



Beginnings...

A Closer Look at Genesis 1-3

a Good Soil series
for small group study

Part 1: In the Beginning...

Bible Reading: **Genesis 1:1-13**

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PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

In this 6-part series, we will be considering the first three chapters of the Book of **Genesis**. Genesis 1 is one of the most-read and most-discussed passages of scripture ever. It is hotly debated today, both between atheists and God-believers of many faiths, and different schools of thought within those faiths. Your group may have a range of different views, which should be respected and treated with care. Try to avoid too much preoccupation with 'different theories', however. To fully appreciate it, we must allow the written word to speak to us, not to impose questions that it was never designed to answer. If we get into too many knots, we might miss the very purpose of Genesis – which is surely to lead us into worship of the Living God. And do bear in mind there are 6 sessions on creation, so you don't need to cover everything in the first one! Please pray for your group, that God will inspire and encourage them, whatever stage of faith they are at.

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)

Have you ever wondered how the Bible as we know began to take shape? Here's one possibility:

Around the 6th Century BC, God's people (then known as the people of Judah) found themselves in exile in Babylon. They had a rich and fascinating history, based on their belief and worship of the One True God, known to them as Yahweh. This God had set them apart, meant for them to be holy people, and rescued them dramatically while they were slaves in Egypt. The stories and songs of Yahweh's people would have been recited and remembered week by week, from generation to generation, in their family homes and in the place of worship. But they were in exile for a reason, so the prophets had said: because they had been led astray (many times) to worship other gods, forgetting the One True God and his covenant with them.

Exile was distressing for many reasons. But during that period, certain Jews decided that they must never forget again. They were immersed in a foreign country, under pressure to bow down to other lords, surrounded by many competing beliefs, and in danger of never returning to their homeland. They needed to be encouraged, they needed to remember their God. So they started to collect together their history and faith, and write things down as holy scripture. *Who are we? Where did we come from? Who is our God? How can we worship and stay connected?* These were all important questions. They needed to remember the answers, or risk being lost forever.

How does it make you feel to think about the Bible's beginnings? And what questions do you have as we get ready to look more deeply into the Bible's opening pages? Bring your thoughts honestly to God.

STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Creator God, the world you have made is beautiful and good,
and your holy word in the Bible is a gift of life and hope, passed down by your people.
Help us to find new insight and inspiration as we read about our beginnings,
and may your Holy Spirit encourage us, bringing order out of chaos, light out of darkness,
and lifting our heart to you. In the name of Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

FINDING OUR ROOTS – some starter questions to explore in small groups

What does the Biblical creation story mean to you? How important is this story to your faith? Or does it pose a problem for you in today's scientific world? (Or do you find the science baffling?)

READING THE SCRIPTURES – with background information and reflections

The word *Genesis* is from the Greek, meaning 'origin'. The Hebrew says: ***Bereshit bara Elohim...*** "In the beginning God created..." The word for God is ***Elohim***, not the more personal *Yahweh* (which was revealed to Moses). Rather like the English word 'God' or 'gods', *Elohim* can be used in a specific or general sense when talking about deities. The creation story proceeds in a seven-fold rhythmic way, almost like a poem.

Day 1: God creates life and separates it from darkness, resulting in day and night. **Day 2:** God creates the sky, and separates the waters above from the waters below. **Day 3:** God brings forth the land from beneath the waters, and then covers the land with vegetation. There is a sense of bringing order and purpose out of chaos, preparing the way for what is to come. We are told that God created the heavens and the earth, and then, as our story unfolds, the details are added like an artist moulding and painting and admiring his work. In **verse 2**, the *Spirit* (or *wind*, or *breath*) of God hovers over the waters of the earth and waits to begin...

Read together the Bible passages: **Genesis 1:1-13**

REFLECTION: We might at times feel in a similar place to God's people in exile. Life might seem dark, confusing, or chaotic. But the Bible encourages us to look around and find God has been at work! We're invited to look at the world – the beauty of the land, the wonders in the sky, the trees and plants and water we need for life – to take a deep breath and say: this is real, and this is good! *And where did it come from?* From the One True God; the One who can bring light out of darkness and order out of chaos. This chapter will always provoke many questions, but it was never written as a science book or an instruction manual: it is a starting point for faith, a pillar of reassurance, a voice of hope, and it should lead us to worship.

DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for you to consider in your group:

When has God's creation amazed you? Give some examples of things you find awe-inspiring!

In the creation story, God speaks creation into existence. What does this say about God, and where do we see God's powerful word at work today?

When has Genesis chapter 1 encouraged or inspired your faith? When have you found it difficult?

Have you seen or felt anything new in our study of these verses today? How can it help to hear other perspectives on the subject of creation? What questions do you still have?

Do you feel (or have you ever felt) in a dark, confusing or chaotic place? Think about God's people through the centuries who have found encouragement from remembering the creation story and the God who made it all. In prayer or meditation, bring your worries or needs to this same God...

PRAYING AND WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

Find some time for a period of prayer together. Allow space for group members to offer their own prayers. Offer to God any issues or concerns that have been raised in the session. Perhaps take the opportunity to pray for our creation in its current state of ecological crisis. **Hymns** to sing or use as prayers include: *Singing the Faith* **106, 116, 118, 727, and 824 (Psalm 104)**. Share **The Lord's Prayer** together.

WHEN YOU GET HOME...

Find somewhere to sit where you can observe some of this wonderful world (a garden, a park, a hillside, a window...); feel the earth's gravity beneath your feet; think about our place in the universe; think about how you came to be... Remember it is GOOD, and lift up your worship to God.

JUNIOR GOOD SOIL – ideas for children and young people

If it's good weather, (with parents' permission) take the children out for a walk to admire and talk about God's creation. Read the whole of the creation story (**Gen 1:1 – 2:3**), and find out what questions they have. Be creative in thinking about how to present and display the **7 days of creation** in church (over 3 sessions).