



**St. Mary and St. Mina Coptic Orthodox Church,
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Bible Study Aids for the Book of Genesis

Introduction to the Book of Genesis:

The name Genesis is from the Greek word *geneseos*, which means birth, lineage or generation. Genesis is the book of origins. Specifically, the Book talks about the origin of creation, mankind, and the people of God (Israel). The Book also describes a number of covenants which God made with mankind, including His covenant with Adam, Noah and Abraham.

The Book covers a very long time period from the creation of the world to the sojourn of the twelve tribes of Israel in the land of Egypt. The Book can be viewed as consisting of two parts. The first part (from Chapter 1 to Chapter 11) gives an account of the early history of mankind, whereas the second part (from Chapter 12 to Chapter 50) describes the lives of the three great patriarchs or the forefathers of the people of Israel, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, along with the story of Joseph, Jacob's beloved son who is responsible for moving the Israelites to Egypt.

Chapter 1 – The Creation of Heaven and Earth:

Genesis starts with an account of the creation of the universe in six consecutive periods, which the Book refers to as days. It is clear that the day here does not refer to a 24 hour period for at least two reasons. First, the sun and moon which define the period we now know as a day were not created until "day" 4 which means that the days before then cannot be just 24 hours.

Second, as pointed by His Holiness the later Pope Shenouda the Third, for each of the first 6 days, the Bible ends the day by saying it is the evening and morning of the first day, and so on, with the exception of the seventh day. This means that we are still living in the seventh day, which thus extends from the creation of our first fathers, Adam and Eve, up to the present time, and until the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. With the second coming, the eighth day, which always refers to eternity, starts (this is why our Lord Jesus Christ rose on the eighth day, Sunday). It should be noted that even the Fathers of the Church (e.g., St. Augustine) commented that the days of Genesis 1 do not refer to just a 24 hour period but to an era. The fathers said that way before the advent of modern science which estimates the universe to be around 14 billion years old.

Chapter 1 raises the issue of the relationship between science and Christianity, or between faith and reason. We can clearly state that there should be no contradiction between good science and good theology. If there appears to be a contradiction, then it is either because science is wrong (quite often science corrects itself over time) or because we did not understand God's Word in the right way (e.g., insisting that the day of Genesis is exactly 24 hours). In fact, it can be argued that modern science is in very good agreement with the Biblical record of creation. For example, the theory of Big Bang proves that the universe has a beginning which is what Genesis affirms, and since it has a beginning, it has to have a cause behind it (i.e., our Loving Triune God). In fact, it can be argued that the Light created on the first day of Genesis refers to the burst of energy at the moment of the big bang, and the creation of time and space.

In Chapter 1 of Genesis, we see how God created the universe as a palace for his beloved creature, mankind. When God finished preparing everything for man, He creates man in *His Image and Likeness*. This shows how much value God has bestowed on mankind. Being created in God's Image, man is bestowed with free will, creativity, and is created for God and eternity.

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 1:

1. Is the Doctrine of the Trinity implied in Chapter 1 of Genesis?
2. What does the account of creation tell us about our Triune God?
3. What does it mean that man is created in God's Image?

Chapter 2 – The Creation of Adam and Eve:

This chapter focuses on the creation of Adam and Eve and brings to the front many interesting theological facts about our creation, which we will attempt to mediate upon by considering the following questions:

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 2:

1. What is the implication of verse 7, which states that "Then God formed man out of dust from the ground, and breathed in his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7)?
2. There are two trees named in Genesis 2 – please identify those two trees.
3. The account of the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam points to (i.e., is a type of) a great event in the New Testament. What is that event, and how is the creation of Eve a type of that event?

Chapter 3 – The Fall of Mankind:

Chapter 3 describes how sin and death entered into the world through the envy of the devil. As can be seen from that Chapter, the devil (speaking through the serpent) tricks Adam and Eve into disobeying God and eating from the forbidden tree. The result is disastrous and results in the death of mankind and the corruption of the whole creation. God does not abandon man though, but gives him a promise of salvation in what is known as the *Protevangelium* (Genesis 3:15). Again, we will attempt to mediate upon the truths revealed in that chapter by considering the following questions:

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 3:

1. How did the serpent tempt Eve to fall into sin and disobey God?
2. What was the immediate consequence of Adam and Eve's sin?
3. Why is Genesis 3:15 regarded as the first good news or as the *Protevangelium*?
4. What is the implication of God providing garments of skin to Adam and Eve after they had sinned?

Chapter 4 – Cain and Abel:

In this chapter, we see immediately the consequences of sin entering the world. We see how, out of envy, Cain kills his own brother, Abel. Let us consider the following questions:

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 4:

1. How did God deal with Cain's sin?
2. Who was the first man to practice polygamy?
3. What was the name of the son of Adam and Eve born after Abel was killed?

Chapter 6 – Man's Wickedness:

In this chapter, we continue to see how sin and wickedness is spreading throughout human race, and how God had to intervene to end the evil. God, however, spares the righteous Noah, to save mankind and to re-establish His covenant with Noah. Please consider the following questions.

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 6:

1. Who are the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" mentioned in this chapter?
2. What did God decide regarding the life-span of mankind during the times of Noah?
3. Describe the ark that God ordered Noah to build.

Chapters 7 – The flood

The account of the flood should be viewed as God's act of re-creating the world by destroying evil. Noah is a kind of new Adam, a new father of mankind. The ark is a kind of new Eden, and bears many similarities with the future Temple of Solomon. Consider the following questions:

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 7:

1. How old was Noah when the flood started?
2. Why did Noah take seven pairs of the clean animals and two of the unclean animals?
3. How long did it rain on the earth during the flood?

Chapter 8 – The Cessation of the flood

In this chapter, we see how God remembered Noah and saved him. Consider the following questions:

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 8:

1. What was the name of the mountain upon which the ark rested?
2. How did Noah figure out that it is safe to leave the ark?

Chapter 9 – God’s Covenant with Noah

In this Chapter, God re-established His covenant with Noah. Consider the following:

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 9:

1. What was the sign of the covenant between God and Noah
2. What were the names of the three sons of Noah?
3. What was the result of Ham’s sin?

Chapter 11 – The Tower of Babel

In this chapter, we learn about a widespread rebellion of mankind against God in the event of the tower of Babel. The tower is viewed by mankind as a substitute for the now lost Eden, and is constructed as a shrine to the pride of mankind. God confuses the speech of man to prevent the construction of the tower and to force mankind to populate the whole earth. The confusion, however, sows divisions among man. This confusion is overcome on the day of Pentecost in the New Testament, when the Holy Spirit comes to restore unity and love among mankind.

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 11:

1. What was the purpose of mankind in building the tower of Babel?
2. Who is Terah, and what were the names of his three sons?
3. What was the relationship between Abram and Lot?