

WEEK 1 | THE GOSPEL IN THE BEGINNING

Why was Genesis written?

Goals for this week:

- ▶ *To understand an overview of Manna Small Groups.*
- ▶ *To consider how to connect the story of Genesis to your life.*
- ▶ *To reflect upon the way God intervenes by the power of His Word into the chaos of your life.*
- ▶ *To give you comfort and hope that God is going to finish the job He promised.*

From the very beginning the story of the Bible is God's story of intervening into the chaos of our lives by His powerful Word. That story is found in the opening verses of the Bible in a nutshell. Blake said in Large Group that the purpose of Genesis 1:1-5 is to to comfort God's fearful people with the knowledge that our God is the Sovereign Creator who dwells with us and will finish the job he promised. What did he promise to Israel? He promised that he would deliver them from Egypt *and* get them to the promise land of Canaan. That was the gospel to the Israelites. And that is the gospel to you, too. Let's examine this more closely tonight.

1. Read Genesis 1:1-5. Why would Moses go out of his way to tell us that the earth was 'formless' and 'void' in verse 2? How do you think the israelites would have heard this a) in the wilderness and b) in the Babylonian exile?

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The purpose of Genesis 1 is two-fold: (1) to oppose the influence of pagan gods and to shape or correct Israel's worldview — and ours! (2) to comfort God's fearful people with the knowledge that their God is the sovereign Creator God who controls the world's destiny and Israel's — and ours! While its easy to get sidetracked by the creation/evolution debates, we must read Genesis as Moses (the primary author) intended it to be read. Moses is not primarily concerned with the mechanisms of biological origins, but with larger pastoral questions to comfort the Israelites in the middle of the wilderness. Tim Keller writes,

It is far too easy to read the first chapters of Genesis with the questions of our time: "were the days of creation 24 hours long?" "how long ago did this happen?" "is this history or myth?" "how does this square with modern views of science and evolution?" Of course, these are important questions and we can probably learn

some things from Genesis 1-11 that are relevant to them. But we don't learn very much from a text if we ask it questions that it was not written to answer. Genesis is, frankly, about deeper issues than biological origins. It is answering questions like: "what are human beings? what are we here for? what is our relationship to the nature and the world? Essentially, Genesis 1 is not about the "How" of creation but rather about the "Why". That is, ultimately, far more important.¹

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The Bible comes to us with a message about our deepest questions and longings. How important it is that we should realize that this is the starting point. So often when people come to Genesis they say, "Ah, this is going to be interesting. What about creation and evolution?" And off they go at once. "But science says this and that." And there they are, discussing something far away from themselves, something entirely theoretical. But that is not how the Bible approaches us. The Bible comes to us exactly where we are; it speaks to us in the very position that we are in at that moment. Indeed, it always insists upon doing that. It says, "I am interested in you, and I want to talk to you about yourself."²

2. What is significant about the words 'formless' (*tohu*) and 'void' (*bohu*) (cf. Deut 32:10)?

You cannot begin to discuss your problems, your personal problems, your personal needs and difficulties, truly and well unless you somehow take that in. And the Bible makes you do that. It reasons with you. The Bible does not just say, "Just come to Jesus and all will be well." Not at all. It starts in Genesis. It starts with creation. It wants you to know and to understand why you are what you are and why God is proposing what he proposes. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Gospel in Genesis*, 15.

3. What is God proposing to you in the Bible?

4. What chaos is in your life right now?

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We said last week at Large Group that Genesis 1 is the foundational story of the entire Bible. We learned Saturday night that Moses probably told this creation story (a true story) to the traveling band of God's people the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness after their exodus from slavery. God promised them that he would take care of them, but instead of believing God's Word, they doubted God and sought security in other things, things that you and I still seek security in: money, fame, sex, knowledge, power.

5. Give an example of when you sought security in other things rather than God? Are you seeking security in those things now?

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Final thought:

You can never take God by surprise. You can never anticipate him. He always makes the first move. He is always there 'in the beginning'. Before man existed, God acted. Before man stirs himself to seek God, God has sought man. In the Bible we do not see man groping after God; we see God reaching after man.

(John Stott, *Becoming a Christian*, 11).

MON > TUES > WED > THURS > FRI > SAT > SUN

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Through the week:

- ▶ *Journal how God is interceding into the chaos of your life.*
- ▶ *Attend Manna's Daily Prayer Meetings.*
- ▶ *Begin Manna's daily devotionals.*

¹ Tim Keller, *What Were We Put in the World to Do?: Participants Guide*, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2006, 1. At Manna, we will explore questions of faith and science in one of our small-group topical studies November 29-December 17. You'll find more information about this at Large Group and through our weekly announcements. Be sure to sign up to receive those on our website, www.princeton.edu/manna.

² These words are close to the way Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a popular twentieth-century evangelical preacher in London, begins his series in Genesis. See *The Gospel in Genesis*, 9.