

Lesson 2—Prologue: Genesis 1-11

Review: By way of review, let's briefly examine the four points of background information we have discussed so far: unity, progress and goal, and the selectivity of the Bible. We have learned that the Bible is unified in the same sense that an ink pen is unified: it is made up of several different parts that all work together to form a single unified whole; the Bible is comprised of lots and lots of little stories that work together to tell one big story—the story of what God is doing on this earth to glorify Himself by redeeming His fallen creation. We also learned that we should expect to see progress throughout the Bible, for, according to **Hebrews 4:12**, the Bible is “living and active,” and all living things experience growth, or progress. To help us understand this concept, we looked at the examples of an acorn and a zygote, both of which are living things that grow simply because they are alive; the seed of an acorn progresses into an oak tree and the seed of a zygote progresses into a fully developed human. Throughout the Bible, we will see God making seed-like statements and doing seed-like actions that grow/progress over time into more fully developed results (for example: Genesis 12:1-3 is a seed-like statement that progresses tremendously into the coming of Messiah in the Gospels). We also saw that, since we expect progress, there must also be a goal, for you cannot have progress without a goal—that is simply called movement. So, what is God's goal? I suggested that **Numbers 14:21** sums up the goal of God quite nicely when God says, “But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.” Ultimately, God is working to fill the whole earth with his glory, which again, is affirmed by the command in Genesis to fill the earth and subdue it (**Genesis 1:28**) and Paul's explanation of our salvation in **Romans 8:29** as causing us to be remade in the image of Jesus—all of these references lead me to believe that God is working to save us so that he can fill the earth with true/restored image bearers, thus filling the earth with his glory. Now,

in addition to all of that, we also explored the selectivity of the Bible and noted how God only tells us what we need to know in order to understand his plan of redemption on this earth. For instance, he only uses ten words to tell us that he created the entire universe (Genesis 1:1), then takes the rest of the chapter explaining how he made this tiny planet, then he moves on in the next chapter to tell us how he made us tiny creatures on this tiny planet and why he made us: he is focusing our attention onto the important details, implying, for instance, that all we *need* to know about creation is that God is the one behind it; we don't necessarily need to know things like how old the earth is, whether or not Adam and Eve had belly buttons, or what type of fruit in particular hung from the tree of life. These can be fun and even helpful discussions, but it does appear that God has prioritized certain details over others and we would do well to pay attention to those differences.

Now, with those four concepts safely tucked away securely in our minds, let us finally begin to dig into the actual Scriptural narrative. As you should with all good stories, we are going to start at the very beginning, in the book of Genesis, and for the rest of our time together this time, we are going to focus in on the first 11 chapters. First, let us just start to look at a general overview of those chapters:

1. **Genesis 1:1**—"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The first chapter focuses primarily on the fact that God created the universe. We do see his focus narrow in on the fact that he created this earth, in particular, but the point remains: God is the Creator.
2. **Genesis 2:7; 21-22**—"then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." "So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of

his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” Chapter 2 focuses primarily on the creation of mankind—man and woman—and how we were formed in a unique fashion (in his image), distinct from the rest of God’s creation.

3. **Genesis 3:6-7**—”So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.” Chapter 3 focuses primarily on the fall of mankind into sin. We go straight from the creation of mankind to its fall; God takes no detour—we don’t know how long they were in the Garden before they fell, we just know they fell into sin.
4. **Genesis 4:7-8**—God is talking to Cain when he says, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.” Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.” Chapter 4 takes us directly from the fall of mankind straight to its effect on us: sin brings death, and we see that immediately in the story of Cain murdering his brother Abel.
5. **Genesis 5:1**—“This is the book of the generations of Adam.” Genesis chapter 5 gives us the first significant break in the narrative. Typically, people think that the first break in the narrative is in Genesis 3 when man sinned. However, that is not so much a break in the narrative as it is simply the introduction of conflict into the narrative. Genesis 5, on the other hand, is different in content and style, therefore breaking the narrative cleanly.

In chapter 5, we see the genealogy from Adam to Noah—at least a thousand years of human life is covered in this single chapter, which is odd since God took the entire chapter before (ch. 4) to discuss a single major event in the lives of two men—Cain murdering Abel—and its consequences. In light of the selectivity of the Bible, we can safely assume that nothing significant regarding God’s plan for redemption happens until chapter 6, and therefore, chapter 5 must simply be acting as a bridge of continuity, connecting chapters 4 and 6.

6. **Genesis 6:1, 5-8**—“ When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them;” ⁵“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. ⁶ And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” We see here in chapter 6 that the focal point is the rampant wickedness of mankind: “every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” However, one man has found favor in the eyes of God, and his name is Noah; one man among the many still honors God. So, we see sin enter the world in chapter 3, its consequences become immediately known to us in Abel’s murder in chapter 4, chapter 5 passes us along a thousand years of human history in a flash, and we resume the action in chapter 6 with the wickedness of man having spread across the earth with only the slightest glimmer of righteousness in a man named Noah.

7. **Genesis 7:11-13, 23**—¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. ¹² And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. ¹³ On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark,”
“²³ He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark.” We see here that the focus of chapter 7 is on God's judgment of the wickedness of mankind and of his simultaneous salvation of mankind through the means of the ark. Side note: God's judgment and salvation come through the same means—you are either judged by Jesus Christ or saved by him, and that depends on whether or not you repent of your sins and trust him as your Lord and Savior.
8. **Genesis 8:18-19**—¹⁸ So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. ¹⁹ Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark.” We see here that the focus of chapter 8 is the safe rescue and release of Noah and his family from the ark. God did indeed save those who trusted in him for rescue.
9. **Genesis 9:1**—⁹ And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” Just in case you don't recall, these are the exact words that God said to Adam and Eve just after he created them. Consequently, we see that God is giving humanity a fresh start through Noah and his family, and his main goal of filling the earth with his glory hasn't changed.

10. **Genesis 10:1**—” These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.” In chapter 10, we see another genealogy and therefore another break in the narrative, indicating that nothing significant for God’s redemptive purposes happened until chapter 11. Chapter 10 is still significant, though, for like chapter 5, it provides continuity in the narrative.
11. Chapter 11 (part 1: v.1-9); **11:1, 4, 6-9**—” Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.” ⁴ Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” ⁶ And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” ⁸ So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused^[a] the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.” The first part of chapter 11 focuses in on how mankind begins multiplying, but instead of dispersing and filling the earth as God commanded them, they insist on unifying and building a tower so that they won’t be dispersed (v.4)—sin is still in effect and mankind is still rebelling against God. God’s plans won’t be frustrated, however, and so God confuses their language so that they abandon the project and disperse themselves all over the world like they were supposed to do.
12. Chapter 11 (part 2: v.10-32); **11:10, 27**—” These are the generations of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood.” ²⁷ Now

these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot.” This last portion of chapter 11 gives us yet another genealogy, this time connecting Shem, a son of Noah, to Abram, or Abraham.

Quick summary:

1. God created the heavens and the *earth*.
2. God created mankind in a unique fashion (in God’s image, from the dust), and therefore mankind is distinct from the rest of creation.
3. Mankind falls into sin.
4. We immediately see the effects of sin in Abel’s murder by his brother, Cain.
5. Genealogy from Adam to Noah, connecting chapters 4 and 6.
6. The earth was filled with violence and corruption—wickedness was rampant and sin was spreading.
7. God judges the wickedness on the earth by the flood while simultaneously saving humanity through Noah’s family.
8. Noah’s family rescued from flood and released from the ark—God does indeed save those who trust in Him for rescue.
9. God gives humanity a fresh start with Noah’s family.
10. Genealogy of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, connecting chapters 9 and 11.
11. Chapter 11, part 1, shows us how mankind, now many, has unified and continues to rebel against God by building a tower so that they won’t be dispersed; God, therefore, confuses their language and disperses them anyways.
12. Chapter 11, part 2, gives us a genealogy from Shem to Abram, connecting chapters 11 and 12.

As we review these first 11 chapters of Genesis, we see that God begins telling the story of what He is doing on this earth to glorify himself by redeeming His fallen creation by informing us of three major details that must first be understood if we are going to understand the rest of the story:

1. In Genesis chapters 1-4, God is showing us that He created mankind, but we rebelled against God in sin, bringing the devastating consequences of death into this world.
2. In Genesis chapters 6-9, God is showing us that because the Earth has become full of violence and corruption, God destroyed mankind and started anew with a family of 8 people.
3. In Genesis chapter 11, God is showing us that in our rebellion, we tried to stay unified against God by building a city and a tower, now called Babel; regardless of our efforts to continually rebel against God, he confused our language and scattered us throughout the world as we should have done on our own.

So, the question now is this: what is God doing in Genesis 1-11? After all, we keep saying that the overall story of the Bible that unifies it is the story of what God is doing to glorify himself by redeeming his fallen creation. However, up to this point (Genesis 11), apart from Creation, God's actions have been primarily negative: He has been judging, destroying, scattering people, etc. This leads me to believe that these chapters are really focused on what man did and the consequences of what was done, not necessarily on what God did. That is why I refer to these chapters as the Prologue to the story of God's redemption of mankind—a prologue is a separate set of introductory information that is attached at the beginning of a story. A prologue is written in order to provide the reader with the background information they need in order to fully understand the story that is about to be told. Therefore, the prologue to the story of God's redemption of mankind in the Bible must show us the need for that redemptive work of God. So, let me ask you this: do the first 11 chapters of Genesis present you with a scenario within which there is something seriously wrong with this world and with humanity caused directly by the sin of mankind? You bet they do. Consequently, when we are done reading

Genesis chapter 11, we have been presented with a great problem—the problem of sin and its consequences—and are then left wondering what the solution to that problem will be.

Fortunately, we don't have to wait long before we start reading in Genesis 12 as the curtain rises, so to speak, and God gives us that answer as he begins his wonderful work of redemption.

Genesis 12:1-3 reads, “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country to your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” All of a sudden, God is no longer dealing with all of humanity, but rather with one man: Abram. And it is to this one man, Abram, that God says in **Genesis 12:2** “I will make of you,” and “I will bless you.” God has just announced to Abram and, through the Scriptures, to us, that now He is going to act; God is now going to do something. God has begun his operation of redemption, and he has done so with one man, but his plan extends worldwide because, remember, God’s goal is and always has been to fill the earth with his glory: “in you (Abram) all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (**Gen. 12:3c**)

Now, if you are like me, you might be asking, why did God wait so long to start his act of redemption? I believe God waited in order to show us, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that we need him to fix our problem. We are not capable of solving the problem of our sin and the consequences it brings, and that should have been made abundantly clear to us in the first few thousand years of human life on this planet as we constantly grew in our wickedness and became more violent and corrupt. Left to ourselves, we only made things worse; God even gave us a second chance after the flood through Noah’s family, and we continued to rebel against him with the incident at the Tower of Babel. So, I believe the call of Abram in chapter 12, which signals

the beginning of God's redemptive work on this earth, was God saying, "Enough. I have waited long enough. Hopefully now you all can see how desperately you need me. So, watch. I am going to do something so wonderful and so amazing that when I do it, you won't believe. I am going to work through one man to bring about the redemption for all men; I will bless the whole world through one man." This work started with one man named Abram, but we know that God completed this work of redemption through one man named Jesus, the Son of God who took on the sins of the world when he died on that cross so that man might be redeemed, freed from their sins, and reconciled to God.

It is here that we will break for now, and when we come back together...