

Lesson 1 | September 6, 2020

The Great Story Begins

Study Text: Genesis 1:1–31; 12:1–7; 21:1–7; 32:22–32; 45:1–5; 46:1–7; Exodus 3:6

Central Truth: God is both Creator and Sovereign over all, yet He is intimately involved in the lives of His people.

Key Verse: Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (KJV).

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Recognize God as the loving Creator who is always active in students' lives.
- Appreciate the role of Abraham and his descendants in Scripture's story of salvation through Christ.
- Submit to God's purpose for students' lives, surrendering to His lordship and guidance.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: The Bible is the most amazing book you will ever read. While it is a collection of many smaller books, it is a unified story of God's love for His people. This quarter provides an overview of both the Old and New Testaments that will serve as a foundation for the quarters to follow. (*Play the Unit 1 introduction video, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.*)

Opening Activity—Quick Bible Facts

Ask your students to name as many facts about the Bible as they can in the next two minutes. Write their responses on the board. You may hear the following:

The Bible contains sixty-six books total; thirty-nine Old Testament books; twenty-seven New Testament books; written by more than forty people over approximately 1,600 years; longest chapter is Psalm 119; shortest chapter is Psalm 117; shortest verse is John 11:35; the Bible includes Law, history, poetry, prophets, Gospels, and Epistles. The Bible is the best-selling book of all time, and it takes about seventy-five hours to read.

Did you know there is a great study Bible that is distinctively Pentecostal? Check out this website to see what's available: MyHealthyChurch.com/FireBible.

Say: In today's lesson, we begin a journey through the Old Testament, covering highlights from the Book of Genesis. This unit is not a thorough survey of the Old Testament, but an overview the story of the plan of God from the beginning until the time of the Messiah. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Bible was written by more than forty people over about 1,600 years. Yet within its diversity is unity of theme and purpose. The Book of Genesis forms the starting point for what follows throughout the Old and New Testaments. Many of the great doctrines of the Bible are introduced in Genesis.

The theme of Genesis reflects the theme of Scripture: the redemption of humanity from sin and the effects of the Fall. It establishes God as the sole Creator of all things, then proceeds with the story of God's interaction with His creation.

Part 1—God the Loving Creator

In the Beginning, God Created the Universe

Genesis 1:1–2

Say: The creation account demonstrates the creative power of God, introduces the Trinity, and presents God's love as He provided for the needs of people before He created them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis does not give us all the details of creation. But it does describe our powerful God, who created all things. The first words of Scripture are critical: "In the beginning God created . . ." (Genesis 1:1). God has always existed; the Creator preceded the creation. And so, the first five words of Genesis repudiate atheism, for they affirm the existence of God as Almighty, eternal Creator. This simple phrase also rejects materialism (the philosophy that only matter exists), for it distinguishes between God and His material creation. And, finally, the phrase establishes God as Creator of all, for "the heavens and the earth" (NIV) is a reference to all that exists in the material world. "In the beginning God created" is, therefore, a foundational truth of Christianity. Because God created the universe, it belongs to Him and He controls it (see Psalm 24:1–2; 95:3–5; Isaiah 48:12–13).

Genesis 1:2 draws our focus from the whole of creation specifically to planet earth. It was formless, empty, and dark—utterly uninhabitable. It seems that water covered the whole earth, and the Spirit of God hovered over the water.

Discuss

? Of all the things that God created, what is your favorite and why?

? In what ways do you see the Triune God in the creation account?

God's Work in Creation Is Orderly and Purposeful

Genesis 1:3–31

Say: Genesis clearly indicates that God's creation was orderly. He did not make the universe in a random or haphazard way. When we consider the way plants, animals, and humans are interdependent, we gain a bit of insight into the creative mind of God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 1:3–31 records immense creative activity: God said, God saw, God divided or separated, God called, God made, God set, God blessed. Here is the all-powerful God deeply involved in His creation.

The orderliness of creation is seen in its sequence. Note the relationship between the days. The first day He made light; the fourth day, light bearers. The second day He made the expanses of water and atmosphere; the fifth day, birds to fly in one expanse and fish to swim within the other. The third day He made dry land and vegetation; the sixth day, animals and humans to live on the land and eat the vegetation.

There is also a balance. Days one and two have one work each. Day three has two distinct works. Days four and five have one work each. Day six has two distinct works (which serves to emphasize that animals and humans are distinct from one another).

The progression of Genesis 1 leads to the creation of humanity in God’s image, referring in large part to the capability for righteousness and holiness (see Ephesians 4:22–24). Neither the universe nor humanity came by mere chance.

Resource Packet Item 1: God’s Orderly Creation

Distribute the work sheet. You may have students work in small groups to fill in the chart and answer the questions, or you may complete it as a class. (See answers below.)

Day 1 Light	Day 4 Lightbearers (sun, moon, stars)
Day 2 Water and atmosphere	Day 5 Birds and fish
Day 3 Dry land and vegetation	Day 6 Animals and man

Discuss

? What would you say to an unbeliever to affirm the existence of God as Creator?

Part 2—God Used a Chosen People To Carry Out His Plan

Abraham Followed God’s Direction

Genesis 12:1–3

Say: Genesis 1:31 says that when God finished His creation, He saw that it was “very good.” Then Adam and Eve chose to sin, plunging all of humanity into sin and bringing corruption into all of creation. But God had a plan by which humanity could find redemption. He chose Abraham to become the father of the nation from which the Messiah would be born—One who would die for the sins of the world. God made a covenant with Abraham, and Abraham trusted God’s direction even when he did not understand all that God was doing. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 3 records humanity’s fall into sin, which brought about the sinfulness of every human being. Moving through chapters 3–11, we see how violence and corruption led to God sending

the Flood to destroy the earth in Noah's time. Then God promised to never again destroy the earth by a flood. Yet as time went forward, humanity continued its march into wickedness. Redemption was needed, and God's answer to that is the central theme throughout the remainder of Scripture. The plan of redemption is prophesied in Genesis 3:15 and begins to take shape in Genesis 12, where Abraham was chosen by God to be the father—the first patriarch—of a covenant people through whom the whole world would be blessed by the Savior who would come (Genesis 12:1–3).

Genesis 12 is a transitional chapter, connecting humanity to the lineage of Abraham. God chose Abraham to begin a chosen nation that would prepare the way for the greater Seed of Abraham—Christ—who would bring blessing to the world. For the remainder of Scripture, this concept of God's people as Abraham's seed, or lineage, will be present. While we think of his descendants primarily as being the Jewish people, Gentile (non-Jewish) believers in God are also present throughout the Old Testament (i.e., Rahab, Ruth, Uriah). In Genesis 14, Abraham himself offered tithes to a Canaanite king and priest of God named Melchizedek.

In Abraham we are introduced to the great concept of faith in God and personal trust in His promises. God called Abraham to leave his homeland in Mesopotamia to go to an unnamed place of God's choosing (Genesis 12:1–3). That place was Canaan, several hundred miles to the southwest, which is largely the land we now know of as Israel. But God also gave Abraham a promise. He would become the father of a great nation through which God would demonstrate His love to the world (Exodus 19:5–6; Deuteronomy 7:6–9). The specifics of Abraham's story are well-known. But we must keep the bigger picture in view. God used Abraham to prepare the way for Christ. Indeed, the New Testament refers to all who follow Christ as children of Abraham (Romans 9:6–9; Galatians 3:6–11).

Discuss

? What did God ask Abraham to do that required him to trust God?

? What promise did God make to Abraham that would endure for generations to come?

? Has God ever asked you to step out in faith and do something that seemed illogical? What was it? How did you respond, and what was the result? (Share your response as well.)

Resource Packet Item 2: God's Covenants

Divide the class into groups of 2–4 people. Assign each group one of the covenants to read, then have each group report their findings to the class.

God Did the Miraculous To Advance His Plan

Genesis 21:1–7; 32:22–30

Say: God's Word reminds us that God can do anything. He had a plan to bring Christ, the Messiah, into the world through the nation of Israel, and He did the impossible to fulfill that plan. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

God had promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation. Yet Genesis 21 finds him and his wife, Sarah, childless and elderly. (He was 100 years old, and she was ninety.) But God miraculously gave them a son, Isaac. Isaac's name meant "laughter," a reminder of the joy that Isaac brought his parents. God kept His promise even when that required a great miracle.

God's promise also endured despite the failures of His people. Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, is a familiar example. When we hear of Jacob, we often think of his deception of Esau (see Genesis 26:34 through 28:9). But God later shaped Jacob into a man of persevering faith. In Genesis 32:22–31, God appeared in the form of a man and wrestled with Jacob. (Many scholars believe this was an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament.) It was ultimately a spiritual struggle, as Jacob desired God's blessing. He clung to the man even after suffering a painful injury. His perseverance brought about a name change to "Israel," meaning "one who struggles with God."

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remind us that God made a plan to redeem humanity, preserving that plan through seemingly impossible circumstances and flawed individuals.

Discuss

? What promise did God keep for Abraham and Sarah, and how does that promise relate to you?

? Have you ever received a promise from God, from His Word that you clung to when it seemed impossible? Share your testimony to encourage others.

? Many of the people God used were flawed. What were some of the faults of Abraham and his family? How can the faults of these individuals teach and encourage you?

Part 3—God Preserved His People and His Plan

Joseph's Trials Were Part of God's Plan

Genesis 45:1–8

Say: Joseph was Jacob's favored son. His older brothers sold him into slavery, but God used him to preserve the nation of Israel during a time of famine. The story of Joseph is a crucial part of God's plan to provide the Messiah for all people everywhere. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

Joseph was Jacob's eleventh son, and because he enjoyed Jacob's special favor, his ten older brothers became jealous of him. Out of this jealousy, they had sold him into slavery in Egypt. Yet what started as a tragic story became a beautiful account of God's care and preservation of the Promise, as recorded in Genesis 45:1–8. In Egypt, over the course of years, God enabled Joseph to ascend to a high position in government. He became the overseer of food provisions in preparation for a prophesied famine. Meanwhile, the famine led Jacob's sons to Egypt in search of food. Verse 7 is key: God had orchestrated all these circumstances in order to save the lives of Joseph's loved ones and preserve the family line.

In saving the lives of Jacob's descendants, God also preserved His plan for the nation of Israel. Nothing could nullify His covenant with Abraham—and His plan to bless every nation through his descendants.

Discuss

? How did Joseph get to Egypt?

? Why was it important for Joseph to be in Egypt when the famine came?

? What experience have you had where God orchestrated events to make sure you were in the right place at the right time? (Share your response, too.)

Even Egypt Was Part of God's Plan

Genesis 46:1–7; Exodus 3:6

Say: God sometimes moves us in location, career, or some other way that seems to be a detour for us. Previously in Genesis, God had directed Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, to leave Ur and follow Him. In chapter 46, God uprooted Jacob's whole family and moved them. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

In Genesis 46:1–7 the story of the patriarchs draws toward its conclusion with Jacob moving to Egypt, where he would escape famine and be with his beloved son Joseph, whom he had believed to be dead. Before Jacob moved to Egypt, he had received a name change (Israel), a reminder that he was the head of the family God had promised to make into a nation (see 35:10). The descendants would become as innumerable as the sands of the sea (see 22:17).

God was leading Israel (Jacob) step by step and appeared to him in a vision as the one true God. Israel did not need to be afraid to go to Egypt, for this was a necessary step in God's plan. The journey to Egypt was not just to obtain food. It was a stage in God's larger purpose for His people. Though many tests were yet to come, the Children of Israel would be preserved during the famine. As the years and centuries went by, Israel's descendants would face terrible trials and enter into slavery. Yet God would never leave them, for He was their God (Exodus 3:6). The great story of the Bible was unfolding.

Discuss

? Have you experienced events that could have discouraged you, yet God used them for a greater purpose? Give students opportunities to share testimonies of these events.

? When Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, there were seventy of them, including Joseph's sons, who had been born in Egypt (Genesis 46:26). By the time of the Exodus and wilderness wandering, the nation had grown to about 600,000 men, plus women and children (see Exodus 12:37). How does this relate to God's promise in Genesis 12:2?

Resource Packet Item 3: Fortunately or Thankfully

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to fill in the answers. Then ask a few of them to share their testimonies of how God has used fortunate or unfortunate events and situations for His purposes.

What is God Saying to Us?

Say: As we study Genesis, it is easy to get caught up in the details, but we must not miss the central message: God created all things. He is our Maker, and He loves us so much that when humanity fell, He enacted a plan to redeem us. He used people like Abraham and others to bring about His ultimate plan for our redemption.

God created us in His image, and Jesus reinforced this truth. When the Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus and asked Him about paying taxes to Caesar, He asked for a coin. He asked them whose image was on it. Of course, it was Caesar's. Jesus told them to give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's (see Matthew 22:21). You are made in God's image and, therefore, belong to Him. Ask God to help you reflect His image to everyone around you.

Living in Out Ministry in Action

- Invite your students to reflect on their lives and trust God with any difficult circumstances they are facing.
- Ask your students to find someone else to encourage this week regarding God's long-term plan. That may take the form of sharing the plan of salvation with an unbeliever or encouraging another believer who is struggling with difficult circumstances.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Recounting God's Preservation.
Nehemiah 9:5–15

Tuesday:

Glory and Power of God.
Psalm 33:6–9

Wednesday:

The Sovereignty of God.
Isaiah 40:12–17

Thursday:

The Eternal Word of God.
John 1:1–5,14

Friday:

Beginning of Salvation History.
Acts 7:2–8

Saturday:

The Great Invitation.
Revelation 22:12–14,16–17