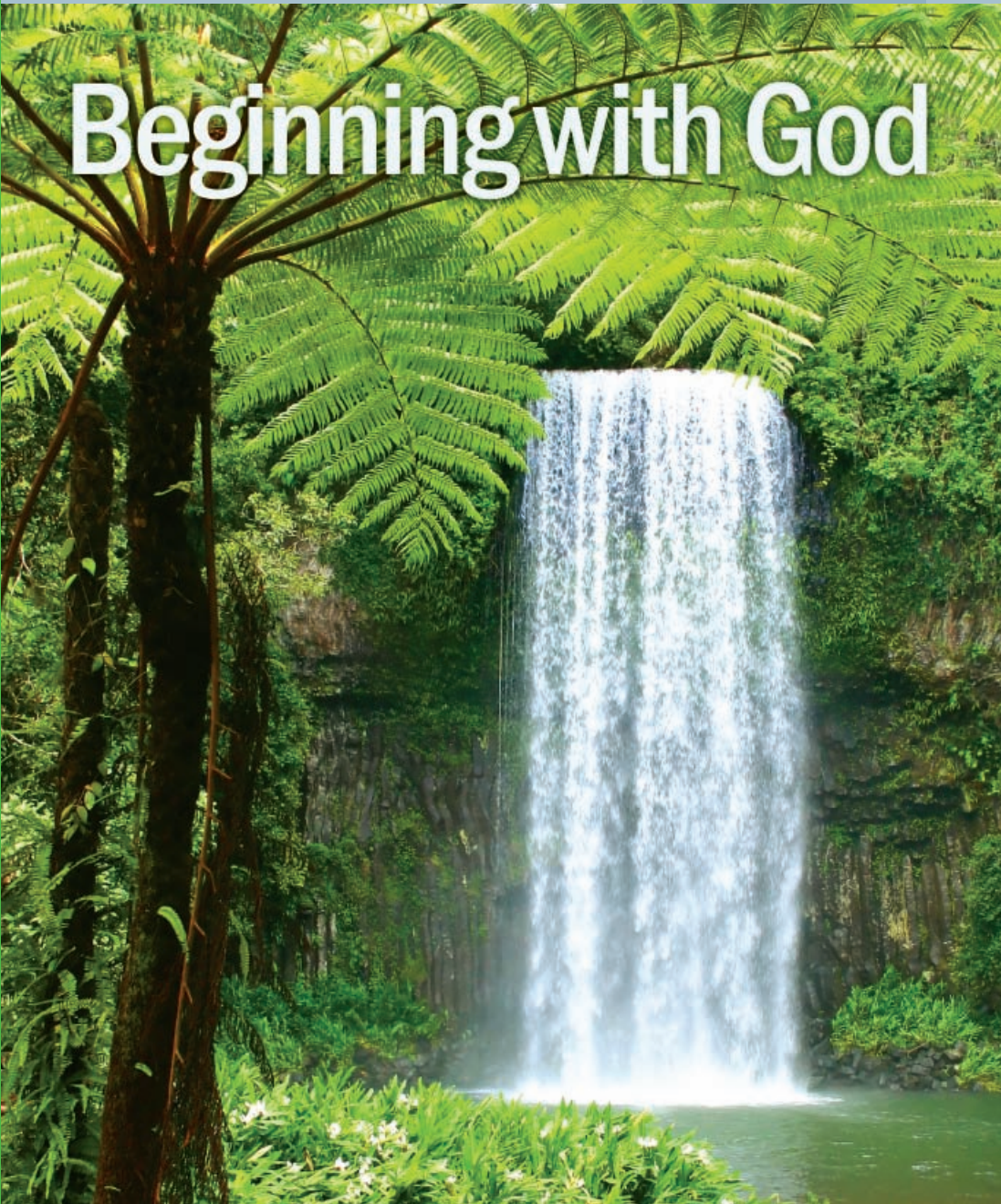




PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

GENESIS 1-12

Beginning with God





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BY GORDON CHENG



matthiasmedia

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Pathway Bible Guides: Genesis 1-12

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

God’s plan, as revealed in his word, unfolds step by step. Every part of it assumes that we know something of what has been said already—the more the better. The single exception to this is Genesis. Here the writer assumes that we will be looking forward rather than back. The word ‘Genesis’ means ‘beginning’, and if we really want to find out what we believe as Christians, this is the place to start.

In the early chapters of Genesis, we learn the most basic information about God, his creation, and our place in it as men and women. We learn why the world now is not as it was when it was made. And we begin to see how even at the point where it seemed that all of God’s plans for his creation had been ruined by our sin, nothing could be further from the truth. God was already putting into place his plan to redeem the world through the work of the Lord Jesus. Genesis is the bud of this flower.

In this simple series of studies on the early chapters of Genesis, we focus on the beginnings of this plan, with the occasional glance forward to its fulfilment in the work of our Lord on the cross and in the resurrection. By reading Genesis, we are starting to understand the story of God and the story of our salvation from sin.

Gordon Cheng

July 2006

1. IN THE BEGINNING

Genesis 1:1-2:3



Getting started

An atheist friend says, “The world is nothing more than a product of random chance and evolution. There’s no meaning or purpose to our existence, and it would make no difference in the big scheme of things if we were all wiped out tomorrow.” What would be your response?



Light from the Word

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3.

1. Use the table below¹ to summarize what gets created in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

Before the first day (1:1-2)	
Form	Use
Day 1:	Day 4:
Day 2:	Day 5:
Day 3:	Day 6:
Day 7: God rests	

2. Do you notice a pattern in the words used to describe the first five days of creation?

a. Use the space below to show the most commonly repeated parts of the pattern (the first one has been filled in).

i. “And God said ...”

ii.

iii.

1 Based on Andrew Reid’s useful and simple commentary on Genesis, *Salvation Begins: Reading Genesis Today*, Aquila Press, Sydney, 2000.

4. A friend says, "I'm a Scorpio. Of course, I believe in God and the Bible, but I also think we learn a lot by paying attention to the influence of the stars." Using Genesis 1, how would you respond?

5. If all of creation came about as described in Genesis 1, how does this help us understand:
 - a. the meaning and purpose of the world?

 - b. the goodness of creation?

 - c. evil?

 - d. other religions that claim:
 - there is more than one god?

 - God is in everything?

6. The Bible tells us what is going to happen to this creation in Revelation 21:1-8—it will be replaced with the new creation. Look at this passage and describe what it will look like, and how we can be part of it.



To finish

“Now that we’re Christian, we should be denying ourselves material things and living simple, more spiritual lives.” Do you agree? Talk about why or why not.



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for his good creation and the gifts that we enjoy.
- Pray that we would be able to worship the Creator, rather than the things he has created.

LEADER'S NOTES

1. IN THE BEGINNING

Genesis 1:1-2:3

► Remember: 60/40/20



Getting started

The introductory question is to give you as leader a feel for the range of views in your group, without asking you to come down on a particular side of the creation versus evolution debate. In fact, in this series of studies we won't be taking any particular stance regarding the truth or otherwise of scientific evolution. However, here are a few relevant thoughts on the topic.

The dispute we are most familiar with today is, broadly, between those who believe because of the Bible that the world was created in six 24-hour days, and those who insist that some form of evolution is responsible for life as we know it, without needing to appeal to the existence of some creator or intelligent designer. Although Genesis 1 is relevant to this dispute, it is worth noticing that the Bible doesn't specifically mention evolution, or even the idea of evolution, anywhere. We may still want to draw conclusions about evolution, but what we decide is not going to be the central point that was in the mind of the writer of Genesis. Group members who want to pursue this further may like to read Kirsten Birkett's books, *The Essence of Darwinism*, and *Unnatural Enemies* (which is on the relationship between science and Christianity).¹

The Bible does, however, have plenty to say about other gods, and here is where Genesis really helps us. Do other gods exist, and if they do, do they have the power to control the world or humans through their decisions and actions? The only possible answer, if we accept Genesis 1 as true, is that every single thing in creation, ourselves included, is subject to the ultimate power of the one God. If 1:14-18 is true, for example, then the sun, moon and stars are lights in the sky

1 Both of these books are available from Matthias Media.

placed there by God to divide night from day, and astrology and star signs are an irrelevant nonsense.

We should read Genesis first and foremost not for scientific theory, but for what it tells us about God and his relationship to the world.

Studying the passage

Before the first day (1:1-2)	
Form	Use
Day 1: Light (day and night)	Day 4: Lights in heaven
Day 2: Water and sky	Day 5: Fish and birds
Day 3: Land and vegetation	Day 6: Animals and humans
Day 7: God rests	

The table in the first question highlights the pattern and structure in the way the creation story is told. Likewise, question 2 shows that the Genesis account is highly structured in a way that emphasizes the ordering and purpose of God as he speaks to create. The basic structure is:

- i. “And God said ...”
- ii “Let there be ...”
- iii. “And it was so.”
- iv. “And there was evening and there was morning ...”

Not all parts of the pattern are repeated each day. For example, “And it was good” and “And God called” occur a number of times, but not on every occasion. But the group will easily be able to see a clear and deliberate pattern in the way the story is told.

The point of this is to see that creation is not a random mess. God creates a world with order and purpose, and it is good. It is not said that chaos is bad or evil, but there is enough in the story to see that chaos is not part of God’s creative purpose. Later in Genesis we will see that the undoing of God’s good order is a sign of his judgement.

The way the story is written suggests either that the account is not meant to

be strictly literal, or that, even if it is, there are more important points being made. The evening/morning pattern, in place even before the sun and moon and stars are created, draws attention to the ordered nature of God's world and the way he works in it. Again, these themes will become important.

So what do we learn? We learn that there is only one God. He is separate from his creation. The creation depends on him for its existence, and not the other way round. He is powerful, and he works to bring about exactly what he decides. God is not created; he has no beginning. He simply is, and because he is separate from his creation, the laws that might apply to creation don't apply to him. He rules over and orders all things.

We learn that God creates the world by his word. His word is powerful and effective. The power of God's word, seen in creation, is one of the reasons we can trust God's word in the promises he makes elsewhere. And we learn that the world is made by God. The world is not God, and it is not a part of God. The world depends on God and his powerful word for its order.

Question 4 addresses some of our world's current preoccupations—concerns that the writer of Genesis addresses because they seem to have been a feature of his world as well. As far as we can tell, Genesis was written with full awareness of other ancient creation stories, full of their own ideas about the power of other gods and astrological or spiritual forces. However, the points made in Genesis about the creation of the world and what happened are almost always the exact opposite of what those other creation stories seem to be saying. Here in Genesis 1:14-19, for example, the writer insists that the sun, moon and stars are nothing more than lights that serve a purpose in creation. They separate the night from the day. They don't control or influence the future. In a world in which the heavenly bodies were worshipped as gods and astrology was rife, Genesis 1 presents a stark contrast.

The writer's account helps us to see that God made the world for his own good purposes. God's world is not just neutral but good. From the moment it sprang into being, it existed and functioned in exactly the way that God intended. Evil had no part in creation when God made it. Genesis doesn't explain evil and why bad things happen. But there are certain facts that are set in place. We learn that God is good. We learn that God made the world good. It follows that there is no evil in God. God didn't create evil, nor did he make people (or any part of creation) evil. Later on in Genesis 3, we will see that God is not surprised by the appearance of evil, and that evil things and events are not outside his power.

Apart from this, however, we should be careful not to say more about evil than the Bible says—or at least, we should acknowledge that we are guessing.

Other religions make different claims—for example, that there is more than one god, or that God is present in everything. If Genesis is true, then these claims are false. God is separate from his creation, and there is only one of him.

The final question in this section points us to the New Testament, and to God's plan and promise of new creation. There will be no more mourning, crying or pain. The Lord Jesus will be at the centre of it, and we can be part of it by putting our trust in him. Revelation 21:5 says that those who are thirsty will be given the water of life by Jesus; it stresses that there is nothing that we do to get right with God. However, Revelation 21:7-8 tells us that putting our trust in Jesus means we need to change.



To finish

The point of this discussion is to help group members see creation as a good gift of God, as it is described in Genesis 1. It is given to us to care for and rule over well. One small thing to beware of is not to get sidetracked onto a discussion of overpopulation and whether or not we should stop having so many children. Rather, the discussion is intended to highlight how generous God is, and that a good way to respond is to receive the gifts of his creation with thankfulness. 1 Timothy 4:1-4 is a good summary of some of these ideas.

At the end of each section, there are suggestions for thanks and prayer. Feel free to integrate these suggestions into the group's normal prayer time.