

Back to the Beginning: Genesis Session 1 Summary and Study Guide

Welcome to our Bible study series, *Back to the Beginning*, where we explore the book of Genesis and the profound accounts of God's interactions with His creation. This first session sets the stage by examining what Scripture reveals about God's nature and His actions before the creation of the world, as well as the opening verses of Genesis 1. Our goal is to dig deeper into these stories, moving beyond a surface-level understanding to uncover the rich theological truths beneath. You can follow along with your Bible and the study notes provided, which are designed to help you engage with the material on your own. Let's dive into this adventure together, seeking to grow in our understanding and awe of God.

Introduction: Why Study Genesis?

The book of Genesis is foundational to understanding God's character, His purposes, and His relationship with humanity. By studying Genesis, we aim to explore the accounts of real people and their encounters with the true God, who created all things. These stories are not just children's stories as we learned them in Sunday School, but are filled with deep truths about God's plan, His nature, and His redemptive work. The study notes associated with these lessons are designed for you to use as a tool for personal reflection and preparation. While you're encouraged to explore them ahead of time to spark questions and insights, you're also welcome to simply follow along as we uncover these truths together. There are no quizzes or assignments—this is an opportunity to grow in faith and understanding at your own pace.

Lesson Objectives

In this session, we will:

1. Explore what Scripture says about God's existence and actions *before* time began.
2. Understand the concept of time in relation to God's eternal nature.
3. Begin studying Genesis 1:1–7, focusing on God's creative acts and their significance.
4. Reflect on the implications of God's character for our worship and faith.

Part 1: Before Time Began

I. God's Eternal Existence

Genesis 1:1 declares, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" This raises a question: the beginning of what? The answer is the beginning of *everything*—time, space, and matter. Before this moment, there was no time as we know it. To grasp this, we need to consider what the Bible says about God's existence and activity *before* creation.

Scripture provides glimpses into God's eternal nature and His plans before the foundation of the world. Consider the following passages:

- **2 Timothy 1:8–9:** God "*saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.*" This tells us that God's plan of salvation through Christ was established *before* time existed. His grace and purpose for humanity were already in place.
- **Titus 1:2:** God promised "*eternal life... before the world began.*" Even before creation, God's promise of eternal life was certain, rooted in His unchanging character.

- **Ephesians 1:4:** God “*chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.*” This indicates that God’s redemptive plan, centered on Christ, was set before the world was formed.
- **John 17:24:** In His high priestly prayer, Jesus says, “*You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*” This reveals the eternal fellowship within the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—existing in perfect love and communion before creation.
- **1 Peter 1:20:** Christ “*was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.*” Jesus’ role as our Savior was planned before time began, showing God’s intentional design.

These passages reveal that God was not idle before creation. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existed in perfect fellowship, covenanting together to plan the redemption of humanity. God’s purpose, grace, and promise of eternal life were established before the world existed, demonstrating His sovereignty and unchanging nature.

II. Why Did God Create?

If God is self-sufficient, with no needs, why did He create the world? Unlike other belief systems that suggest a deity created out of loneliness or need, the Bible teaches that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—had perfect fellowship within Himself. He did not create to fill a void but to display His glory and demonstrate His attributes, such as mercy and grace (Ephesians 2:7). Creation was an act of divine will, not necessity, to bring praise and glory to Himself through His creatures—angels and humans.

III. Reflection Questions

1. How does knowing that God planned salvation *before time began* deepen your trust in His sovereignty?
2. Why is it significant that God created out of His desire to glorify Himself rather than out of need?

Part 2: God and Time

IV. God’s Eternal Nature

One of the most mind-stretching truths about God is His relationship to time. Unlike us, God exists outside of time. Time began when He created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). Even secular theories, like the Big Bang, align with this idea by suggesting there was no time before the universe’s origin. God does not experience time as we do—He does not plan for tomorrow or reflect on yesterday. He simply *is*. Consider these passages:

- **Exodus 3:14:** When Moses asks God His name, He responds, “*I AM WHO I AM.*” This name reveals God’s eternal, self-existent nature.
- **John 8:58:** Jesus declares, “*Before Abraham was, I AM.*” He does not say “I was” but “I AM,” indicating His eternal presence across all time.
- **Psalms 90:4:** “*A thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past.*” To God, time is insignificant—whether a day or a thousand years, it’s all the same to Him.
- **James 1:17:** There is “*no variation or shadow of turning*” with God. He is unchanging and unaffected by time.
- **Colossians 1:17:** Christ “*is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*” He is the eternal sustainer of creation. Notice the present tense “*is*”.

- **Revelation 4:8:** God is “*the One who was and is and is to come.*” He encompasses all of eternity.
- **Isaiah 57:15:** God “*inhabits eternity.*” He fills all of eternity, just as He fills all of space.
- **Malachi 3:6** “*For I am the Lord, I do not change.*”

When God speaks of “before” or “after,” He is accommodating our human perspective, as we live within the constraints of time. A helpful (though imperfect) analogy is a parade: from a street-level view, you see events unfold sequentially, but from above, you can see the entire parade at once. Theoretically, a person above the parade could drop in anywhere and join the parade wherever he wanted to. Similarly, God sees all of history simultaneously and can interact within it however He wants because He exists outside the progression of time.

V. Implications for Faith

Understanding God’s eternal nature increases our awe of Him. He is not bound by time, change, or uncertainty. His plans, including the salvation of His people, were set before creation and are unchangeable. This truth assures us that God’s promises are certain, and His purposes will be fulfilled, no matter what happens in our time-bound world.

VI. Reflection Questions

1. How does the concept of God existing outside of time challenge or encourage your understanding of His nature?
2. What does it mean to you that God’s plans, including your salvation, were established before time began?

Part 3: Exploring Genesis 1:1–7

Let’s turn to the opening verses of Genesis to see God’s creative power in action. Read Genesis 1:1–7:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. Then God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.’ Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.”

VII. Key Observations

1. **God’s Creative Power:** God speaks, and creation obeys. When He commands, “*Let there be light,*” light comes into existence. This demonstrates His absolute authority and power to bring something from nothing. Something which did not exist obeyed the command!
2. **The Spirit’s Role:** The Spirit of God is described as “*hovering over the face of the waters.*” Picture this vivid image of God’s Spirit actively present, preparing to bring order to the formless earth.

3. **Order and Separation:** God’s creative acts involve separating and organizing—light from darkness, waters above from waters below. This reflects His purpose to bring structure and beauty to creation.
4. **Light Before the Sun:** Interestingly, God creates light on Day 1, but the sun is not created until Day 4. This suggests that God Himself is the source of light, independent of celestial bodies.

VIII. Study Exercise

To deepen your understanding of Genesis 1, try this exercise:

- Read through Genesis 1 and list every action God takes (e.g., “God said,” “God saw,” “God created”). Write these on a blank page to see the pattern of His creative work.
- Note instances of separation (e.g., light from darkness, waters above from below). What does this tell you about God’s purpose in creation?
- Reflect on the phrase “*the Spirit of God was hovering.*” What does this imagery suggest about God’s involvement in creation?

Part 4: The Nature of True Worship

As we study God’s eternal nature and His creative power, we must consider what this means for our worship. Many approach religion as a checklist—read the Bible, pray, attend church, and you’re “good.” This mindset reduces faith to a series of obligations, like appeasing a pagan god. However, Christianity is not about checking boxes to appease God. The Bible reveals a God who has already provided propitiation—full atonement for our sins—through Jesus Christ (1 John 2:2). Christ’s death on the cross paid the penalty for our sins, satisfying God’s justice. There is nothing left for us to do to earn His favor.

True worship flows from gratitude for this gift of grace. It’s not an obligation but an *opportunity* to respond to God’s love by living for His glory. When we sing, pray, or study His Word, we engage with the eternal, unchanging God who has revealed Himself to us. This should fill us with awe and inspire us to live out our faith authentically, not as a ritual but as a relationship with the living God.

IX. Reflection Questions

1. How does understanding Christ as our propitiation free you from a checklist mentality in your faith?
2. What practical steps can you take to approach your worship and Bible study as an opportunity rather than an obligation?

Conclusion and Next Steps

In this session, we’ve explored God’s eternal nature, His plans before time began, and the opening acts of creation in Genesis 1. These truths remind us that we serve a God who is above time, unchanging, and sovereign over all creation. His plan of salvation through Christ was established before the world began, assuring us of His faithfulness.

For next week, take time to:

- Review Genesis 1:1–7 and complete the study exercise of listing God’s actions and separations.
- Reflect on the reflection questions provided to deepen your understanding.
- Come prepared with any questions or insights to share with the group.

Let's close in prayer: *Lord, we thank You for Your Word and the revelation of Your eternal nature. You are the God who exists above time, who planned our salvation before the world began, and who created all things for Your glory. Help us to grow in awe of You and to worship You with grateful hearts. Guide our study in the weeks to come, and may we honor You in all we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.*