that God's provision was a woman. This underlines the fact that the continuation of the human race is for men and women together, producing the next generation.

The making of a woman from Adam's side is deeply meaningful as well. The Genesis account of the origin of woman cannot be put on one side in the modern debate about women's rights and liberation. We need to recall that man was created first and that woman was taken out of man, thus supporting the Apostle Paul's doctrine of headship (Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3). Yet, because she came from Adam, woman is also equal to man: equal in essence but different in function. This difference in function and role does not imply inferiority in nature and personality.

The first marriage, 23-25

Having taken woman out of the side of man, God then brings woman back to man in a new way. Adam recognised that something very special had taken place. Here at last was another human being just like himself, bearing the image of God, and together they would constitute humankind. In their relationship they had nothing to hide from each other. The key note here is mutuality. Her life derived from his, as his would derive from hers in later generations. In time to come the marriage

relationship would be exclusive. This is certainly what Jesus himself would teach when he quotes v24 in Matthew 19:5. It is only after such a commitment between man and woman that we can see physical union, sexual intercourse, being expressed.

In v24 we are given four key ingredients to marriage.

1. It is the union between one man and one woman.
2. Man will leave his parents. This shows the primary obligation of the new relationship once we have left our parents.
3. We are told that the man is to stick with his wife and this expresses the permanence and exclusive nature of marriage.
4. The husband and wife are to become one; here is the expression of intimacy that every marriage should have. This surely raises a significant question mark about those who claim that homosexual relationships are 'normal' relationships.

The final verse of the chapter is 'the man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame'. This verse is clearly intended to link the account of the land and the blessing of these opening two chapters with that of the Fall that is to come in chapter 3.

Study 2 Questions

1. According to the passage, what was God's purpose when he made human beings (vv4-9, 15)?
2. Work is a key factor in the creation story. What guiding principles do we learn about work from these verses (5-15)? Can we ever enjoy the experience of work? What else do we discover from this chapter that is important for mankind in connection with our relationship with God?
3. Looking at Genesis 2:4-25, in what ways was the garden in which Adam and Eve were placed like paradise? It seems that the garden itself had some rules. Does this give us an insight into heaven (vv16-17) and if so in what way?
4. In vv20-25, we are given some of the first Bible teaching on marriage, loneliness and friendship. What do we discover about these important areas? Looking at vv20-25, what are we being taught about Adam's response to the creation of Eve? Do we learn anything about God's intentions regarding sexuality (v24)?
5. Has an increasing awareness of the threats to the earth changed the way we look at our responsibility to care for our environment? What does this passage teach us about our responsibilities in this area?

Study 3 - Sin: the problem and the solution Genesis 3:1-24

Introduction: the Fall

In his great letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul makes it clear that all mankind is naturally under the guilt and power of sin (Romans 3:9, 3:19 and 5:17). Here in Genesis 3 we are given the account of humanity's Fall, away from God and godliness into sin and disobedience. Adam and Eve were driven from God's garden and were therefore lost. The consequence of the Fall is death.

We discover that:

1. God made the first man as a representative of all mankind, just as he would make Jesus Christ the representative of all his people (Romans 5:15-19 and 9:22-26). These two representatives acted on behalf of their people in the same way that a head of state will act on behalf of the nation when making a decision that will affect all the people (eg signing a peace treaty or declaration of war).
2. We know from the opening chapters of the Bible that God put this first man (Adam) into a place of happiness which would belong to him and all who would follow him if he showed faith by a perfect obedience to the commands which God had given to him, in particular not eating from the tree described as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is so important. It showed whether or not mankind was willing to be dependent on God or act independently of him.
3. We learn that Adam, led by his wife Eve, who was herself led by the serpent, defied God by eating the fruit that had been forbidden to them. The result and consequence of this was: first, they were in opposition to God; second, they inflated their own importance before God, affected by a sense of guilt and pollution that made them feel ashamed and fearful before God; and finally, they discovered what it meant to be cursed

by both pain and death and they were expelled from the garden.

The great truth of original sin is built on this passage and it explains why men and women find it so hard to live lives that please God.

We all know when we face evil. When evil rears its ugly head and is stripped away of all camouflage, then it is easy to recognise and reject. But at the heart of this passage, the serpent poses the question to Eve 'Did God really say . . .?' (v1). The evil in this passage is sinister and it is devious, in that it seeks to undermine the confidence of Adam and Eve to believe the words that God himself has said. The Devil makes suggestions and raises questions which easily overwhelm Eve's defences (vv1, 4).

How did the serpent do this?

Firstly, the limitations that God placed upon man and woman are questioned – 'Did God really say . . . ?' Secondly, the truthfulness of what God said is openly denied – 'You will not surely die . . .' Thirdly the motivation behind what God has taught Adam and Eve is challenged. The Devil implies that God is jealously keeping them from becoming like himself. It was an attack on the very character and nature of God.

While all this is taking place, Eve was flattered and encouraged to doubt and question the very things that God and Adam had said. This brought dissatisfaction with what she had been given from God's almighty hand. They could indeed be like God, but the knowledge of good and evil would have its consequences, disrupting their relationship not only with God but also with each other and with creation. The final consequence was that God brought his judgement upon them and banished them from the garden. They try to defend themselves by offloading their responsibility on to others, but we see that they are guilty because they have been disobedient to God and his word.

In vv14-20 God's judgement is poured out firstly on the snake, next on Eve and finally on Adam. In v16 we read that his judgement against Eve relates first to her children and then to her

husband. She will bear children but in increased pain and labour. Her desire will be for her husband and he will rule over her. By the time we get to God's judgement of Adam we realise that this 'good land' provided by God was now to be cursed. Man could no longer freely eat of the produce of the land. Finally, before the Fall, man was taken from the ground and given the breath of life (2:7). But, as a result of the Fall, man must return to the ground and will once more be dust (v19). The author is attempting to show the great reversal that is taking place because of the entrance of sin and death.

We cannot let this chapter conclude without looking again at v16 and the idea of man and woman. Here we find the word 'rule' and we see the opening salvos in what will, over the centuries, become the battle of the sexes. Because of the Fall, man no longer rules with ease. There is a new conflict, because his headship is questioned. Sin has eroded both the willingness of the wife and the loving headship of the husband. We see again and again that a women's desire is to control her husband, that is to usurp his headship. Note the contrast of the rule of love found in the garden before the Fall and the struggle and strife which replaces it.

The chapter ends with another marked contrast. God rested from his work at the end of chapter 1. Now, after the Fall in v21, 'the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them'. So immediately after God's judgement, we are told once more of God's labour. This may be the first step in God seeking to bring about the restoration of man to the place of blessing. The closing verses remind us of the verdict of death that has been brought against Adam and Eve. They are cast from the garden and barred from having access to the tree of life. The chapter ends with man and woman being like God, because they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but no longer being with God in the garden. This leads naturally into our next study when we see the consequences and outworking of sin in our lives.

We have discovered that God judged our very first parents and sent them out of the garden so that they might not live there forever (3:22-23). Notice that it is the Lord's action to drive

Adam and Eve from the garden. This was the same action that would appear later when the people of God, the Israelites, were to drive out the Canaanites from the Promised Land.

What can we learn from this chapter?

Even though Christians have been set free from sin and death (Ephesians 2:1-7) we still have a battle with our desire to flee from God's presence (Luke 5:8). We also know what it means to find labour and work hard and often our relationships with those amongst whom we live are fraught.

All these are the consequences that flow out of that first act of rebellion in the Garden of Eden all those years ago. Until sin is completely removed from us, this struggle will continue. As we look at this passage, the challenge to us is to see that we bring every aspect of our life under the lordship of Jesus. Only then will we know what it means to have true peace from the battles that rage in our hearts.

Study 3 Questions

1. In this passage, what does God provide and what does he prohibit? (v1-8)
2. How does our view of freedom of choice conflict with God's gift of freedom to us (see 2:16)?
3. Vv2-5 How does Eve go wrong? In what way does she misquote God? Does this conversation also reveal something about her relationship with God? Do we ever get ourselves in the same kind of mess? Why do you think the serpent misleads Eve? What was his aim? What are his methods? Why did Adam sin? Can you think of some positive principles that might have helped Adam and Eve to have victory over temptation?
4. We seek paradise on earth yet when it is given to us, we seek to escape from it (vv6-15). Why? Why is sin so appealing? What is the link between thinking and acting? What is the impact of sin upon a person? (Romans 1:18-19, 3:9, 6:23, Mark 7:20) What does God do in order to seek out Adam and Eve in the garden? And what further action is hinted at in 3:15 that once again shows us God's action?
4. God's judgement comes in vv16-21. How does God judge those involved? In what ways do we glimpse his compassion? What judgments does the Lord God pronounce on the serpent (vv14-15), the woman (v16) and the man (vv17-19)? What hope do we find in these verses? (vv20-21)
5. How would you retell this story in a modern setting? What would be the whisper in our ear from the Satan in our story?

Study 4 - Sin's tragic pattern Genesis 4:1-26

If you take a moment to think about our society today, sadly you will see that division and separation are a part of many aspects of our community and national life. A quick glance through a national newspaper or watching five minutes of the national news will demonstrate that we have an increasing divorce rate, rising crime, violence in the Middle East, poverty and strife in Africa, as well as conflict in our own individual lives. The history of men and women is a record of splits and division. From our earlier studies we know that every broken relationship can be linked back to the very first relationship that was broken between man and God.

In this chapter we see how the consequences of the break of Adam and Eve from God now spill out into their children's lives as one brother is set against the other.

Where does Cain's wife come from? This question is often raised when discussing these early chapters of Genesis. The simple answer is that we do not know! The Bible is silent about this. There is just a hint of an answer in v14, that the world is already populated to some degree, but in the end this is one of the secret things of God. I think it is quite possible that Cain married one of his sisters or, though not as likely, a niece. This idea comes from reading Genesis 5 which tells us that Adam lived for approximately 930 years and fathered many sons and daughters. Remember the Bible itself only mentions Abel, Cain and Seth. The question of Cain's wife in no way undermines the credibility of the early chapters of the Bible. We need to remember that this chapter does not answer that kind of question. Rather, the chapter speak to us in the midst of situations that we confront today.

So far, we have learned that sin has entered into the lives of Adam and Eve. It is now perpetuated in the lives of their children. After the birth of Cain and Eve's joyful cry and recognition of God's gift of another human being, the scene now changes. In one sense, chapter 4 marks the beginning of the life in exile. This is the time when men and women begin to know

what it means to live away from God. The news that Eve has given birth to two sons, 1:1-2, is our first picture of family life. We read of the joy of the birth of a first child. Yet even as we read of this baby entering the world, we know that relationships have been spoiled! It reminds us that appearances are deceptive. Could it not be possible that, as she held Cain in her arms that day, Eve thought that he might be the very one that God had provided to right the mistakes that had been made by herself and Adam?

The chapter has five sections:

1. God is not fooled by appearances, 1-7
2. God loves justice, 8-10
3. God's action, 11-16
4. God's protection, 15-24
5. God's blessing, 25-26.

1. God is not fooled by appearances, 1-7

It is all too easy to be taken in by appearances. This truth was driven home to me when Joy and I went looking to buy our first house. It is all too easy to be taken in by a lick of paint, fresh coffee on the stove and the smell of baked bread! It could lead you to believe that you have found your dream home. We need to remember that God, unlike us, is not fooled by appearances. The Bible constantly reminds us that he looks on the heart (see 1 Samuel 16:7). God looked on Cain and Abel. He saw not only the outward appearance, but also into their hearts. Today, God looks into our hearts. He is not fooled by the outward show of commitment that we may make. The critical question that the Bible poses again and again is the question of the attitude of our hearts towards God. We can appear to do the right thing, but if our hearts are far from God then we are lost!

This is one of the critical elements in the story of Cain and Abel. The issue was the attitude of their hearts! God is not interested in mere religion, but in our relationships with him and with others. The crisis between Cain and Abel arose over the question of

religion, namely `what is acceptable worship?' We read that Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the land. One day, Cain decided to offer up a portion of his labour to God. Then, Abel offered up fat portions from amongst the firstborn of his flocks to God. On the surface, it looked as if the issue was just one of worship style but it went much deeper. Critically in v5, God brought his verdict down upon the worship that was offered. The key to acceptable worship is the attitude of the believer. It wasn't too long ago that people would get hot and bothered about the clothes families wore and how they looked when they went to church. We have come to realise that it is not the clothes we wear that are important, but rather the attitude of our hearts.

Today, churches get worked up about the type of songs we sing and whether a service is formal or informal. We need to remind ourselves again that God is far more concerned about how we live! Cain's life was not acceptable to God but Abel's was because he put God first. The offerings were merely a symptom of what was going on in their hearts. Is not the same true about our worship today? God does not accept our worship merely because we are singing the latest song or hymn. He does not hear our prayers simply because we have used the right words. God accepts our worship when our hearts are right with him. Cain's religion was a cover for his own selfish and sinful attitude to God. As we study this passage together, it is good to ask ourselves "What is our real attitude to God?"

2. God loves Justice, 8-10

In v8 we are simply told how the act was done: Cain took Abel out into the field and killed him. Cain had been furious that God did not accept his offering. He had allowed bitterness to grow into envy and envy into hatred and hatred into murder. Maybe Cain thought he could get away with it? No one would see his crime. He had forgotten that God sees everything. At this point in the chapter, the Lord steps in and makes a cry for justice. Just as we saw in chapter 3, the Lord begins by asking questions. "Where is your brother Abel?" (v9). "What have you done?" (v10). Here is an important lesson for us to learn. God loves justice! We need to remember this as a church when we see

injustice in the world around us. It reminds us also that there will be a day of reckoning.

Next comes God's verdict and with it an expression that has stood the test of time. "Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground". The God we worship is the God of justice and his justice comes with forgiveness. This is not wishy-washy forgiveness, nor forgiveness that says "it didn't happen" or looks the other way. This forgiveness can only take place when there is true repentance in our hearts.

At this stage, we might well be thinking "Why didn't God stop Cain from killing his brother Abel?" In v6 God asks Cain "Why are you angry?" God warns Cain that sin is crouching at the door. God longs to see Cain come to his senses, repenting and following God's ways; but Cain gives in to his fallen way of thinking! We can see the same attitudes and thoughts today. But before we point the finger at those outside the church, we need to realise that sin is also crouching at our door. For example, the sin of envy is always at work in God's people. Remember Saul and David and how the people sang about David? This brought out envy in the life of Saul (1 Samuel 18:6 onwards). Many of us can find it hard to praise God when others are blessed and we seem to be left out.

3. God's action, 11-16

Cain was tried before God and found guilty. He was sentenced to wander. Jealousy and hatred have broken up the Bible's first family. This scene seems especially tragic when we remember the moment Eve first held that small child in her arms, v1.

4. God's protection, 15-24

What comes now is Cain's alienation from God and how he is marked out from the rest of society around him. Though God punished Cain in this way, God spared his life, for the law of capital punishment would only come later (Genesis 9:6). Commentators have speculated on the reason for the mark upon him. We see once more God's concern not just for the innocent, but also his care for the sinner. We find that God does care for Cain and that the mark given to him will provide him with safe

conduct (v15). In this section, we discover the beginnings of civilised life with its mixture of good and evil, with arts which will bless mankind although it is mixed with abuses (vv19, 23, 24). We need to understand that, even at its highest peak, culture will never lead to redemption and that the Lord has appointed mankind as steward of his creation (going back to chapters 1 and 2). The world belongs to God but we are his people and he is concerned about the society that we are shaping and also the mandate that he has given to us. The chapter closes with a sad indictment as Lamech's family learn to master the world but cannot master themselves. In spite of progress they now have the capacity to misuse and abuse the very good gift from God.

5. God's blessing, 25-26

The chapter concludes with a scene which once more offers hope to what has been a very desperate family in torment. We are told of another son being born (v25). Though Cain's sons have prospered and have become the founders of the new world after the Fall, the focus of the story now turns from the line of Cain to the new son who is there to replace Abel. The name of that son is Seth because, we are told, "God has granted me another child". Here is a story of God once more blessing his people.

Study 4 Questions

1. Why did Cain and Abel bring sacrifices to God? (Numbers 18:12, 17; Leviticus 3:16, Revelation 13:8).
2. Why do you think the Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering but not on Cain and his offering (vv3-7)? There are probably three reasons.
3. The Lord confronted Adam and Eve with a question when they sinned. He used the same approach with Cain (vv9-10). What might some of the reasons for this approach be? Jesus also used this approach in many of his encounters (eg Mark 2:8-9).
4. In what way is Cain's punishment a logical consequence of his sin (vv10-16)? It is interesting to contrast Cain's response (v9) with that of David (2 Samuel 12, Psalm 51). How was David's response different? How has Genesis 4 helped us to understand the nature and consequences of sin?
5. Looking at the chapter as a whole, the lifestyle of Cain's family is a representation of humanity: we see steady technical development matched by moral decline. How do you see this tendency reflected in our own culture? What examples and issues come to mind?

Study 5 - The believer's safety

Genesis 6:1-22

Introduction

Evil is rampant. There can hardly be greater difference between the worlds of Genesis 1 and Genesis 6. We see a complete contrast between the order of a good creation and the evil which has now enveloped this world, both made and loved by God. We see a contrast between the close relationship God had with man in the beginning and the growing alienation that is now becoming all too apparent. We see a contrast also between God's original plan for marriage between a man and a woman and the increasing promiscuity that is evident in this chapter.

Genesis 1 teaches us that the universe is the work of our sovereign God who spoke it into being and who cares about the people he has made. In Genesis 2, we discover that there is a special role for man to be in relationship with God. Man is made in God's image: male and female. By chapter 3, man is in the process of rebelling against God. We discover here that the universe is a moral place, as God sets the standards for what is right and wrong. Also in chapter 3 we discover that there are consequences for rebelling against God's sovereign rule. As we arrive in chapter 4 we see the results of mankind's rebellion against God working out in human society. In Genesis 5 we see the ultimate consequences of death, recorded generation after generation and proving that Satan was lying when he said to Eve and to Adam "you will not surely die" (3:4). Genesis 5 reminds us that death is in the world.

Chapter 6 opens with a summary of the state of affairs of Adam's descendants. In vv1-4 we have an introduction to the story of the flood which heralds God's coming judgement upon the world. God does not shrug his shoulders when faced with wickedness. He will always oppose it and bring judgement. We might think that this is discouraging but I hope that, in our study, we will see it is an important and positive message for us about God's love and grace.

The story of the flood gives us every indication of being carefully planned. There are seven key stages in the story.

1. The decision to send the flood and to rescue Noah (6:1-12)
2. God's command to build the ark (6:13-22)
3. God's command to enter the ark (7:1-5)
4. The coming of the flood (7:6-24)
5. The waters receding (8:1-14)
6. God's command for Noah and the people to leave the ark (8:15-19)
7. God commands Noah to build an altar and he makes a covenant with Noah using the rainbow to remind him of the promise (8:20-9:17).

The culmination of the story is the judgement of God shown when he covers the world with water. We begin by seeing it from a heavenly perspective as we listen to God's conversations with Noah and the detailed description of his plans (6:5-7:5). However, when the water has come, the events are recorded from Noah's point of view and God is not mentioned. Not until chapter 8 do we learn that God remembered Noah and sent a wind to dry up the waters.

The end and the beginning, 1-4

These facts are presented briefly, without much explanation. I can only be tentative about how we will understand vv1-4! "The sons of God" is probably used for angels. What is clear is an unprecedented wickedness coming not from without but from within people's hearts (v5). It seems that the inclination of men's hearts was to do evil all the time. The earth, we are told, was filled with violence. The term 'Nephalim' that appears in v4 probably refers to great men.

The judgement, 5-12

Here is the introduction to the story of the flood. There are many links back to the account of creation in chapter 1. The effect is to show that the flood was a reversal of God's good work of creation.

In chapter 1 we are told that God prepared the land for mankind and now we find that God is the one who takes the good land away from mankind.

Noah the man, 9-10

God's word sets out the character of Noah in contrast to those people who lived around him. We have already learned what the world was like in the days of Noah. Now, by way of contrast, we have a description of this man who was faithful to the Lord. God saw him and judged him blameless (vv8-9).

Noah's character is unveiled before us:

1. He is a righteous man (v9). This means that it is most likely that he wanted to live in a way that pleased God.
2. He is a blameless man (v9). This does not mean that Noah was perfect, as his own story will reveal later. When we think of him being blameless, it is a relative term in comparison to those who lived around him.
3. He walked with God (v9). This immediately links Noah to Enoch who is also said to have walked with God. It reminds us that he lived in relationship with God. He is a man whose life pleases God.
4. He was a father (v10). Noah was the head of his family. We are simply told that he is the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth. This is significant because the salvation that comes to Noah will come also to his family: his wife, sons and daughters-in-law. The story eventually tells us that salvation will also come to the animal kingdom through Noah.

So Noah is a man who walks with God but seems to be out of step with the people around him. This must be an encouragement to us – that if we want to walk with God we may well be out of step with our contemporaries.

God judges wickedness, 11-12

Here is the picture of what life was like in the world before the flood came. There is a sharp contrast between Noah's faithfulness and the general unfaithfulness of the generation amongst whom he lives. It is also emphasised that God's action to bring judgement on the world through a flood is completely just. This passage reminds us of the final judgement when God will bring down the curtain on history. At that time, as Peter reminds us (2 Peter 3:6-7), it will no longer be with water but rather with fire.

Judgement and salvation, 14-17

There is a clear link between the description of the building of the ark and the account of creation (Genesis 1). There is the same pattern each time. (1) God speaks; (2) an action is commanded; (3) the action is carried out according to God's will.

We find a blessing from God at the end (Genesis 1:28, 9:1). We see the instructions given by God for the building of the ark of salvation.

God and his grace, 18-21

Here is God's promise of grace to his people. God decided to save Noah and his family from the coming judgement. Noah's relatives went into the ark, joining the covenant community by so doing. However it does not mean that they will enter into eternal life merely by associating with God's righteous people. Please don't miss out on the fact that Noah will become a new Adam for a new world, once the flood has taken place.

The response of faith, 22

The passage concludes with this brief but important statement: 'Noah did everything just as God had commanded him'. This is a phrase that is often repeated in the pages of the Bible. The building of the ark might have appeared a ridiculous task to those around him (they were miles from the sea) but Noah did exactly what the Lord commanded. Surely, this encourages us to see

that this is the proper response to the commands of God and acts of faith. It is not for us to question God's intentions. We are to be a people who are ready to obey. As the hymn-writer has said, we are simply called 'to trust and obey'.

Study 5 Questions

1. Before you read the chapter ask the group to retell the story of Noah (6-9). Ask each member of the group to add another bit to the story. Try and tell the story in order if you can. It is interesting to see which bits are missed out and why. Who was saved?
2. Love and justice are two key issues in this story of Noah. Why did God send the flood to bring judgement (vv1-6)? Are there wickednesses today that your group would like God to end in our day?
3. Looking at vv1-8, if Noah was also fallen like all mankind, why was he commanded by God to build the ark? Hebrews 11:7 tells us that Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord. What do we discover about him?
4. Looking at vv7-19, what do we discover about God and how is our understanding of him developed?
5. Turning to vv18-21 we see how God preserved his creation in miniature. How does this rescue action reflect the way Christ rescues his people? What does this passage also teach us about God's sovereign action in our world?

Study 6 - The Tower of Babel

Genesis 11:1-9

Introduction

This last session tells us of one more tragic story in the opening days of the human race. We are witnessing the effects of sin on humanity. God planned that man should 'fill the earth' and we read in 10:32 that 'the nations spread out over the earth after the flood'. Now we find that those who built the Tower of Babel are determined to stay together. They raise their architectural masterpiece in an attempt to rival God himself. This is an account of a community seeking to become like God. In so doing they are echoing the sin of Adam and Eve and, of course, we know that God will judge them.

If we cast our eyes back, we see that in Genesis 10 we are given the table of nations. The purpose behind this is to show us that the world descends from three brothers. We are left with an intriguing question: 'How do we find people spread across the world with so many different languages? How did it all happen?'

In Genesis 1 and again in Genesis 9:7, man was given the responsibility of spreading across the world. However, he disobeyed this command and in this passage, God himself brought about the dispersal of humanity across the world. In 11:1-2, there was one language and settlement in Shinar (Babylonia). Instead of using these simple circumstances with their ease of communication to govern the world properly for God's glory, men and women rebelled and tried to put themselves on the throne and make themselves like God (v3-4).

The first scene is the building of the tower. These people are seeking to build Babylon. It is not without significance that Moses tells us the location of where this rebellion is being waged. One of the crucial questions in this passage is: 'why does God judge the builders of this city?' The clue to the answer is that certain key words are repeated in the story. Let us focus on two: 'name' and 'scattered'. Notice what man's intentions are and what God's

actions are. The story of the building of Babylon makes sense in its own setting, but if we are to look a little deeper we will see that it ties us to a theme that is developing here within the pages of the Bible. Since the very beginning of Genesis Moses has been showing us God's plan to bless mankind but also mankind's tendency to rebel and fail to trust in God and enjoy the good things that he has provided. In the Bible, Babylon stands for the world and its opposition to God, seeking to be dependent of God and his word. The culmination of this opposition is seen in Revelation where God will overthrow and bring judgement on Babylon (Revelation 18).

We could not end our series of studies without seeing that God has a plan and a purpose for all his actions. We witness that God has not abandoned mankind, even though he would have been perfectly justified so to do. Far from rejecting his rebellious creatures, he begins to put his plan to bring salvation to the whole earth into operation and thereby restore mankind to himself. What is his strategy? It is to choose one man (Abraham): through him and his family will come a blessing to all the nations. Their land (the promised land) was to be God's bridgehead where his rule could be demonstrated and established and be a witness to the watching world (Genesis 12:7).

Study 6 Questions

1. What action do the people of Babel take, and what is their motive (11:1-9)?
2. How was the building of the tower a violation of God's command to Noah's sons given in Genesis 9? What is God's reaction (11:5-9)? What did God do to destroy their plans in building the tower? What is the significance of the move eastwards? Do we face similar dangers today?
3. What was wrong with the attitude of the people who were building the Tower? What kind of judgment does God bring down on them? (See also: Psalm 2:1-4, Luke 11:23).
4. How have you recently hurt someone through failure to communicate and what steps toward healing can you take?
5. Genesis 11:10-32 traces the line from Shem to Abraham. Why do you think the author is beginning to shift from all the families of the earth to one family?