

# A greater hope and power

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Very warm welcome. Lovely to see everyone at the start of a new growth group year. I see people are sitting in growth groups. I think the idea was not to name and shame some groups as opposed to others, but we thought it would just help groups to sort of gel at the start of the new year and so on.

So I hope that's helpful. Obviously Genesis is a big book, and so one of two suggestions, would it be useful to have an introductory evening?

Hence this evening. I'm not going to go through Genesis. Chapter 1 is about. Chapter 2, that would be terribly dull, wouldn't it? It's kind of all the way up to Chapter 50.

What I'm hoping to do is to give us a bit of a steer. And if you're a walker or an orienteer, you have your compass, don't you? So what I'm really hoping is that we'll go away from this evening feeling we've been given a compass so that when we get lost, when we get stuck in Chapter 14 or 22, whatever it is, actually we can come back to this evening, get our compass out again, and remind ourselves of what Genesis is all about, just so that actually through the year we keep being excited and fresh about a big book of the Bible rather than getting bogged down on this.

So that's the aim this evening. So why don't I pray as we begin? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you very much for the enormous privilege to study this fantastic big book at the very beginning of the Bible this year.

[ 1 : 3 7 ] We thank you that all Scripture is God-breathed. Thank you for your spirit enabling the author to write this. And we pray, Heavenly Father, this evening, please would you help us just to get our bearings such that this book might be truly profitable for us individually and together as a church this year.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Can everyone hear me? Yeah, everyone can hear. I will try and speak.

I was speaking at lunchtime and tomorrow lunchtime, so I don't want to bellow too much, but I'll have a go. If you really can't hear, then you may have to... I'll take all the extraneous noise.

Okay. If you really can't hear, then you may have to move. Okay. Has everyone got a handout? Everyone's got a handout?

Excellent. You need a handout, a Bible, and a pen. And I'm going to do a fair bit of talking early on. There are then going to be two bits of group work in the middle.

[ 2 : 5 3 ] First of all, who wrote Genesis? Well, in the first century at the time of the Lord Jesus, it was widely believed that Moses wrote it. I'm not going to go any more into that. There's more in commentaries if you're interested.

More importantly, God wrote it. So Matthew chapter 9, verse 19, verse 5. These words of the Lord Jesus. I've got them there on the outline.

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause? He answered, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore, quoting from Genesis 2, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

Now turn to Genesis chapter 2, verse 24. And just turn to your neighbor, and tell your neighbor who is speaking in Genesis 2, 24.

Hopefully we've spotted that it's the author.

[ 4 : 1 7 ] It's the narrator of Genesis who is speaking, and yet what does the Lord Jesus say? He says it's the creator who's speaking. Now, of course, that is completely consistent, isn't it, with our understanding of the Bible, 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16, that all scripture is breathed out by God.

So just, and it's almost incidental in the way that the Lord Jesus says it, but it just confirms his assumption that all scripture is God speaking. What is the structure?

Well, I put the structure there on the outline, so turn to chapter 2, verse 4. And the structure is, well, you get a whole series of these.

So chapter 2, verse 4. These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they are created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. And then chapter 5, verse 1. This is the book of the generations of Adam. And then chapter 6, verse 9. These are the generations of Noah. And then chapter 10, verse 1. These are the generations and so on.

[ 5 : 29 ] So this little phrase, these are the generations, is the way the book is structured. And each of these are the generations then sort of introduces what follows.

In other words, the structure of Genesis is around a series of family trees, which you may not think to yourself sounds very exciting, but we'll see more about that later on.

What's the book about? Well, in broad outline, chapter 1, verse 1, you may know that in the ancient Near East, books were often named after their first words.

So the word Genesis translates the Hebrew of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1, in the beginning. So Genesis is a book of beginnings, of origins.

Origins of the cosmos, the whole world, chapter 1, 1, 2, chapter 2, verse 3. The origins, beginnings of humanity, and the growth of the nations, chapter 2, verse 4 to 11, 32, including, of course, what is wrong with our world, what is wrong with humanity.

[ 6 : 40 ] And then chapter 12, verse 1 onwards, the origins, the beginnings of God's people, or the church, as we see God's promise to Abraham. So it's a book about origins.

Ultimately, the book of Genesis is about the gospel, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I put a few New Testament references there, just so we can get a sense of that.

John, chapter 5, verse 39, the Lord Jesus says, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me.

So Jesus is saying, you read the Old Testament, and what is the main, who is the main character of the Old Testament? The Lord Jesus, they bear witness about him.

Romans chapter 15, verse 8, for I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.

[ 7 : 42 ] So the patriarchs, the sort of collective name for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the promises made to them are fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. In other words, to fully understand Jesus, there's a sense in which we need to understand Genesis.

Or Galatians chapter 3, verse 7 to 9, the Apostle Paul says, know then that it's those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, in you shall all the nations be blessed.

So then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. In other words, the Apostle Paul is saying that God preached the gospel, and specifically the gospel of justification by faith as a free gift.

to Abraham first. So it's not a kind of newfangled New Testament thing, but actually it's pretty near the beginning of Genesis thing.

Abraham, in other words, not the father of the Jewish nation, as he is so often referred to, but actually the father of the church. So there's also, therefore, a sense in which to fully understand the gospel, we need Genesis.

[ 8 : 58 ] Let's think about whose agenda. Let's think about agendas. Now, we all bring baggage to a Bible study.

So here's my baggage. So here I am going to my growth group on a Tuesday evening, and here is my baggage.

And in my bag, I've got all sorts of bits and pieces of baggage, and it kind of weighs it down a bit, and it's really full of questions. And I've got masses of questions, masses of baggage, when it comes to Genesis.

So, you know, questions like, are the seven days of Genesis chapter one literal, or are they metaphorical? You know, what about dinosaurs?

Where do they fit in? Were there other people, you know, living in the garden, or perhaps just outside the garden, when Adam and Eve, or about the same time that Adam and Eve were created?

[10:07] What about the flood? You know, did it actually happen? Why do people live so long? You know, hundreds, and I don't want to live that long, but, you know, sort of six, seven, eight hundred, why do people live so long?

And did they live so long? And, you know, how tall was the tower? Endless lists. And you see, what I have, I have my rucksack that I bring along to my growth group Bible study, and what do I do with my rucksack and all my questions?

Well, I just plonk it on the table, and it just kind of sits there on the table, dominating the study. And my agenda, really, as I've come to the study, is to have my questions answered.

And because I've just plonked them on the table, then everyone else in the group, well, they can't really ignore it, because it's just sitting there on the table. And you see, what happens to the Bible study?

Actually, I've come with my agenda, and if I've had my questions answered in the study, then I'll go away at the end of the study, a happy bunny. If I haven't had my questions answered in the study, I'll go away feeling a bit fed up.

[11:16] But can you see what I'm doing there? I'm coming with my own agenda, with my own stuff, which I just kind of dump, rather than actually, of course, the most important question, whenever we come to any book of the Bible, is that, you know, the most important question of all is to say, what is God's agenda?

What is the Holy Spirit's agenda? Why did the Holy Spirit cause this book of the Bible to be written? I'll remove that so you can take some notes.

So, now obviously, some of those questions are important questions to ask, aren't they? So, can I just make one or two recommendations, if we want to dig around with some of those questions?

Okay, first of all, Henri Blocher, French, Henri Blocher, in the beginning, the opening chapters of Genesis is worth reading, if you want to think about some of these, bigger questions in Genesis. John Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World*, is also very helpful. And if you feel that we go through Genesis chapters 1 to 4 too quickly, and you want to think a little bit more about the sort of agenda, God's agenda for Genesis 1 to 4, then Alistair Payne's book, *The First Chapters of Everything*, how Genesis 1 to 4 explain our world, is excellent.

[12:47] Let me just read that quote I put on the outline from Derek Kidner. The interests and methods of scripture and science differ so widely, they are best studied in any detail apart.

Their accounts of the world are as distinct, and each as legitimate, as an artist's portrait, and an anatomist's diagram, of which no composite picture will be satisfactory, for their common ground is only in the total reality to which they both attend.

So, what do we do with the rucksack? Well, take it off the table. Please don't come to Growth Group insisting your own questions are answered, and derail the study.

They may be your questions, but actually they won't necessarily be everyone else's questions. Or, to use a driving metaphor, if we don't like rucksack metaphors, stick to the main road of the book. Okay? And really, the rest of this evening is aimed at helping us to stick to the main road. So, let's think, about, over the page, about Genesis in God's unfolding plan.

[14:05] And turn, if you will, to Genesis chapter 15. And, could someone with a nice, loud voice read Genesis 15, verses 13 to 16?

So, I'm happy to do that. Welcome, you guys. Genesis 15, 13 to 16. Someone happy to read? James, well done.

Thank you. Then the Lord said to Abraham, Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace.

You shall be buried in a good old age, and they shall come back here in the fourth generation. The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. Thanks, James. These are important verses because they show that God has a whole plan for what is about to unfold, both in Genesis and also in Exodus.

[15:20] Julian, there's a chair here, and there's one over there as well. So notice in those verses that Abraham's descendants will leave in Egypt for four hundred years.

God will then bring them out, and he'll bring them into the land that he promised Abraham in Genesis chapter 15. In other words, there's a whole unfolding plan of what is going to happen as

God takes his people eventually to Egypt and then brings them out of Egypt and then back to the land he has promised.

We saw something of that, didn't we, in God's Big Picture course last term. I hope we found that really exciting and really helpful as we trace through the Bible those three themes of God's people in God's place and under God's rule.

And I thought it'd be helpful if we just kind of narrowed in just a little bit in Genesis itself and just saw how those three themes actually develop a little bit more within the book itself. So you'll see there there's a table, and what I'd like us to do around our tables is to spend ten minutes or so in our groups looking at some of those passages.

So can I suggest that this table does Genesis 2, Genesis 3, Genesis 12, Genesis 15, Genesis 17, Genesis 50 at the end.

[16:51] You guys can choose which one you want to go for. And once you've done your first passage, then go on to the next one. And just one thing to say, so some passages you'll see where God's people now are in terms of God's people, God's place, God's rule.

Other passages will be talking about what God is going to do in the future in terms of God's people, God's place, God's rule. And then if you could appoint a spokesperson as well who can succinctly summarise, then that would be really helpful for everyone else in the group.

Sorry. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.