

# ReGroups 7/2/23

## Origin Stories: In the Beginning - Genesis 1

Earlier this year, we spent a few weeks in the book of Genesis in a series called “Origin Stories”. The goal of the series was to understand that the first book of the Bible is more than just a history lesson, but is also the foundation for many of our Christian beliefs.

We learned that Genesis’ main goal is not just to inform *what* happened in history, but *why* it happened the way that it did. Also, Genesis’ timeless message is to explain *how* the beginning has *effected* every generation since and still has a great effect on us today.

Our ReGroups allow for more in-depth discussions and a longer period of time to dig in and study much more of Genesis. Over the next few weeks we will open up to Genesis and learn how the Origin Story of our world and our kind has so much to say to us. With a right foundation about why things happened, we will be better equipped to respond to our present world and current circumstances.

### ***Respect the Context***

For every book of the Bible, it’s essential to know who wrote it and who the original audience would’ve been. This helps us fully appreciate the message that God provides in the text. It is tempting to take a text and force it into our own generation’s shoes, but the proper way to read is to step into the original hearers shoes. Rather than trying to modernize the text, the best way to approach it is to respect the context. **Does this make sense?**

God’s Word is alive, so just because respecting the original context is necessary to understand, it doesn’t mean there isn’t a message for our current generation. By all means, there absolutely is, but in order to take hold of the true and full meaning, we must go about it in the right way.

### **Author and Audience**

God gave the book of Genesis to Moses in approximately 1446 BC. Just after trekking across the desert, in flight from Egypt, the children of Israel camped out at Mt. Sinai. Moses was called up to receive revelation from God, as recorded in **Exodus 24:12-18**.

Israel had been in Egypt for over 400 years, and many didn't even know the stories of their forefathers, let alone the story of Creation. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were more legends than historical figures to many, who had grown up so far away from their promised land.

On top of not having a good foundation of their true identity, they had also grown up in a land with vastly different values and beliefs than those impressed on Abraham's family. The Egyptian culture was centered around a pantheon of gods, all of which were none too fond of humans. All of the creation myths of the Ancient Middle East, from Egypt to Babylon were fantastical and featured gods at war with each other and humans being created by accident. The Pagan gods were on record of having contempt towards humans. However, they were still very much concerned with bossing them around and threatening them into obedience and service.

For this reason, the one, true God - Yahweh, God of Israel - wanted His people to know the actual story of Creation. He wanted them to trust Him and understand how personally interested and invested He was in the world. Before commanding them to live a certain way or follow His rules, He wanted them to know their backstory and how He had been on our side, seeking our good from the very beginning.

This context will also be helpful when reading deeper into the Law and discovering some of the more obscure dietary and moral codes that are taught. Israel had been learned in and the people raised in a complete pagan society, with grotesque practices that even our modern, perverse world frowns upon (see **Leviticus 11:29-31, 41-42, 17:10, 18:6**). Therefore, it was important that everything be addressed with love and grace, as God was trying to lead Israel in forgetting all the ways of Egypt.

It makes sense then, that God would start at the very beginning of Creation to clear up any confusion about why and how humans came into being. Of course, Genesis tells more than just the creation story, but goes on to detail where Israel came from, thus providing the full backstory for the Jewish people. On the cusp of finally realizing the promise made to Abraham, Genesis provided them reason why God sought to make a covenant with Abraham to begin with.

**Before we look at Genesis 1 and the Creation Story, spend some time discussing this information and clear up any questions that may remain about this important context.**

## ***The Right Perspective***

Read **Genesis 1:1-2** and discuss the following premise: This is not meant to be a science lesson, but rather a Spiritual lesson. As in, the people of the ancient world had no where near the scientific capacity that our modern world has, so God wasn't about to get into all the details we now about the ancient history of our universe or planet. His goal was to give them the confidence that the world was created by God, on purpose for a purpose.

Therefore, it doesn't really benefit anyone to compare Genesis 1 to what science says about earth's earliest days or the universe's formation. There is no way to reconcile what scientist have learned with what Genesis 1 teaches, and there really isn't a need to even try. Regardless if everything that science proposes is hard truth or mere theory, we can rest assured that God was there "*in the beginning.*" Before what we now know and rely on was "formed" and "filled" by God, there was a self-sufficient and all-powerful God residing over it all.

The point of this message isn't to believe everything that science proposes or to try to contest what is taught by scientist - it's to bring all of that under God's sovereignty and goodness. Whether or not the days of creation were literal 24 hour periods or if you can align this passage with the proposed millions of years of world history, Genesis 1:1-2 teaches us that God created our universe and He was the first and only agent of creation. Our world didn't come into being by accident or coincident, but was intentionally designed by God and specifically was God's grand idea.

It's tempting to write all science as an obstacle to what Genesis 1 teaches, but truly many of the revelations are an added blessing and bring further glory to God. We know that our universe is infinite in size, something actually suggested by Solomon in **1 Kings 8:27**. Knowing that our universe contains countless galaxies, thousands of planets, and wonders untold makes the intimate and focused story of our planet's origin even more special. As our universe ever-expands to contain and glorify its Creator, only one planet in one of its galaxies was chosen to be God's focus and receive His greatest blessings.

**Spend some time discussing all of these suggestions and points. How does this framework add emphasis to the sacred role we get to play in history? What challenges does this text still present to you? What is the greatest blessing you find from this introduction to our world?**

## ***Lights, Camera, Action***

Read **Genesis 1:3-5** and discuss how important Light is in the overall story of Scripture. Baked into the Creation Story is a preview of the Redemption Story! Compare this passage with how John begins His Gospel in **John 1:1-5**. Before there was sin or the Fall occurred, God built contrast between light and darkness into the universe, as if to embed a promise into nature itself. Yes, there is a lot of science that could be discussed here, but the greater message is the Spiritual application God wants to hear and receive. It's under His light and because of His light that we can rest assured that our universe has *never been nor ever will be* forsaken or too distant from God. The persistent presence of Light is our constant reminder of God's rule and love.

### **Some Quick Observations (Discuss as see fit):**

- **Genesis 1:6-8)** God created a clear separation between Heaven and Earth to denote His higher position over all of creation. Just like we read about later on at Babel, humanity as spent all of history attempting to breach the atmosphere and explore the cosmos. Whether or not we continue to make it farther and farther into space, we will always discover that God is still higher than we will ever reach on our own.
- **Genesis 1:9-13)** Little did the original hearers know how important it is that for our world to be covered in water. The Earth is 70% water, which allows for life as we know it to exist and thrive. The separate, dry land is nourished by this massive reservoir and serves as the perfect platform for us all to enjoy life.
- **Genesis 1:14-19)** Time as we know it begins with the Sun and Moon being positioned to govern the earth's orbiting patterns. So much information is implied behind the scenes with these verses, like the concepts of *gravity* and *inertia*. What matters most to us however is how we understand and measure time. **Psalms 90:12** tells us the importance of respecting the allotment of days given to us all.
- **Genesis 1:20-25)** All of animal life as we know it created and featured in these verses. If you open up any animal encyclopedia, covering aquatic to terrain life, it adds to the wonder of God's grand design.

## ***It Was Very Good***

Read **Genesis 1:26-31** and discover the focal point of the Creation Story: *Us*. Of course, God is at the center of the story, but it's from the overflow of His goodness that we are created and placed on center stage. Here Israel would have learned how God delighted in taking care of His own, and never saw people as a burden like the pagan religions taught. This passage also serves to show that God didn't create the world in a fallen state, but made everything to be *good*.

Discuss how this framework helps us to have a positive, uplifting attitude about Creation and life in general, knowing that God created everything with joy. Read **Isaiah 6:3, Psalm 8:3-9, Psalm 19:1, and Psalm 24:1** and consider how we ought to appreciate and understand our world as God's favored creation.

## ***In His Image***

Alongside this emphasis on the goodness of creation, is the message about our design. We have been made in God's image. This is less about how we look and more about what we are worth. All of earth's creatures are based on *pre-existing* Heavenly designs, as all of the visions of/from Heaven feature these kinds of comparisons (**See Ezekiel 1:4-5, 10**).

More importantly, to be made in God's image means we are made with divine flare and favor. The second commandment given to Israel was about not having graven images, like the pagans did. It could be said that Israel didn't need to reduce God down to an image of some mutated animal, because they were always face to face with images of God. Considering how God was teaching them the importance of treating one another with respect, and how the Bible teaches us to love one another, God's image speaks us of our ascribed value, dignity and purpose.

In His image, we are forever tethered to Him and accountable to Him. Likewise, we are also forever connected to one another, in that we share this same design. In closing, read **Matthew 22:34-40** and discuss how this dovetails perfectly with Genesis 1's revelation about the nature and design of us all.