



WEEK OF JANUARY 7, 2024
(COVERS READINGS FROM JANUARY 7-13)

Overview

The following information is provided as a basic orientation to reading the Bible. Feel free to add to it and use it in any way that is helpful for your group. Also, feel free to make copies of these pages for members of your group!

This week, we dove into the first book of the Bible, Genesis. We began the week with God's creation of everything—the Heavens and the Earth, the Sun and the Moon, all creatures who walk, swim, crawl, or fly, including human beings. In Genesis 2, we found a more earthy, intimate telling of the creation, with God “fashioning” the humans and planting a Garden for them to inhabit. It doesn't take long for God's “good” creation to go awry, as chapter 3 narrates the built-up distrust of God, thanks to the serpent's cunning words. God finds out that the humans have eaten from a forbidden tree in the garden, and the consequences begin immediately, as they realize they are naked. God announces the effects of their sin, and drives the humans out of the garden—but not before clothing them first.

In Genesis 6-9 we find the telling of Noah and the Ark. As the consequences of sin multiply, God grieves and regrets having made humanity, and so God decides to destroy the creation. However, God favors Noah and directs him to build an ark—a large boat—to keep himself alive, along with his family and two of each living thing (chapter seven indicates that Noah kept seven pairs of each clean animal—those acceptable for sacrifice—and one pair of each of the unclean animals). Noah, his family, and all the other creatures endure the days of rain and flooding, and eventually find themselves on dry land again. God then blesses Noah and his sons with the same command he had given to the humans and animals in creation: “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” God sets a bow in the sky and declares it to be a sign of the covenant between God, Noah, and every living creature for generations to come. As part of that covenant connection, God declares that there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth.

In Genesis 11, creation has already gone awry again, and humans are determined to “make for ourselves a name,” so they build a tower whose top “will reach into heaven.” God comes down to see the city and the tower they have made, and decides to confuse their language so that humans will not understand each other. The humans are scattered over the face of the earth, and they stop building the city.

Genesis 12 tells of God's call to Abram to leave Haran and go “to the land which I will show you.” God promises that Abram will be blessed and his name will be great, and by that God declares that he will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Abram went as God called, taking his wife, Sarai, and nephew, Lot.

During a famine, Abram fled to Egypt, but his deception of Pharaoh got him kicked out. Chapter 15 is an intimate conversation between Abram and God, in which God makes a covenant with Abram, promising that his descendants will be many, and God will give them a promised land.

In Genesis 21 we find God “making good” on the promise to make Abram (now Abraham) the father of many, as Sarai (now Sarah) gives birth to a son, Isaac. Sarah then asks Abraham to send away Hagar and her son, so that Isaac will be the only heir. God assures a distressed Abraham that God will make a nation out of Hagar’s son, as well. In chapter 22, the promise is challenged when God tests Abraham, asking him to offer his son as a sacrifice. Abraham does as the Lord asks, but at the last moment, the angel of the Lord stops him, and reveals that God has provided a ram for the sacrifice instead. God reaffirms God’s blessing on Abraham because he did not withhold his son.

I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.

Genesis 22:17–18

General Discussion Questions

Use any or all of the following questions, depending how much time you have:

- How familiar were you with this week’s readings? Was there anything that surprised you?
- What do you learn about God from these readings? What do you learn about humanity, or about human nature? How did the authors of these writings understand their relationship with God?
- What passages or aspects of these readings give you comfort or assurance? What passages or aspects of these readings do you find difficult to accept?
- Are there any particular passages that you want to study in-depth?

This Week’s Discussion Questions

Genesis 1–2 | In the creation, we find God choosing not to hold on to power, but rather to give some power away to the creatures—especially humans. As one commentator suggests, “In spite of the risks involved, God chooses the way of less than absolute control, for the sake of a relationship of integrity in which power is shared with that which is other than God.” Where in the text do you see that happening? What are the results? What does it teach us about the relationship that God sets up between God and humans?

Genesis 12 | One author says, “God calls Abram to a loyalty and commitment that transcends even his family ties, the most important of all relationships in the ancient world. But this command comes with a powerful promise.” Does God call people today? In what ways? How would you describe your calling in life?

Closing Prayer

Loving God and Creator of all,

We come to you today deeply grateful for your creation. As we look around us, we are amazed at the greatness and majesty of all that you made. As we sing praises of how majestic is your name in all the earth, may we show our love and reverence to you by listening for your call and following you in faith. Amen.