# IN THE BEGINNING

## tabernacle:penarth

5 studies for small groups on Genesis chapters 1 to 3

# In The Beginning, God...

Five studies for small groups in the Book of Genesis chapters 1 to 3

Page

	Introduction	1
1.	Perspectives	5
2.	Genesis 1 to 3: an overview	10
3.	Genesis chapter 1 in detail	16
4.	Genesis chapter 2 in detail	20
5.	Genesis chapter 3 in detail	23

The writers of these studies are: Roger Grafton (studiy 1), David Evans (study 2), Cedric Longville (study 3), Jonathan Bugg (study 4) and John Weaver (study 5)

### Introduction

As a congregation Tabernacle is surprisingly diverse. In tradition, theology, ecclesiology and preferences there are a wide range of people and practices. We have traditional Baptist members who are Baptist by conviction; we have people who have worshipped at Baptist churches all their life, but more by accident than by conviction; we have people who have backgrounds in the Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Brethren, Pentecostal and Presbyterian churches. We have people who were brought up in Christian homes and have been believers for as long as they can remember and we have members who became believers at a much later stage in life. We have people who love traditional hymns played on the organ and those who love modern songs played as loud as possible on the drums and guitars; We have a large number of people in their 80's and 90's and a large number of people in their teens. In fact we have people of almost every description. The only area we are fairly monochrome is in skin colour, and that is more of a reflection of the area we live in than anything else.

In the area of theology we also have a very diverse congregation. Some members are what we would call 'conservative evangelical', others 'charismatic', others are more 'middle of the road evangelical' in their beliefs or 'new/emerging evangelical' and one or two others are even happy to describe themselves as 'liberal'. We also have one or two Roman Catholics who worship with us because they love the fellowship, children's work and worship but who in their heart of hearts are still 'sacramentalists.' These people are still communicant members of the Catholic Church, but sneak off to Tabs from time to time for a 'fix' of our worship style! If you think that planning and leading worship in this kind of setting can be a bit of a challenge, then you should think how difficult it is to teach at Tabs. Almost anything you say is going to be liked by some people whilst others will passionately disagree with you. How do we hold a church like Tabs together when it comes to discussing difficult or controversial matters? John Stott once said that the problem for evangelicals is that we have "a pathological tendency to fragment." (John Stott, Evangelical Truth: a personal plea for unity, integrity and faithfulness. IVP, 2005) In the same book Stott contends that when Paul writes to the churches pleading for unity, he is not on the one hand calling for unity at any price nor is he, on the other hand, calling for uniformity of belief and practice. Rather, he says, it is "Unity in the Gospel, in the evangelical essentials as we stand side by side in the struggle to advance the Gospel faith." Too often, Stott says, we fail in the 'final apologetic' of love for one another and allow differences of theology to cause division. His call is for the church to stand together around the authority of scripture whilst loving each other and striving for unity when we disagree over 'secondary doctrines.'

In his book *Mapping Postmodernism: A survey of Christian Options* (IVP 2003) Robert Greer builds on what Stott has to say and argues for a need to develop a two-tiered system which divides the essentials of orthodoxy from the particularities of different traditions and readings of scripture. The top tier matches the creeds of the early church and defines the essentials of what makes for orthodox Christianity whilst the bottom tier corresponds to the distinctives of particular theological positions which whilst orthodox, we might disagree upon.

When we come to reading the first three chapters of the Book of Genesis and start talking about creation, the need for Stott's 'final apologetic of love for one another' becomes essential. The need to understand the difference between what is essential to our faith and what is important but secondary becomes really important. The reason is that within the body of Tabernacle there are many different opinions and positions: Some believe in a literal six-day creation which happened relatively recently (in time measured in thousands of years ago rather than billions) whilst others believe that the creation narratives are poems written to describe a process that God initiated but which has taken billions of years to reach this point. Some people would describe themselves as proponents of 'intelligent design' whilst others are evolutionists who say that Genesis 1 to 3 are mythological in nature and are an attempt by the early Israelites to explain their understanding of the creator God they had encountered and put their faith in.

This is a wide spectrum of belief! Do we all believe that the scriptures are authoritative? Yes, I believe we do. Do we all believe that God became flesh at the incarnation, died on a cross, rose again from the dead and ascended to heaven? Yes, I think so. Do we all understand the need for a personal faith and a faith response to the Gospel story in order to receive God's offer of salvation in Jesus? I hope so! Do we all agree on issues of creation, science, geology and archaeology? No we don't - but we are still united in the 'first tier' essentials we do agree about. Our essential faith binds us together in love and unity around the person of Jesus.

I have wanted to do a study series on Genesis 1-3 for many years, but have held off because of the controversial nature of some of the subjects. As I cast my eye over the lists of small groups and who are members of each group I have wondered how we would handle the disagreements and debates which are inevitable. Every single group has people who would hold differing positions on these subjects (well, there is one group where there is a possibility that everyone might agree - but I'm not saying which group it is!) However, I think that the church is now in a place where it can start to honestly and openly discuss some of the issues raised by studying the early chapters of Genesis and now is the time to do it.

Of the five studies in this series I have written 1 and I have asked 4 other people to write the others. We come from different theological positions and understandings of the Book of Genesis, but want to work together to explore the complex issues of the creation narratives.

We are agreed that the Book of Genesis is divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit and authoritative in the life of the church. We agree that the creation story reveals the power, majesty, nature and authority of the creator God and his deep love for the creation - and we want to share some of that revelation with you!

> Roger Grafton April 2013

# 1. PERSPECTIVES

by Roger Grafton

The Bible is not one "book," it is a "library" of sixty-six books that were written over a period of hundreds of years by many different authors. These authors were inspired in their thinking and writing by the Holy Spirit. Thus the Bible is the inspired Word of God but it also has the human "touch" from its authors. Paul is different than David, who is different than James or John. Some scripture is historical, recording events that happened. Some is apocalyptic revealing something which is hidden or unknown. Some of it is poetic using beautiful language to reveal the heart of God. Some is Law revealing God's way of living in community. Some is prophesy pointing towards God's plan for the future. Some is Gospel, revealing in the written word the living Word of God (Jesus). Some of it is epistles-personal letters to the early church, and other parts are what is called wisdom literature, focussing on philosophical questions about the meaning of life. These different styles and purposes of writing create an incredible depth and texture to the Bible. As we read it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we can find layers of meaning are revealed to us. As we grow and mature we can read the same passages over and over again and yet find new meaning and depth to them each time.

When we read the creation narratives of Genesis 1 to 3 we need to be aware of these layers of complexity and texture. As we grapple with the text we need to be asking ourselves what we know about the author (or authors), what style they were writing in, what was their purpose in writing down the text, and what is God's purpose for us as we read it today. Once we begin to get some perspective on what it is we are reading, we can start to grapple with how we are to understand it and apply it to our lives today. "ALL scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God<sup>I</sup> may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. " This is as much true of Genesis as any other part of the Bible!

**Read Genesis chapter 1** as a group, maybe taking a few verses each to share out the load! **Now read Genesis chapter 2:1-7.** 

- A Have you ever noticed that there is not one creation story in Genesis, but two? The account of how God created the heavens and the earth is given twice. Each account tells the same story but with a slightly different emphasis and details. Why do you think this is?
- What is the name given to the 'divine being' in Genesis chapter 1 and what is his name from chapter 2 verse 4 onwards? Why might they be different? (If your Bible has translation notes in the preface, they might help! The 'Going Deeper' section at the end of the study has more details)
- Who do you think wrote Genesis, and why did they write it?
  What form of literature is it?
- ✤ There is possibly going to be a difference of opinion amongst the members of your group about who wrote Genesis and why they wrote it. There is almost certainly going to be a difference of opinion about whether we should read it literally or not! How essential is it that we agree upon what we believe about creation and what the Bible says about it?
- ♥ What areas of theology and doctrine we must absolutely agree upon as believers? What are the fundamental matters that we must believe in order to be a Christian? Are there other areas we can disagree upon but still be in fellowship with one another? What are these areas? (Gifts? Tongues? Women? Versions of the Bible?)

The main reason that any discussion of the accounts of creation given in the Bible tend to be controversial are to do with whether they are

'true' or not and whether they should be read 'literally' or not. Many Christians feels that science, particularly geology and evolutionary sciences, are at odds with the Genesis accounts of creation. In 1859 Charles Darwin published "On the origin of the species" which was to provide the foundation for evolutionary biology. At the time geology was very much in an infant state and there was surprisingly little opposition to Darwin's ideas from theologians or rejection of the creation accounts by scientists. Many thinkers saw evolution as purposeful and evidence of a design behind creation and interpreted natural selection as instruments of God's design. Darwin himself made several references to 'creation' in the first edition of his book. and the final sentence of the second edition was "life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one" However, fairly quickly people began to realise that whilst the book barely hinted at human evolution. Darwin's theories led to a position that might be at odds with a literal reading of Genesis 1 to 3. As evolutionary biology developed alongside the newly emerging sciences of geology and cosmology, controversy ensued! How are Christians to read and understand the Bible's version of creation alongside apparently contradictory scientific views? Is the Bible true and reliable or not? Lets think for a moment about biblical ways of conveying truth...

#### Read Matthew 21:33-46

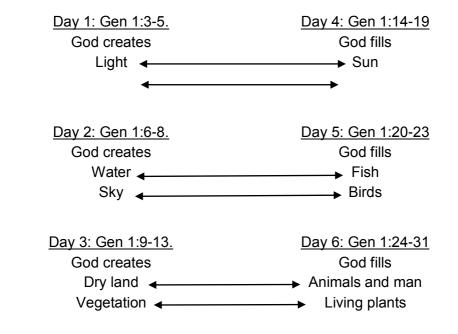
- Jesus begins this story by saying, "listen to another parable." What is a parable? Was there ever a real landowner who planted a literal vineyard, or is Jesus making up a story to illustrate truth about the Kingdom?
- What is the parable about? Is it about vineyards and tenants or is it about something else? The chief priests and the Pharisees heard the story and thought it was about something else! (verse 45)

- ▶ Is this parable to be taken literally or figuratively? Is it true?
- ✤ Think about other parables that Jesus told: was there ever literally a man who had an enemy who sowed weeds into his wheat field (Mat 13:24-30) or a man who sold everything to buy a field with treasure hidden in it (13:44-46)? Is it essential that these parables are literally true or not? Can these parables be true, even if the events in them are not?

**Read Ezekiel 23:1-4 and 18-24** (Not always a comfortable read, but it is in the Bible!)

♥ What is this about? Is the prostitution, adultery and idolatry of the two sisters literal or is it a metaphor for something else? Did these lurid events ever happen, or are they an illustration about God's relationship with the adulterous nation of Israel? Is this passage scripture? Is it prophesy? Is it truth? Is it literally true?

Now look again at Genesis chapter 1 in the following table:



This is a ancient poetic form called a chiastic structure and a poetic

style called parallelism - we saw it in the studies in Daniel.

If Gen 1 was written as a poem, does that affect how we read it? Cane poems be 'truth' in what they say?

✤ Do you believe the Genesis story to be true? Do you think it is a literal account or a poetic one?



Historically evangelical Christians have held to the belief that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible. Whilst there are many references to 'the Law of Moses' in both the Old and the New Testament and Jesus himself talked about "the book of Moses." (Mk 12:26), it is a huge leap to go from this to claim that Moses also wrote the book of

Genesis. However, in the 19th and 20th centuries theologians began to propose that there may have been several writers or groups of writers of the Pentateuch and that their writings were brought together by an editor(s) around 400BC to form what we now call the Pentateuch. They came to this conclusion by looking at the types of words used and the way these words were put together. So, for example, in Genesis 1 the word Elohim is used as the name of God. In Genesis 2 the words "Yahweh Elohim" (Lord God) are used whilst in Genesis 4 it becomes just "Yahweh" (Lord). Was the writer just inconsistent or was this (and other examples) evidence of more than one writer? This opened up new and exciting possibilities for academics: Could Genesis 1-3 be the work of several authors brought together later? Could it have been produced after the Babylonian exile where Jews had been in contact with Babylonian creation stories? Was Genesis intended to be an accurate historic account, or is it what the Rabbis call *Midrash* (the telling of stories that explore truth and ethics)? It is interesting to note that Most Jews do not read the Bible literally. There is no dogma in Judaism. Judaism is a religion of action and proper behaviour, not belief. For a Jew, the question of whether Genesis 1-3 is true or not is irrelevant! "Does it change the way we live," they ask instead.

# 2. In the Beginning God...

#### Read Genesis 2: 15 to 3:15

*'In the beginning God...'* This introductory phrase opens up a journey of discovery. 'God', 'Elohim' – who exactly is He and what does He have to say to us about the ultimate questions of life? Where did our universe come from? Why are we here? Why do we have to die?

These are questions that cannot be answered by any human being. Historians record what people have seen or experienced in the past; scientists observe what is observable and may suggest how things might have begun. However, neither can tell us why it all began and whether the universe as it exists has any meaning.

Genesis is the foundational book for the whole of the Bible and most, if not all, biblical truths are included here, at least in embryo form. The first six chapters are all quoted in detail in the New Testament and all eight major New Testament writers refer to the book of Genesis in some way. There are important 'first mentions', for example God (1:1), good (1:4), man (1:26), work (2:2), evil (2:9), knowledge (2:17), woman (2:22). The first mentions set out principles; what follows elsewhere in the Bible adds detail.

The first three chapters deal with some matters which are at the heart of our faith. There's the 'fall' (Chapter 3) and God's plan for redemption and putting the tempter (the 'you' in 3:15) in his place.

Other parts of these chapters deal with the institution of marriage, which is foundational to society. In Genesis 2:20, the words 'suitable helper' describe the requirements for a wife for Adam. In Hebrew, this is *ezer kenegdo*. Whilst there are no exact parallel words in English, *kenegdo* means 'alongside him, opposite him, a counterpart to him – to ensure, in the spiritual or relationship with God context, he is kept safe. The word

'ezer' denotes 'active intervention on behalf of someone', especially in military contexts. So, what is envisaged is a very important and a very challenging role. Does your view of marriage reflect this ideal?

Can we take such words literally? Let's look at Genesis 1:19-20. It's interesting: it says that Adam named each living creature. Here are examples of the Hebrew words for some commonplace creatures:

elephant	פיל	[peel]	with a mouth that is a hand and a staff'
eagle	נשר	[ne-sher]	'a living prince or warrior'
dog	כָּלֶב	[ke-lev]	'all heart'
flea	פַּרְעוֹש	[par-osh]	'a mouth of evil teeth'

If you had been Adam, what would you have called these animals? This is a simple and maybe a 'fun' example but can we take it literally? (You may like to consider your answer after reading the section on 'Going Deeper'). If we are persuaded here, is there any reason why we should not take the whole of Genesis 1-3 literally? Are there consequences if we do not take it literally?

These questions inevitably lead onto whether we accept that the world as we know it was created in six literal days as described in Genesis 1. Think carefully! Is there anything that you know that is a provable fact that goes against what the Genesis account says or are your reasons like the 'broken cisterns' in Jeremiah 2:13 (read this verse in its context). Think also about the chorus we sometimes sing in church 'Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing that He cannot do' – would you agree that this chorus has a special place for a conviction creationist?

The final part of the study is to consider how 'Paradise Lost' in Genesis becomes 'Paradise Regained' in the book of Revelation (you may not have time to cover this material when you meet together – it's included for you to refer to it later). There are similarities which add to our understanding of the original world that God created:

#### Genesis (Original world)

**Revelation (Final world)** 

Division of light and	1:4	No more night	21:25
Division of land and sea	1:1	No more sea	21:1
Rule of sun and moon	1:1	No need for sun or moon	21:23
Man in a prepared	2:8,	Man in a prepared city	21:2
Tree of life in the middle	2:9	Tree of life on each side of	22:2
River flowing out of	2:1	River flowing from God's	22:1
Eden Gold in the land	0 2:1	throne Street of gold in the city	21:21
Aromatic resin and onyx	2:1	All manner of precious	21:19
gems God walking in the	2 3:8	stones God dwelling with his	21:3

A number of other comparisons could be made between these two parts of the Bible; one of the more striking ones would be the characteristics of the world after the fall compared to those in the new or eternal world in Revelation.

Genesis	(world	after the	fall)
---------	--------	-----------	-------

Revelation (new or eternal world)

Redemption promised Satan opposing	3;15 3:15	Redemption realised Satan banished	5:9,10 20:10
Painful childbirth and toil	3:16,1 7	No more pain or sorrow	21:4
Cursed ground	7 3:17	No more curse	22:3
Thorns and thistles	3:18	No more pain	21:4
Eating plants of the	3:18	Eating fruit from tree of life	22:2
Sweat on the brow	3:19	Tears wiped away	21:4
Returning to dust	3:19	No more death	21:4
Garments of skins	3:21	Fine linen, white and clean	19:8
Banished from the garden	3:23	Free entry to the city	22:14
Kept from the tree of	3:24	Access to the tree of life	22:14
Wickedness on the	6:5	Nothing impure will enter	21:27

Now that you've been through this study, ask yourselves the following questions:

- ✤ Do you agree that Genesis 1-3 is about physical reality and not just interesting stories and theological teaching?
- ✤ If the days of creation are lost in so called 'geological ages' extending over millions of years, would the gospel message be undermined at its foundation because it puts death, disease, thorns and suffering before the fall?
- ✤ Returning to Jeremiah 2:13, if alternatives to a literal interpretation are theories, how different are they to the 'broken cisterns'?



#### Adam spoke Hebrew

Hebrew was almost certainly the original language in which God addressed Adam, Eve and the prophets. The argument to establish this point is clear from Scripture. Firstly, consider Scripture passages that are built upon the order of the

letters of the *Hebrew* alphabet, e.g. Psalm 119 as well as Proverbs 31:10-31 and the book of Lamentations. Psalm 119 is truly remarkable; it has 176 verses which are broken down into 22 separate sections each of which is called by one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and, within each of these sections, all the verses (without exception) begin with that letter of the alphabet. This feature doesn't end there; each letter is in itself a 'word picture' that also describes the content of the section; for example, the word picture for *beth* (vv 9 to 16) means 'home' and the '*word*' in v.11 (I have hidden your *word* in my heart) actually means 'what the mother has instilled' in bringing up the young man. How can we conclude other than that God is truly Almighty, all knowing and all wise when it comes to compiling His instruction manual. When these passages are translated into any other language, these alphabetical arrangements no longer exist.

There is also the derivation of Scriptural names, the first in the passage, 'And the Lord God formed *Adam*' (Gen 2:7), where Adam's name is derived from the *earth* out of which he was created. Another instance is in the verse, 'she shall be called Woman' (Gen 2:23), a name derived from that for *man*, since she was taken out of him. You can find other examples in the footnotes to most Bibles; examples would include *Cain*, *Seth* and *Peleg* and so on.

This is not so in other early languages such as Aramaic; 'man' in Aramaic is *gabra*, whereas 'woman' is *'itta* and so there is no linkage like in Hebrew.

It follows that everyone must have spoken Hebrew at the time described by the earliest chapters of Genesis, since Scripture says: 'And the whole earth had one language' (Gen 11:1), until they were divided and dispersed. 'That is why it was called *Babel* - because there the Lord *confused* the language of all the earth' (Gen 11:9).

Hebrew is a language that has meaning beyond its sound; each word has a clearly demonstrable in-built meaning indicating Divine authorship.

Indeed, it may be argued that God has promised to restore this single language, 'For then will I return to the peoples a pure language (clear speech)...' (Zeph 3:9), implying that at present every nation calls God by another name but on that day all will use his Hebrew name, Ădonay.

## 3. GENESIS CHAPTER 1

By Cedric Longville

#### Read Genesis chapter 1—God's plan from the beginning

In the beginning God - what a wonderfully comforting phrase - that the God in whom we trust was there right at the beginning of things. It gets even more wonderful when we read from Matthew 25:34 that God's plan of salvation for us has been planned ever since the world was created. It means that God the Son, in many ways the prime mover in God's creation plan (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:2&3), knew before He created us that He would have to go to the cross to save us from ourselves.

With that incredible thought in mind let's ponder the story of God's creation and think about those stupendous commands issued with divine authority in chapter 1: 'Let there be light' (verse 3), 'Let there be sky' (verses 6-8), 'Let there be land' (verses 9 and 10), 'Let there be Sun, Moon and Stars' (verses 14-18), 'Let there be life' in all its diversity (verses 11,12, 20-25). This is the Creator giving free rein to His power and creativity, the scale of His vision growing with each successive day. Then in a dramatic turn of events He decides He wants to share it.

#### Made in the image of God

It seems there was a discussion among the Trinity on the sixth day, and one of them (God the Son perhaps?) said 'Let's make man in our image and likeness' (verse 26). So Adam and Eve were made in God's image, and we, their imperfect descendants, still bear features of that unique image. Is it any wonder then that mankind alone has explored the secrets of the universe, harnessed the elements, discovered technology, developed medicine, built towns and cities, invented machines, created music and the arts, and embraced the gifts of language, wisdom and imagination? And that's all down to God's image in each one of us. What an honour and privilege – and responsibility!

One scientist (astrophysicist Paul Davies) has put it this way, "We

human beings are able to grasp at least some of nature's secrets...I cannot believe that our existence in the universe is a mere quirk of fate." And the theologian Claus Westermann has said that "human beings are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be *their relationship with God*".

- Why do you think God created the Universe and everything in it, including us? Or is this the sort of question we have no way of trying to answer? After giving this some thought have a look at John 17:24.
- ✤ Some scientists talk about "the God of the gaps". They see science as a jig-saw with their discoveries revealing more of the picture and only the gaps left for God. Is this reasonable, or is there another way of looking at it? Have a look at Deuteronomy 29:29.
- On most of the creation 'days' (the first, third, fourth and fifth) God decided that what He had made was 'good'. Only on the sixth day did He conclude that all He had made was 'very good'. Why do you think that was?
- Astronomers tell us that the Earth consists of elements thrown into space by dying stars. But in Genesis 1 'the heavens and the earth' are created by the first day (verses 1-3), with the stars only mentioned on the fourth day (verses 16-19). Is there a contradiction here? Or is the mention of the stars something of a throw-away line that could have been mentioned anywhere? (A bit like recounting each day of your holiday and in some random place in the story saying 'Oh, and we also used the hotel pool').
- In verses 11,12 and 24, God provides that all life will reproduce 'according to its kind'. Does this rule out any place for evolution in God's perfect creation?
- Verses 22 and 28 tell us that God blessed all the living creatures, and mankind, and commanded them all to be fruitful and multiply. There is no hint of death in this perfect creation, so what do you

think God's plans may have been for finding a place for everyone on an increasingly crowded yet perfect Earth?

In verse 28 God also commands mankind to rule over the rest of His creation. What sort of job do you think we've made of that task?



#### Six Days or 4.5 Billion Years?

It's sad but not surprising that this question has come to dominate much of the discussion of Genesis chapter 1. Is Genesis 1 at loggerheads with science? If it's a 'Young Earth' how are some galaxies billions of years old? If it's an 'Old Earth', why is there death in the fossil

record before humans came along to spoil God's perfect creation? Do we need to take sides in the debate, or can we get help from both science and the Bible?

**Science:** It can be helpful if we remember that we worship the God who made time and space, and time and space can sometimes do some *very strange things*...

When cosmonaut Sergei Kirkalev returned from 803 days in space, he stepped out of his space capsule and *into the future.* You might want to read that sentence again! It was only a fraction of a second into the future, but we know it happened - not just because Einstein said it would, but because the clocks on the satellites that govern your SatNav keep a different time to those on Earth. It's all due to that strange effect known as Relativity, and it means that the satellite clocks have to be adjusted regularly, otherwise the SatNav will think you're in Barry when you're really in Penarth!

Time runs differently in different places in the Universe. To take an extreme case, if you could find a rocket that went fast enough you could take a few weeks' holiday in it and come back to Earth millions of years into the future!

**The Bible:** Have a look at these verses: Genesis 3:17-19, and 5:29, Romans 5:12 and 8:19-22, 1 Corinthians 15:22, and lastly back to

Genesis 3:23-24. So where is the Garden of Eden today? Did it get overgrown with weeds and the angel with the flaming sword pack up and go back into Heaven? The fact that no one has found it, along with those verses we've read, tells us that our Earth has changed profoundly since Adam and Eve fell. So how much can we rely on the trail of death in the fossil record of this *changed Earth* to give us a picture of the *perfect Earth* that God created? Is it like trying to detect wall decorations in a house that's suffered a huge fire? Scientists tell us this *changed Earth* has existed for billions of years, so how could it be Adam's fault?

Think again about Sergei Kirkalev, your SatNav, and your rocketpowered vacation. According to Einstein's proven theories, God – without changing any of the laws He made – could have snatched Adam and Eve from the Garden and, within their own lifetime, placed them on a *changed Earth* that already bore the scars from billions of years of the consequences of their rebellion. To our rational minds that's pretty weird, and of course we don't know that anything like that happened. But if something like that did happen, there could be truth both in the 'Young Earth' of Genesis 1 *and* the 'Old Earth' of today's science. Faced with a world of such strangeness, wonders and possibilities, *do we really need to worry too much about having to take sides?* 

"If there really is a door...to some other world...I should not be at all surprised to find that the other world had a separate time of its own; so that however long you stayed there it would never take up any of our time" (the Professor in C S Lewis's The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe).

#### 4. Genesis Chapter 2 By Jonathan Bugg

I guess the best place to start a study like this is to acknowledge that whenever we try to describe the things of God in any language, we will always struggle. God is beyond any description or understanding that we could ever aspire to, and quite right too. After all, who wants to worship a God who is totally comprehendible to mere human beings?

When we insist upon only reading some things very literally, we force our understanding of God down one rather narrow path, a narrow path that was quite possibly not in the minds of those writing these poetic endeavours at understanding a God beyond our comprehension. For instance, when God formed man out of the mud, are we to insist that God has actual fingers and hands to do this, or can we accept that God created, brought into being, developed or adapted man from the base material of God's expansive creation? When God breathes life into Man, are we now to insist on the restriction of God having lips that can form around the mouth of man, and lungs that can exhale into the lifeless form before God, or that in all the vastness and holiness and universe creating hugeness, God caused life of God's initiation and design to enter the mud-man on the ground?

"Literal" forces us to answer ever more convoluted questions that may or may not really be relevant to our quest to understand God. We have to answer why it is necessary to include 2 quite different accounts of the creation process? Why God has a different name in chapter 1 to that in chapter 2? If chapter 1 has vegetation on day 3 and man on day 6, why does chapter 2 have man created when no vegetation exists? Even within just chapter 2, it says in verses 4-7 that there was no vegetation yet verse 8 says God had already planted a garden in Eden. Chapter 1:24 has the creation of beasts before the creation of man, but chapter 2:19 has God creating the animals to keep Man company. If the inconsistencies of these texts are so apparent to the likes of me, surely the authors knew they were there. Consequently, their very presence in the text suggests that such apparent contradictions (or at least difficulties) were in fact unimportant to the authors. What if the people compiling such a wonderful book of poetry and wisdom wanted us to focus instead on the underlying meaning of Genesis? Then the text opens up before us like turning a corner to confront the most beautiful of views for the first time.

When we read the early Genesis chapters, we cannot over look the fact that God made man. We are given the most convincing reasons that man is considered by God to be both the reason for creation (2:4-7) and the pinnacle of creation (1:26). When we understand that Eden means "delight" as well as paradise, we can begin to grasp the level of love God has for creation. But as well as these things, there are other theological perspectives that are very exciting to explore. Chapter 2 seems to be full of relationship issues: God's relationship with humanity, humanity's relationship with humanity, and humanity's relationship with the planet. However we read Genesis, we are presented with a loving God who amply provided for creation and set the loving community of humanity over it as stewards. If we read Genesis as a poetic exploration rather than history, we do not lose any of the real important issues, and actually gain the possibility of a wider understanding of God.

- ✤ Having accepted that humanity is the purpose and the pinnacle of God's creation, what does the existence of verse 24 as almost the last word, say regarding the ideal conclusion to creation?
- ✤ Look at the language used in 1:26: God speaks of God's self in the plural and suggests that Man be created in God's image (male and female). Now look at what it says in 2:18: that Man

should not be alone. What does this suggest to you regarding the role of Woman and the completion of the creation process? If we accept that 1:26 is one of the first admissions of the Trinity, then in what way should we look at the relationship detailed in 2:24? Do you think this gives single people difficulties? Has the church always appreciated the issues of being single in a community built on such phrases as 2:24?

- ♥ What do the verses 1:26-27, 2:18, 2:24 say about community?
- ♥ What is the difference between the "life" spoken of in 2:7 and the "life" in John 10:10?
- ✤ Looking beyond the obvious reading of physical nakedness, what is the significance of Adam and Eve being naked and unashamed? If we read this passage for the underlying story, how would you describe the relationship with one another and with God at the time?
- As we read of the abundance of food available to mankind in 2:9 & 2:16 we are always mindful that this is no longer the case in the world. It is easy to point to the next chapter and say it was the fall that did this, but how does our perspective change when we understand that Eden represents God's kingdom and will as it should be and Jesus came to restore the kingdom? Luke 11:20 clearly states that the kingdom of God has come to us, so how can we balance the situation in the world today and the suggestion in Genesis of what God's kingdom is like?
- In the first verses of chapter 2 we are told that God rested. What are we to understand from this when talking about an almighty God who brought the cosmos into being at a mere word? What alternative reading of these verses might there be?

- ✤ How are we to read the verses about the rivers (2:10-14)? Two of the rivers are still known and two unknown. Some scholars believe that the two unknown represent a spiritual out flowing as well as the physical one illustrated by the two known rivers. Imagine for a moment if the author didn't mean literal rivers but more the flow of God's blessing? If in the garden of God's delight there rose a river of God's blessing that poured out to the 4 corners of the earth? What would this mean to you?
- ✤ We often read chapter 3:17-19 to suggest that the fall is responsible for the need of humanity to labour. How do you understand 2:15 in this light?
- ✤ What do you think is the significance of there being two trees detailed but only the fruit of one originally forbidden? What does the eventual denial of the fruit of the second tree suggest?
- ✤ Imagine all the catalogues of animals with their Latin names in the Natural History Museum. Have you ever considered that the process of verses 19 & 20 is yet to end?

## 5. Genesis Chapter 3

By John Weaver

#### Introduction:

Having looked at God's creative genius in Chapter 1 and God's desire for human relationships in Chapter 2, we now move on to consider the human condition in Chapter 3.

Chapter 1 paints a picture of God's covenant with the whole of creation: God created it; God ordered it; God loved it; and God was pleased with it. We see God's power, purpose and promise. The six days of creating reach their climax with the worship of the creator on the Sabbath.

Chapter 2 takes us into God's purposes for human relationships: our relationship with God, with each other; and with the whole of creation. We walk with God; we have committed companionable relationships with each other; and we care for God's created world.

- ✤ So why is everything in such a mess?
- ✤ Why don't we recognise God as the creator of the universe and the expert advisor on how to live in this world?
- ✤ Why do we see so many damaged and broken relationships in society?
- ✤ Why is the environment being destroyed?

Genesis Chapter 3 explains all.

#### Chapter 3 in outline:

Temptation comes in the form of a snake, who suggests that we do not have to take God at his word (verse 1). Human self-justification

changes God's word and makes it harder to keep (verses 2-3 cf. 2:16-17 - spot the difference). Eating the fruit of this tree will make the human beings God-like (verses 4-5). Being like God is something that is pleasing and to be desired (verses 6-7), but not necessarily with happy consequences.

When God arrives on the scene, the truth comes out (verses 8-10) and their relationship with God is marked by fear.

God knows that they have disobeyed his instructions and eaten from the tree. God investigates the situation. He asks the man: 'It wasn't me it was the woman.' He asks the woman: 'It wasn't me it was the snake.' - and the poor old snake didn't have a leg to stand on!!

There are consequences for disobedience: snakes are cursed and have no relationship with human beings (verse 14-15); women will be controlled by men and have pain in childbirth (verse 16); men will labour and find life harsh (verses17-19); and the man and the woman are banished from God's paradise (verses 20-24).

Human beings decided that they wanted to be like God, and know all the answers. They became jealous and violent and the killing started. Then they believed that they had no need of God and God's wisdom as creator at all. This is the message of Genesis 3, together with chapters 4 and 5.

#### Chapter 3 — a reflection:

We human beings, in the shape of Adam and Eve, don't like to be told what to do, even if it is for our own good.

We want to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because knowledge is power, and we can be in control - we can play God in our lives. So let's eat and take control - what can be wrong with that? Surely I know what is best for me? It's my body and I have the right to do with it as I want.

Here is the fall from grace; here paradise is lost, as human selfcentredness takes centre stage.

In God's created paradise we see God as the faithful, orderly, and loving creator of everything. In God's created paradise our relationships with God, with each other, and with the whole of creation are strong, loving, and caring.

When self-centredness takes control we cease to recognise God, we cease to worship God as the source of all wisdom and love, we cease to build strong loving relationships with each other, and we pollute, exploit, and selfishly exhaust the natural world.

And of course, it's never our fault!

So God asks how all this mess has come about: 'it wasn't me it was ....' someone or something else. The blame culture is part of a fallen world, in which our focus has moved from God to ourselves.

In order to change we first have to recognise our own responsibility for the mess in our lives or in the world and then repent.

Thus in Romans 5 Paul tells us that the focus of our lives must be reversed and turned back to God in Christ (Romans 5:6-9). In the first man all have fallen from grace, and in the second man (Jesus) we have received grace and life (Romans 5:12-17).

So the heart of the Gospel in Jesus' words is to deny self, take up the cross and follow Jesus (Mark 8:34). Jesus is inviting us to return to paradise where God is in control, our relationships are marked by cross-shaped sacrificial love, and the life of Jesus is the example that we follow.

There is no mention of 'sin' anywhere in this chapter. What is sin

#### ✤ What does a fallen world look like?

In answering think about: our care of creation; human relationships; the stress and problems of work and the blame culture, which looks to find someone else to 'carry the can'.

✤ In terms of relationships consider the words, "he will rule over you" (verse 16) - what does it mean for our lives and for the church when we consider that patriarchy and male domination are aspects of the Fall?

#### ✤ Fallen from what?

How different might our experience of life be if we were able to walk with God in the garden in the cool of the day? When we consider the breakdown of relationships all around us: our sexual and family relationships; our relationship with each other, our attitudes to work, and our careless attitude to the environment, how do we interpret Paul's words that creation (and no doubt God) groan as they wait for human beings to reach their full Christ-like humanity in the power of the Spirit (Romans 8:18-27)?

#### ✤ What does a good world look like?

Consider the promise and hope of the following texts: Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 11:6-9; Isaiah 65:17-25 (cf. Revelation 21:1-5); Jeremiah 31:33-34; John 10:7-10.

✤ Do we believe that the Good News of Christ is the possibility of a transformed world?



#### What about you and me?

We have seen a picture of the fallenness and brokenness of creation. In Genesis 1 God brings order out of chaos and makes space for life. Genesis 2 shows creation as the context for life and civilisation, and the social context for personal love. But in Genesis 3 human beings seek their own will; they want power and control,

and fall into temptation – God didn't really say...? God didn't really mean...? This is a picture of the human condition that we can recognise – power, control, and someone to blame when things go wrong. This leads to a break in relationship with God, with nature, and with each other. The grim tale of self-centred rebellion moves through murder and anarchy, ending with the total devastation of the flood. This is followed by recreation, a covenant between God, human beings, animals, and all of creation, which is sealed with the sign of the rainbow.

But sadly the brokenness and rebellion continues.

#### Who am I, and who are you?

We learn from Genesis 1-3 that human beings are in the image of God, but are fallen. The image is marred by our self-centredness. Psychologists recognise the universal feeling of striving after some lost 'golden age.' The hope that we offer as Good News is of a restored humanity in Christ.

In Genesis we are presented with God's intimate involvement with creation, but also his risk in giving freedom to creation. God's vulnerable self-emptying love is exemplified in the Incarnation and the Cross of Christ. God's risk and God's love, in creation is to choose to bring a universe into being, whose crowning glory is the existence of self-conscious, intelligent, self-willed human beings.

Along with John (1 John 1:8-10) and Paul (Romans 7:14-25) we will need an honest assessment of our continuing condition, knowing that God looks for, and longs for, our response in love, where we find God's redeeming grace (Romans 7:24-25).

© Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth, 2013

www.tabspenarth.org.uk