

## GENESIS 1:1-3 | WHAT THE BIBLE IS ALL ABOUT

This guide is designed to be used for community groups discussions, but can easily be adapted for personal reflection.

### ENGAGE (15-20 MINUTES)

*Real Biblical community involves people “doing life together.” As much as we can, we want to create an atmosphere where people get to know one another, and feel comfortable sharing the ups, downs, and in-betweens of life. So take some time for people to get acquainted. A possible icebreaker question: Share a high and a low from the previous week. Or, rate your week 1-10. Or, make up one of your own.*

### REFLECTION AND STUDY (30-35 MINUTES)

**Opening:** I once heard a Bible scholar say that if he had to divide the Bible into two sections, he would break it up into Genesis 1-11, and everything else. A little uneven, perhaps, but it makes sense. The rest of the Bible is an answer to the problems posed in Genesis 1-11. To put it another way, the first eleven chapters of Genesis give us a lens through which to see and understand the rest of the Bible.

#### **Bible: Genesis 1:1-3**

1.) The Bible begins with God as the subject of the first sentence. Is this significant? How does it help set the stage for the rest of the Biblical storyline?

2.) Was the earth “without form and void” (v.2) before God began to create (v.1), or after? Why is this a significant question? You may want to look at Hebrews 11:3 for help with answer.

(Hint: See “Three Ways to Interpret the relationship between verse 1 and verse 2” at the end of this document.)

3.) What does v. 2-3 tell us about the means by which God creates?

4.) Read John 1:1-14. What parallels do you see with Genesis 1? Who is God’s creative Word?

5.) Read Colossians 1:15-17. How was Jesus involved in the creation of the world? Why was the world created?

#### **Article: Read the sermon summary on the next page (or hand it out for everyone to read).**

6.) Does anything stand out to you as helpful, challenging or confusing?

7.) In trying to understand what’s going on in your life, do you begin with God, or do you have another starting point? Josh mentioned 3 very practical ways to begin with God: daily Bible reading, prayer, and getting into community. Which of these do you need to emphasize in your life this week?

8.) “For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: it also depends on what sort of person you are” (C.S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*). How does Genesis 1-11 help you to “see well”?

### PRAYER (15 MINUTES)

Break into men and women for prayer. Share prayer requests and pray for one another.

## WHAT THE BIBLE IS ALL ABOUT

This week we talked about some themes from Genesis 1-11 that shape the way we think about who God is, who we are, what's wrong with the world, and what to do about it.

### 5 Great Realities from Genesis 1-11

1.) *God himself*: Genesis begins with God, and it really couldn't be any other way. The Bible tells us that God is the ground of all being – everything that exists only exists because he exists. If this is true, then we'll never really understand the meaning of life unless we begin by seeking God (Prov 9:10). It's like buttoning a shirt: if you start with the wrong button, you'll always be off.

2.) *The created world has meaning and purpose*: The world was made by God, and because it was made, it has meaning and purpose. Perhaps the most persuasive case for this was made by an atheist – Jean Paul Sartre. In his essay “Existentialism is a Humanism” Sartre uses the example of a paper-knife. A paper-knife has a designer, and the designer makes it with a purpose (to cut paper). The knife can be said to be good or bad only because it has a purpose (if it cuts paper, it is good; if it doesn't, it's bad). If humans were created by God, then they (like the paper-knife) were designed with a purpose. So we can talk about right and wrong, good and evil. But if there is no God, then there is no such thing as human nature, or right and wrong. As Dostoyevsky wrote: “If there is no God everything is permitted.”

3.) *The reality of human sin*: What is wrong with the world? How you answer that question determines what you will do to try and make the world better. The Bible says that sin has marred the world that God originally created as good. Genesis 3 tells us of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God. In chapter 4 the sin spreads from the parents to the children. And then throughout civilization, so that by the time we get to chapter 6, violence has filled the earth. In chapter 11, the first great civilization is founded and has as its first principle, rebellion against God.

4.) *God's judgment*: God is holy and just, and is not indifferent about the spoiling of his world. The Bible tells us that God judges sin. Sometimes that judgment is active, as when God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden, destroys the world in the flood, or scatters the people in Babel. At other times God's judgment is the removal of his blessing, allowing sin to run its course. Shame, guilt, violence, and death are realities in a world tainted by sin.

5.) *God's grace gets the final word*: Even in the most severe of judgments, Genesis points us to God's grace. Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden, but they are clothed by God and sent out with a promise that God will someday send a Redeemer (Gen 3:15). Cain is sent away, but is marked by God for his protection. God sends a flood but, in Noah, preserves a people. Shortly after Babel, God calls Abraham from among the scattered peoples and tells him that he will be blessed, and through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

## **THREE WAYS TO INTERPRET THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN V.1 AND V.2**

### **Help for Question #2**

#### **(Excerpt from Tim Keller's Genesis Study)**

a) The least likely interpretation reads v.2 as a contrast to v.1. This view translates: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, but then the earth became formless and void and dark, and God had to go back and create it all over." This is the so-called "Gap" theory which posits that the six days of (re-)creation occurred many years after an initial creation which was followed by some disaster. Some people try to place dinosaurs etc. in this "gap" between v.1 and v.2. But there is no grammatical basis for this view. There is no "But" to begin v.2 nor is there any reason to translate the verb "**was**" as "became". This is an example of how we can try to force a text to answer questions it is not addressing. I mention it because this view has surprising circulation.

b) A more likely interpretation reads v.2 as a parenthetical statement to a clause completed in v.3. This view translates: "When God began to create, (the earth being without form and void), God said..." This is not impossible grammatically, but it is not the most natural way of reading, and we have to ask the question — if God did not create the original "stuff" of the earth, where did it come from? Hebrews 11:3 and many other passages tell us that there was no universe at all before God spoke. See also John 1:3, Col.1:16, Rom.11:36. If the earth were "already there" then God did not create absolutely everything, and that would compromise the absoluteness of his power and authority.

c) The most likely interpretation is that v.2 is the result of v.1. This view translates: "God created the heavens and the earth. But after the initial creative act, the earth was still shapeless and empty. Then God proceeded to say..."