

THE BIBLE TIMELINE

The Story of Salvation



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A. Establish the Context

The first eleven chapters of Genesis, which describe the Early World period in our study, contain some of the best-known stories in the Bible—Creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, the Tower of Babel. It is here that the story we are studying starts and where it finds its roots: “In the beginning,” with God creating the heavens and the earth. Too often, discussion of these stories involves whether they in fact happened, whether they are “true” in the way we think of scientific truth. The Bible is not a science book, however, and the first chapters of Genesis were not written so we would know the scientific beginnings of the universe. To find the intended sense of these chapters, we need to take into account the type of literature this is and understand the ways the ancient Hebrews viewed history and wrote it. They weren’t all about “the facts” the way we are. They wove in story and poetic language to get across far deeper meaning. And God inspired the first part of Genesis to be told through story to help us understand the meaning of our existence, not “the facts” of our beginning—the “who” and “why,” not the “when” or “how.” Why are we here? Are we ruled by fate or chance, or is God in control? Why is there evil, and why would a good God allow it? And so on.

The *Catechism* tells us that the first three chapters of Genesis, which this lesson will cover, were placed at the start of the Bible “to express in their solemn language the truths of creation—its origin and its end in God, its order and goodness, the vocation of man, and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation. Read in the light of Christ, within the unity of Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the Church, these texts remain the principal source for catechesis on the mysteries of the ‘beginning’: creation, fall, and promise of salvation” (No. 289).

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden is not just a children’s tale or something to be taught in religious-education class and then forgotten. It is not the literal kind of history we are familiar with today, but neither is it myth; it is a kind of history that focuses on truth and meaning.¹ The biblical Creation narrative is loaded with truths that help us know God and ourselves, truths that help us understand why we are here and how to make choices and trust God even when this is difficult. Read on and let the story take root in your heart and mind. It is not just the story of Adam and Eve; it is *our* story.

B. Read the Story: Genesis 1-3

Read **Genesis 1-3** to become familiar with the main characters and events of the first part of the Early World, the part pertaining to Creation and the Fall of Man. After reading, trace the action on the center section of your *Bible Timeline* Chart. This lesson takes you only partway into the Early World period. Identify the main characters and notice the flow of key events and where they take place. Any questions? Write them down.

Going deeper (optional): You can gain insight into the Church’s understanding of **Genesis 1-3** by reading *Catechism* Nos. 279-421.

As always, pray before you read.

¹ As Pope Pius XII wrote in *Humani Generis*, “The first eleven chapters of Genesis, although properly speaking not conforming to the historical method used by the best Greek and Latin writers or by competent authors of our time, do nevertheless pertain to history in a true sense, which however must be further studied and determined by exegetes; the same chapters, ... in simple and metaphorical language adapted to the mentality of a people but little cultured, both state the principal truths which are fundamental for our salvation, and also give a popular description of the origin of the human race and the chosen people” (No. 38).

C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering these questions will draw you into the heart of the story. If you don't understand something, make a note of it to bring up in the discussion.

The Creation of Heaven and Earth

1. There are two accounts of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2, told from different viewpoints. Read **Genesis 1** carefully several times.
 - a. What does this account tell us about God? Think about things like the way he creates; the order in which the earth was formed and filled; the way he blesses; even the simple fact that he created the earth and people at all.
 - b. What does Genesis 1 tell you about the nature and purpose of the world and the things around us?

The Creation of Mankind

2. The creation of mankind is told twice, in **Genesis 1:26-31** and **2:4-25**. Read both accounts, paying close attention to Genesis 1:27.
 - a. What does it mean to be created in God's image? Read also *Catechism* Nos. 356-357, 364.
 - b. What does "male and female he created them" add to your understanding of the image in which we are created? For help with this question, read *Catechism* Nos. 369-373.
3. **Think about it:** Genesis 2:1-3 tells us that, after completing his work of Creation, God rested on the seventh day, blessed it, and made it holy. Years later, the children of Israel would be commanded to refrain from work on the seventh day in imitation of God. If we are created in his image, is there any sense in which we stifle the image of God in ourselves when we ignore this command? Or to put it another way: In what way does this command enable us to more fully live in God's image? For further reading about the Sabbath, see *Catechism* Nos. 345-349.

How to Read the Account of the Fall

“The account of the Fall in *Genesis 3* uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place *at the beginning of the history of man*. (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 13§1.) Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents (Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1513; Pius XII: DS 3897; Paul VI: AAS 58 [1966], 653.)”

– *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 390 (emphasis in original)

Fall and Promise

Note: Though the Genesis accounts of the Creation and Fall were written in figurative language, it does not therefore follow that Adam and Eve do not represent a single set of original people. The Church teaches us that “because of its common origin the human race forms a unity, for ‘from one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth’ (Acts 17:26; cf. Tob 8:6)” (*Catechism* No. 360). To believe that Adam and Eve represent a larger number of ancient people is not consistent with the truth conveyed by the Scripture and taught by the Church that our state of original sin “proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own” (cf. Romans 5:12-19; Council of Trent, Session V, canon 1-4; *Humani Generis* No. 37). As the *Catechism* goes on to explain, “The whole human race is in Adam ‘as one body of one man.’ By this ‘unity of the human race’ all men are implicated in Adam’s sin, as all are implicated in Christ’s justice...” (No. 404).

4. “Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God” (*Catechism* No. 391). That is the voice of Satan, the devil, who is pictured in *Genesis 3* as a Serpent. Review the command God gave to Adam in **Genesis 2:16-17**; then read the exchange between the Serpent and the woman in **Genesis 3:1-4**.
 - a. What was the Serpent trying to accomplish?

 - b. What strategy did he use?

5. In **Genesis 3:4**, the Serpent calls God a liar—“You will not die,” he says—and proceeds to tell the woman why it will be to her benefit to disobey God.
 - a. What are these supposed benefits?

- b. Do these benefits offer Eve anything she doesn't already have? What *do* they offer?
6. What immediate effects did Adam and Eve's disobedience have on their behavior that show the consequences of their sin?
7. Read God's curse on the Serpent and on Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:14-19.
- a. Did God abandon his disobedient children? What ray of hope do you see?
- b. Is there anything about their punishment that might help mankind learn the lesson Adam and Eve so sadly failed?
8. **New Testament Connection:** The apostle John borrowed language and imagery from the Creation story to begin his gospel. Read **John 1:1-14**. What new creation is he describing?

D. Application

This question will help you apply one of the key themes of the lesson to your life. After meditating on it, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

What are some ways we hide from the presence of God? How does sin drive us further from his presence?

Dear Lord...

Session 2 Talk Notes

Early World – Part 1

A. Introduction to the Early World – Part 1: how to read Genesis 1-11

1. A unique type of literature: poetry not science; “why” not “how”
 - a. *Catechism* No. 390: “Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms ... a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man.”
2. Genesis 1-11 as “anti-myth”; in contrast to *Enuma Elish*, Babylonian creation myth:
 - a. God alone is king
 - b. Mankind created in his image, as sons and daughters

B. Creation

1. Creation of the earth: God builds a dwelling place for us and him
 - a. “The earth was without form and void” (Genesis 1:1)

God brings form	God fills the void
Day 1: light and darkness	Day 4: sun, moon, stars
Day 2: water and sky	Day 5: fish and birds
Day 3: land	Day 6: land animals, mankind

2. Creation of humanity (Genesis 1-2): How are we different from the animals?
 - a. Created in God’s image and likeness – 1:26-31
 - i. Intellect (reason)
 - ii. Free will (ability to act; governed by the intellect)
 - iii. Capacity to love (John Paul II, the Trinity is a family)
 - iv. Dominion over animals and earth (name; till and keep)
 - b. Created male and female (creation of woman: 2:18-25)
3. Two complementary stories (Brichto: “synoptic-resumptive” technique)
4. The seventh day (Genesis 2:1-3)
 - a. Seventh day breaks from pattern of repetition: it has no end
 - b. The Sabbath day is holy, represents divine rest (Mark 2:27, created for man)
 - c. Man created *on* the sixth day but *for* the seventh day
 - d. Meaning of “six” in the Bible

- e. "Seven" = *sheva*; *shava* = to swear an oath (therefore related to covenant, Heb. *berit*)
 - i. *Catechism* No. 51 – we were created to share in God's divine life

C. Test and Temptation (Genesis 3)

1. The nature of the test
 - a. The prohibition
 - b. Who was the serpent (*nahash*)? (see Revelation 12:9, *Catechism* Nos. 390-395)
 - c. How he lures them (3:1-5; *Catechism* No. 398)
2. The key: Do you trust God? (see *Catechism* No. 397) – sin is lack of trust in his goodness

D. Fall and Promise (Genesis 3)

1. Results of the Fall (3:7-13)
 - a. Immediate consequences: ruptured relationships (see *Catechism* No. 400, Romans 7:15)
 - b. Intellect darkened, will weakened
 - c. Result: concupiscence (*Catechism* No. 405)
2. Why do we sin?
 - a. St. Augustine: out of an inordinate desire for things, we prefer a lesser good
 - b. The pursuit of natural goods can lead us to live as though God does not exist
 - c. Threefold temptation to sensual lust, worldly greed, pride (1 John 2:16)
 - d. John Paul II, sin is "a suicidal act" and one's "internal balance is destroyed"; "its first and most important consequences ... are in his relationship with God"
3. What to do when sin stalks us?
 - a. Resist temptation (2 Timothy 2:22)
 - b. If you sin: repent, go to confession, do penance
 - c. The result if you don't repent
 - d. Romans 2:4 – God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance

E. God has a plan ("first good news," *protoevangelium* – Genesis 3:15)

(We encourage you to review your notes and the *Responses* from last week before beginning this new lesson.)

A. Review the Context

God's story, as it concerns us and our salvation, opens "in the beginning." At the very start of Genesis, we were introduced to God: the powerful Creator and loving Father who infused the world with goodness and beauty. He created mankind in his image and to share his life. Wanting us to share his life and love of our own free will, he gave our first parents a test: Will they trust in his love and goodness and submit to his word, or will they abuse their freedom and follow their own wills? Tempted by the Serpent, they chose a counterfeit. They preferred themselves to God, wanting to be like him but on their own terms, apart from him. The results were immediate: a radical disruption in their relationship with God and with each other. Pain, death, and decay entered the world.

The Church tells us that the personal sin that Adam and Eve committed was transmitted to the rest of the human race in the form of a fallen nature, "a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice" (*Catechism* No. 404). This is the same thing as saying we are born without sanctifying grace, that principle of supernatural life in the soul that causes one to turn toward God. Original sin is thus not something we do; it is something we are: it is a state of being. From the moment we are born, we lack the original holiness and justice that Adam and Eve cast aside. Our souls are wounded, in a sense. We are turned away from God. Our wills are weakened, we are subject to pain and death, and we are inclined to sin (this latter state is sometimes called "concupiscence"). Fortunately, God was not willing to abandon his children to the fate they chose. In Genesis 3 we read that he left Adam and Eve with a flicker of hope: one day, a "seed of the woman" will crush the head of the "seed of the serpent."

We are all ears.

B. Read the Story: Genesis 4-11

Read **Genesis 4-11** to become familiar with the main characters and events of the second part of the Early World, in which God's family grows and spreads to fill the earth. Next trace the action of the Early World on your *Bible Timeline* Chart. Identify the main people and notice the flow of key events and where they take place. Any questions? Jot them down.

If you have trouble understanding some of what's going on in the reading, don't let it bother you. In fact, expect to find things you don't understand (what are those "Nephilim" referred to in chapter 6, anyway? And did people really live to be 900 years old?!). Write things down if they bother you, so you can return to them later in a deeper study of Genesis. There is enough in this one book to keep you studying for a lifetime, should you choose to do so! Remember—this course is an overview to give you the big picture. Treat it like a preliminary walk-through. Your goal is to get the lay of the land, not to explore every crevice.

As always, pray before you read.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering these questions will draw you into the heart of the story. If you don't understand something, make a note of it to bring up in the discussion.

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16)

1. With the births of Cain and Abel we see the first offspring of the woman Eve. Is there any chance one of these might be the promised "seed" who will defeat Satan? Do they look like it to you? Explain.

2. What was wrong with Cain's offering, as compared with Abel's?

The Family Grows (Genesis 4:17–5:32)

Genesis 4 and 5 give us two genealogies: one draws a quick sketch of the descendants of Cain; the other gives a detailed written account of Adam's line (literally, "This is the book of the generations of Adam") through a third son, Seth. These are not comprehensive family trees listing every descendant. The author is using a literary device called a toledot—"the generations of"—which serves to focus the reader on the storyline.

3. Compare and contrast the two family lines. Why do you think the author focuses in on Seth's descendants rather than those of Cain in Adam's "official" genealogy?

The Flood and God's Covenant with Noah (Genesis 6-10)

4. Lamech names his son Noah, which means "rest," saying, "Out of the ground which the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands" (Genesis 5:29). Taking this together with **Genesis 6**, what other relief was needed on the earth?

5. What was God's solution to the problem?
6. **New Testament Connection:** The Church has long seen that God's actions in the Old Testament prefigure what he one day will do through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Old Testament figures are called "types" of the New. Think for a moment about the Ark: A great vessel rides above the deathly waves of a flood and carries the righteous to safety. Can you think of a New Testament parallel, of which the ark is a type? Read **1 Peter 3:18-22** along with *Catechism* Nos. **845** and **1219-1220**. What do the Ark and the Flood signify? Explain.
7. Read **Genesis 8:20-9:17**.
- a. What solemn promise did God make to Noah, and with what sign did he seal that covenant?
- b. As was typical with covenants, the covenant made demands on Noah and his sons as well. What were they?

The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

8. a. Review the events following the flood and God's covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:18-11:9). Do you see any change in man's behavior? What is the new civilization like? Did the "flood solution" to evil work?

- b. **Think about it:** Have you ever wondered why God doesn't just reach down and "wipe out the bad guys"? He did this once and promised never to do it again. Why not? Why was that not the solution? What is it about baptism and the Church that is more effective than the flood that prefigured them? For help with this question, read *Catechism* No. 1213ff.
9. In **Genesis 11**, men built "a tower with its top in the heavens." What might this tower express about their relationship with God?
10. **New Testament Connection:** God's response to mankind's self-exaltation and determination to rely on himself instead of on God was to confuse their languages, to divide and scatter the people across the earth. In the New Testament, something happens that is in effect a reversal of the Babel event. Read **Acts 2:1-13**. What is it?

D. Application

This question will help you apply one of the key themes of the lesson to your life. After meditating on it, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

What enabled Enoch and Noah to stand alone and remain righteous amid great wickedness? Are you the same kind of light, or is it too easy to succumb to the influence of others? How can you keep your own light bright against the darkness?

Dear Lord...

E. Wrap-Up

Conclude your study of the Early World period and fix it in your mind by doing the following:

1. Recall the color of this period and think of it in terms of your reading, to help you remember.
2. Quickly review Sessions 2 and 3. Write a one- or two-sentence summary of what the Early World is all about, or its significance as part of the "big picture."

Session 3 Talk Notes

Early World – Part 2

A. Introduction to the Early World – Part 2

John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*: “At the root of the Fall is a failure to grasp the nature of God’s fatherhood.”

1. Adam and Eve after the Fall
 - a. Harmony in relationships destroyed (with selves, God, creation)
 - b. Expelled from Garden; exiled
 - c. Struggle with concupiscence (our inclination to selfishness)
 - d. Lack of trust in God
2. Early World Part 2 shows what happens as the earth is populated
 - a. The line of promise traced by genealogies (*toledot* = “the generations of”)

B. Adam & Eve are fruitful and multiply (Genesis 4–5)

1. Cain and Abel (4:1-24)
 - a. Cain: the promised “seed”? (4:1)
 - b. Cain’s sin and punishment (vss. 2-16)
 - i. Romans 6:16-18, 1 John 3:11-12
 - ii. God puts a mark on Cain
 - Who are the other people?
 - c. Cain’s descendants (vss. 17-24)
 - i. Industrious
 - ii. Musical
 - iii. Violent (see esp. Lamech, vs. 23)
 - iv. Polygamous
2. Seth and his descendants (4:25-5:32)
 - a. Contrast to Cain’s line:
 - i. Enoch (5:24)
 - ii. Noah (5:29) – shall bring relief
 - b. Significance of ages (lifespan): literal or figurative?
 - i. Emphasis on death and drop in lifespan due to sin

3. Wickedness increases on the earth (6:1-8)
 - a. *Nephilim* (6:4; Hebrew, “fallen ones”). “Mighty men” or warriors, “men of renown”
 - b. The “sons of God” and “daughters of men” (see RSV-CE footnote)
 - c. One man finds favor: Noah

C. Re-creation and another Fall: the Flood and its aftermath (Genesis 6:11–9:28)

1. God’s plan to deal with wickedness: build an ark
 - a. Take your family (Shem, Ham, Japheth, and wives)
 - b. Take two of every unclean, seven of every clean species
2. Typological meaning of the Ark and the Flood: The Church and Baptism
 - a. A family affair (*Catechism* No. 701)
 - b. Forty (40) – the number of trial and testing
3. Re-creation (Genesis 9:1-17)
 - a. Signs of new creation: seven days; winds blowing over the earth; etc.
 - b. God’s covenant with Noah (One Holy Family)
 - i. Terms and sign of the covenant (rainbow)
4. Another “Fall”: Noah’s sons (Genesis 9:18-28)
 - a. “Uncovering nakedness”: an idiom? (see Leviticus 18:18-22; 20:17)
 - b. The curse and a blessing

D. The earth is again populated (Genesis 10)

1. Shem (Middle East/Mesopotamia)
2. Japheth (North of that, spreading East and West)
3. Ham (Canaan and North Africa)

E. The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

1. “Let us make a name for ourselves” (vs. 4)
2. God confuses their language; they scatter
3. Tower most likely a ziggurat
4. The significance of Shem’s line (*Shem* is Heb. for “name”; *Baruch HaShem* = “blessed be the name”)

F. Conclusion