

GENESIS 1-11

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# BEYOND EDEN



9 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR  
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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9 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR  
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AND TONY PAYNE



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*Beyond Eden*

Second edition

© Matthias Media 2010

First published 1990

Matthias Media

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ISBN 978 1 921441 68 4

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Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design Pty Ltd.

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## » HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

### 1. A Christian approach to Genesis

To begin at the beginning ...

The beginning seems an obvious place to start, but many Christians are ignorant of the message of the opening chapters of the Bible. Genesis 1-11 may be familiar to us because of the well-known events it relates—Creation, the creation of Adam and Eve, the Fall, Cain and Abel’s rivalry, Noah’s calling and the Flood—but what is its *meaning*?

When we do turn to these chapters, we find ourselves swamped by controversy. How long did Creation take? Were Adam and Eve real people? Where did Cain’s wife come from? Was Methuselah’s 969-year life span the same as 969 of our modern years?

Unfortunately our interest in these questions of historical detail tends to distract us from what Genesis 1-11 is really about. By asking the wrong questions, we come up with the wrong answers.

In particular, we lose sight of the place that Genesis has in the history of God’s dealings with the world. Genesis sets the scene. In eleven short chapters, it describes how the world came to be the way it is, and what we should expect as God sets in motion his plan of redemption.

The nine studies in this book offer a *Christian* interpretation of Genesis 1-11. They read Genesis from the perspective of Christ, who is the linchpin in God's unfolding plan. Christ is the key that unlocks the meaning of these eleven momentous chapters.

By looking at Genesis in this way (the way that, in fact, we should read all of the Bible), we hope that you will learn not only what Genesis is saying, but what the whole Bible is saying.

## 2. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of 'interaction'—interaction with the Bible, with the things we've written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

## 3. The format

Each study contains four main components:

- short sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- a set of numbered study questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- an 'Implications' section that helps you think about

what this passage means for you and your life today

- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

#### 4. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text and answering the questions about the Bible passage.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

#### 5. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.
- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work

out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.

- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

## 6. Bible translation

Previous editions of this Interactive Bible Study have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. So with this new edition of *Beyond Eden*, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.



## » STUDY 1

# IN THE BEGINNING

[GENESIS 1:1-2:3]

### Our questions

WHEN WE APPROACH THE FIRST BOOK of the Bible—especially its first few chapters—there are always questions on our lips. Were the seven days of Creation seven 24-hour days? Does the order of Creation square with modern theories about the evolution of species? Is there a basic conflict between science and Christianity? Is this creation account a space-time event, or a myth intended to convey a purely religious meaning?

There has been fierce controversy surrounding these questions. The atheists hurl barbs at the ‘head-in-sand’ creationists; the creationists retaliate by exploiting the gaps in evolutionary theory. Other Christians distance themselves from the creationists, arguing that the integrity of Genesis can be maintained without a 24-hour-day, 4004 BC

Creation. And on it goes. More importantly, in evangelism, we trade arguments about carbon dating and the latest archaeological finds, and Jesus is lost in a sea of quasi-scientific confusion.

As we begin to study Genesis, we cannot help but have these concerns in our minds—concerns that owe more to biology and astronomy than the Bible. While these questions are certainly legitimate, we must take care that they do not obscure the real message of Genesis. The key to all good research, including Bible research, is asking the *right* questions. If we try to find answers to *our* questions in Genesis—questions that Genesis does not answer—our search will be fruitless. We do not consult a street directory to find phone numbers; nor should we consult Genesis to find answers to



- 
- Any other observations

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As you looked at the passage, you might have noticed the following things.

## 1. A structured account

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS WE NOTICE about this passage is its highly patterned structure. The account unfolds in a repetitive, orderly fashion, reflecting God's deliberate, orderly work of creation. It is a structured account of the structuring of the world.

The pattern is broken at verse 26 with the creation of man. Is this the climax of the account? Is the seventh day an anticlimax?

## 2. God

God dominates the passage as he dominates his creation. He is mentioned 35 times—initiating, speaking, working, creating, blessing, resting. He is the subject of all the action. In fact, the emphasis of the passage could be summarized by its first four words: “In the beginning, God ...”

We should note three things:

### a) God creates everything, both large and small

Nothing is outside the scope of God's

work. There is nothing ‘natural’ in the sense of being beyond his creative work. The world is his. He made it—all of it.

### b) He creates in an orderly and purposeful way

God does not create arbitrarily or on a whim. Nor is he haphazard. He creates an orderly world in which we can live orderly, purposeful lives. The prophet Isaiah says:

... the LORD,  
who created the heavens  
(he is God!),  
who formed the earth and made it  
(he established it;  
he did not create it empty,  
he formed it to be inhabited!) ...  
(Isa 45:18)

The word ‘empty’ in Isaiah is the same word used in Genesis 1:2 (translated ‘void’ in the ESV). As God sees that his world is habitable, God is pleased. He looks at it and sees that it is good.

### c) God creates by his word

Although very little is said about the mechanism of creation, one important thing is said repeatedly: “And God said ...” The details are unimportant—even irrelevant.

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The important thing is that God has only to speak and things come into being.

This is true of any powerful person. If the Prime Minister speaks, things happen. If he decrees that a highway should be built, it will be done. The details of who actually does the dirty work are unimportant. The PM will say, quite rightly, “I built that road”.

God, who appoints Prime Ministers to do *his* dirty work, brings matter out of nothing simply by a word. What sort of awesome figure is this? It is hard for us to conceive of a power this great. “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host” (Ps 33:6).

### 3. Creation

The creation reflects the character of its creator, and fulfils the purpose for which he made it.

#### a) The creation is dependent on its creator

This may seem to be stating the obvious, but in our current climate, it needs to be said: our world is not self-generating or self-sustaining; it owes its existence and its continued operation to the will of the creator.

Because of the order and predictability that God has built into our world, we are often tempted to think of it as a giant machine that runs on forever, going through the cycle of the seasons with comforting regularity. But we only have to pause and consider the frailty of our own lives to realize how

dependent we really are. A microscopic virus can cut short our lives in a few days or weeks. The food supply we take for granted is generated by others; we are dependent on them, and they, in turn, are dependent on the seasons and the weather for a successful yield. Ultimately, it all depends on God.

#### b) The creation is orderly and habitable

Our orderly, investigable world ecosystem was created and is sustained by a divinely reasonable being. God intended it to be habitable, and it was so.

As with many of the themes of Genesis, we can fail to grasp the implications of this idea. Our whole view of the world is based on this concept of an orderly, reasonable creation. Other cultures have regarded the world as a chaotic, nightmarish place, formed through the chance sexual encounter of some god with some goddess. Western civilization, in contrast, has developed in a world that is understood to be orderly.

#### c) The creation is good

The repetition of this phrase throughout the passage should leave us in no doubt that our world, as created by God, is very good. This, too, is a civilization-changing concept: the created world is not an evil thing or a distraction, to be cast off as we become more spiritual. Nor is it an illusion, as many eastern religions (along with the Christian Scientists) believe. It is real, and separate from its creator, and decidedly good.

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## 4. Man

With the creation of man (that is, mankind) in verse 26, the highly structured pattern changes. Is this just another of God's creatures, or is there something different happening?

### a) Man is a dependent creature

Like the rest of the creation, man owes his genesis to God. He does not rise by chemical chance from the primordial slime; he too springs from the creator's mind, will and word.

This is tremendously important for our self-perception. We like to think of ourselves as persons—as somehow more significant than other creatures. Moreover, we want to think that our lives have some purpose—some meaning. Yet without the creative work of God, our lives have no meaning. If we are but a biological accident, how can we hope to have any purpose? An accident, by definition, is devoid of purpose; it just happens.

For there to be purpose and meaning, there must be manufacture. This is deeply offensive to us humans—especially 21st-century humans. We hate the idea that we

are made by someone else, are dependent on someone else, and are given purpose and meaning by someone else. Yet we cannot face the alternative—that we are an absurd accident, a cosmic joke occasioned by time plus matter plus chance.

### b) Man is unique

We will look at this in more detail in the second study; suffice to say at this point that man is created in God's image to rule over the rest of the creation. Does man have any dignity? Is whaling murder? Is abortion murder? These questions all swing on our view of mankind, and in the next study, we will look in more detail at what Genesis has to say about this.

## 5. Christ

There is another theme here, too, lurking just below the surface. Who does God consult with in verse 26 when he says, "Let us make man in our image"? Is he just using the royal plural? Or is there another divine figure involved in creation?

This becomes clearer as the Scriptures unfold.

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### Read John 1:1-14.

2. What parallels do you see with Genesis 1?

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3. Who is God's creative "Word" (v. 1)?

**Read Colossians 1:15-17.**

4. How was Jesus involved in the creation of the world?

5. Why was the world created?

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## 6. Alternatives

THE VALUE OF WHAT GOD IS SAYING in Genesis becomes even more apparent when we consider the alternatives.

### Ancient alternatives

We cannot know whether the author of Genesis had particular alternatives in mind. Certainly, he cuts across many of the ideas of the ancient world:

- *Astrology*: Many ancient civilizations were convinced that the stars played a dominant role in human affairs. Genesis 1 blows a raspberry at this idea. The stars are not our masters, but our servants; they are part of the creation over which man has dominion.
- *Polytheism*: There is no room in Genesis for a rash of gods each doing a bit here and there; there is only one God (the involvement of Christ notwithstanding).
- *The seventh day*: It is interesting to note that in Mesopotamia, the seventh day was regarded as a day of ill—a day of foreboding and evil omen. In Genesis, it is the best day of all—the day when God rests, the day that God blesses and calls holy.

### Modern alternatives

Current alternatives to the Genesis view of the world abound. Here are but a few:

- *Astrology*: Quite astonishingly, many people still believe in the influence of the stars. 80 per cent of Australians read their star column, and 28 per cent profess to believe what it says. From a scientific, or astronomical,

point of view, the whole thing is a fraud. Yet many still cling to it.

- *Mysticism*: This is the idea that the physical world is an evil place and that true spirituality involves escaping the captivity of our physical environment to soar into the great spiritual unknown. The concept is as old as Plato, who distinguished between body and soul—the soul being the true and immortal principle, and the body being a hindrance. There has been a revival of this thinking in the western world thanks to the spread of eastern mystic religion (e.g. the Hare Krishnas and transcendental meditation). In this system, the physical world is not simply evil; it is an illusion that inhibits our spiritual progress. In this kind of system, there is little place for physical beauty or sexual pleasure. In God's world, the physical matter is good, not evil, and sex is to be enjoyed!
- *Materialism*: This is a WYSIWYG world view (What You See Is What You Get). The world is a closed system in the sense that there is no God outside the creation. There is only matter—matter that was once highly concentrated, then exploded with a Big Bang, formed itself into life, and keeps expanding through the endless reaches of space. As we have noted earlier, in this alternative, meaning, purpose and values are disposed of, along with God. The honest materialist will eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow he may die, and beyond that, there is nothing.





- 
- What is the purpose of the creation?

- What is the purpose behind *your* creation? What is your life about?

### » Give thanks and pray

- Praise God for creating the world to be ordered, structured, purposeful and good through Christ and for Christ.
- Thank God for creating humankind. Thank him in particular for creating you.
- Ask him to help you to respond to him appropriately as the creator of the world and everything in it.
- Ask him to give you the wisdom to know what to say as you talk to non-Christians about the meaning and purpose of life.



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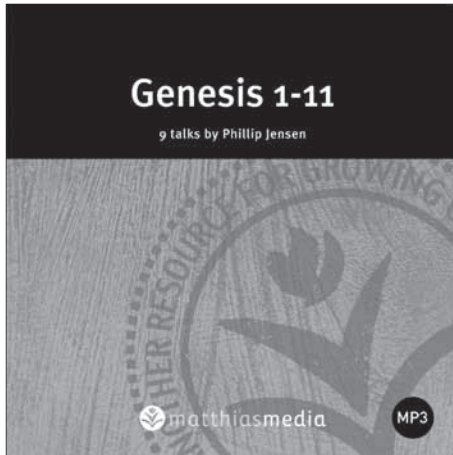
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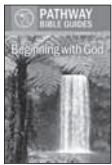
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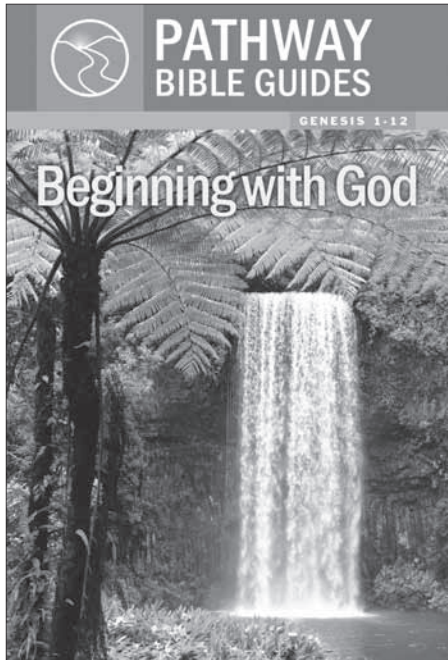
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# Beginning with God



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To start at the very beginning, as the song says, is a very good place to start. This is true of the Bible as well. The opening chapters of Genesis lay down some massive foundation stones for all that God proceeds to do in our world, culminating in Jesus Christ.

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- 14 Luke 7-9, Micah, Galatians
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