

Study Plan

Question / Topic	Passages
→ Is the Bible Trustworthy?	Various
→ Did God Really Create the World?	Genesis 1
→ If God is good, why does suffering exist?	Genesis 2,3
4 Why is evil so widespread and powerful?	Genesis 4-11
5 How can evil people become righteous?	Genesis 12-47
6 Who is God?	Exodus 1-12
7 What is the purpose of the Ten Commandments?	Exodus 14-34
8 What does it mean to take a "step of faith"?	Joshua, 18,2 Samuel
9 How do the Old and New Testaments fit together?	Isaiah, Luke
10 Why did Jesus perform miracles?	Mark
11 What did Jesus really say?	John
12 Is death the end (or the beginning)?	Matthew

Truth to Guide Our Thoughts

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." Proverbs 9:10

"All these things My hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My word." Isaiah 66:2

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" Romans 11:33

As we begin today's lesson, it is important to remember important truths about God. He is at the center of every part of the Biblical story (not us). If we get this backwards, we quickly move away from truth and add Him to our story, leading us away from His light and into our darkness.

Why is Evil so Widespread and Powerful?

How far will men go...?

In our last lesson, we saw how evil entered into the world, removing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and from the presence of God. Today, we will see how quickly evil spreads and "infects" everything and everyone.

From Last Lesson: Sin → Death (separation from life)

- **Genesis 2:16,17** > God gave complete freedom with only one command
- **Sin** – to turn away from God and go your own way
- **Genesis 3:7-9** > After they ate the fruit, they hid themselves from God
 - ✓ When someone dies *physically*, their soul is separated from their body
 - ✓ When someone dies *spiritually*, their spirit is separated from God
- **Genesis 3:10-12** > Fear, Shame, and Guilt

In review of our last lesson, we saw that Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. The result of their actions was spiritual and physical death: separation from God, and ultimately, separation of life from their bodies. In the first few pages of the Bible, we have discovered the cause of suffering and death - sin. The greatest sin of all: rejecting the almighty God. Separation from the source of life itself.

The remainder of the Bible contains the amazing story of how God is seeking to bring people back into a perfect relationship with Himself.

From Last Lesson: Clues to Remember

- **Genesis 3:9** > God came down and called out to the sinful man
 - "Where are you?" An opportunity to confess sin
- **Genesis 3:17-18** > Thorns and Thistles on Earth
 - Thorns: an image of the pain of sin
- **Genesis 3:21** > God covered their shame
 - God allowed the death of an animal (a substitute) instead of the death of the man
 - The first animal sacrifice:
 - A constant reminder that sin causes death
 - **Leviticus 17:11** > The blood contains life (and forgiveness)

As I mentioned last time, the Bible tells the amazing true story about what God is doing to bring people back to Himself. As we move through the Old Testament, we will see "clues" of how He will rescue lost people, starting with these three from Genesis, chapter 3:

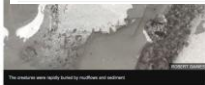
1) While God could have instantly killed the man for his direct disobedience, He didn't. Instead, He came down to the sinful man, calling out to him, giving him the opportunity to repent

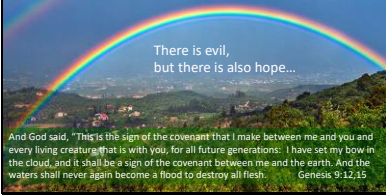
2) Because of sin, life on earth became very difficult. We see thorns and thistles grow up where good fruit should have been. We didn't focus specifically on this last week (as a clue), but you will see later that thorns are a painful reminder of sin.

3) And in a world created with beauty and life, we see the first deaths: God killed animals instead of the man and women, a substitute death to cover their sinful shame.

<u>Three true stories about evil</u> • Cain and Abel (Genesis 4) • The Great Flood (Genesis 6 – 9) • The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)	In this lesson, we will look at three true stories which show us how far men will go away from God. Unless God restrains evil, it will quickly consume us (and we will consume each other).
<u>Cain and Abel - Genesis 4</u> • Verses 1-2: Cain and Abel – both <u>born sinners</u> • Verses 3-5: Two sacrifices; two responses 1. Abel : sacrifice of a lamb, following the example set by God in the garden – accepted 2. Cain : sacrifice of fruits and vegetables, giving the result of his own work – rejected • Cain chose to offer a sacrifice <u>his own way</u> (sin) • It may have <u>seemed good to him</u> but <u>was not</u> what God desired. • “Religion” = people try to please God with their <u>own ideas and efforts</u>.	Since Adam and Eve were both sinners, they passed their sinful genetics down to all of their children. Since both of their sons were separated from God by sin, they offered sacrifices to try and please God. In the garden, God had set the pattern of sacrifices by killing a lamb to cover the sin and shame of Adam and Eve. But Cain decided to do something different. He was a farmer and chose to offer his best vegetables to God. To him, this seemed like a <u>good thing</u> – giving your best to please God, But God had already set the pattern of the <u>right thing</u> to do – the blood of the lamb was needed. Even though the animal sacrifice could not take away their sins, it demonstrated agreement with God’s truth that sin results in death. In pride, people try to please God with their own ideas and efforts – we often call this “religion” – man’s effort to save himself.
<u>The Power of Sin</u> • Verse 5: At whom was Cain “very angry”? – He was angry at God (even though his life and breath were all gifts from God) • Verse 6: Why was Cain angry? – Cain wanted to live his way, not under the authority of God. – Just like Adam and Eve, Cain wanted to rule his own life. • Verse 7: What sin is “crouching at the door”? – Rejecting God’s authority – “believe in yourself” – We all inherited this sin – it lives within every heart – “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Judges 21:25 – A world like this is filled with evil and chaos!	This story is not just about Cain and Abel – it is about all of us. As we read these verses, examine your own heart and you will see that we all face the same sinful temptations. Why is evil so widespread? Because this same sin resides in the heart of every person!
<u>God’s Warning to Cain</u> • Verses 7: God loves Cain and warns him of the danger of sin. Sin tries to trap people and take them further away from God. • Verse 8: Cain did not listen to God’s warning, choosing sin again. • Verses 9-10: God “calls out” to Cain, giving him a chance to confess and repent. • The “blood cries out” – the Bible reminds us that blood represents life. • Verse 11: Sin always results in a curse	Note that God is warning Cain about the temptation to add one sin to another. Warnings demonstrate love. When we love someone, we warn them against danger. Sin isn’t a passive enemy – it actively pursues people, taking them further away from God. But Cain already had a plan to cover up his sin... Why does <u>God call out to Cain</u>? – Once again, we see God giving man <u>an opportunity</u> to <u>confess</u> and <u>repent</u>. We also see another reminder that blood represents life – figuratively, it cries out from the ground. Cain was cursed for his actions, made to be a “fugitive” on the earth (separation).
<u>Things to Remember</u> • Even the very best efforts of man cannot please God. <u>He is God</u> – His way is the only right way.	We have a very sinful tendency to drag God’s glorious majesty down to human level (Psalms 50:21). When we do this, we assume that we can satisfy His expectations with our religious activities. But the actual fact is much more serious – our only hope is to submit completely to His way. When we forget God’s holiness and awesome greatness, we move from an accurate fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10) to acting as though He needs our collaboration (Isaiah 40:14). Like Cain, we demonstrate our rejection of His definitions of good/evil and replace them with our own.

	Inventing religions is a global practice, but it does not solve our problem with sin.
<u>Genesis 5 – Adam’s children</u> • Verse 3: Adam’s next son (Seth) – in <i>man’s</i> image • Verses 4,5: Adam lived 930 years with many sons and daughters • People lived a very long time (solar protection, stable climate, minor genetic changes for now) • Chapter 5 ~ 1500 years • Rapid growth of population and rapid growth of spiritual darkness	The sad change: Initially, men were created in the image of God, but now, they inherit the sinful genetics of their parents (all the way down to us). While the lifespans of people in this chapter seem impossibly long, recognize that the early earth had a very different climate and that the sinful effects on human genetics were only beginning.
<u>Genesis 6 – Evil on the Earth</u> • Verses 5-7: How much wickedness (evil) was on the earth and in the people? • How did God feel about the wickedness? • What did He choose to do? • Verse 8: Noah – the only man on earth who pleased God.	Notice that God sees the <u>actions</u> of mankind and the condition of their <u>hearts</u>. How did God feel about the wickedness on the earth? God is creator, owner, and absolute authority of everything and everyone that exists. He had every right to destroy His creation and would be perfectly just to do so.
<u>Genesis 6 – God’s plan</u> • Verses 13-16: God warns Noah about the judgment and uses him to build a <u>safe place</u>.  ✓ 100 years to build ✓ Very large: ~450 large (40') containers ✓ Very stable: same design used by modern ships ✓ A box: it didn't need to travel – just float.	In Genesis 6:13-22, God tells Noah that He is going to destroy the people on the earth as well as the earth itself. God tells Noah to make an “ark” – a huge barge. God tells him exactly what to do, designing a very stable vessel. Over the next 100 years, Noah did everything just as God commanded.
<u>Genesis 7 – The Great Flood</u> • Verse 13: Only eight people entered the ark • Verses 15,16: God brought pairs of every animal to the ark. And then, God shut the door. • Verses 11,12: Water came from above and below, rising above all dry land (v.19). • Verses 23,24: <u>Everything</u> outside of the ark died • Ezekiel 33:11 How does God feel about death?	On the appointed day, God brought the animals to Noah’s ark and shut them inside. As the global flood approached, this was the only safe place on earth. In verses 17-24 we learn that the water came from <u>above</u> and <u>below</u> the earth (verses 11,12) for 40 days, covering the mountains to a depth of more than 7 meters. Every person, land animal, and bird that was not inside of the ark died. The waters flooded the earth for 150 days. Ezekiel 33:11 tells us that God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked (He did not laugh at their destruction). God’s justice is always fair.
<u>The Great Flood : is it true?</u> • Over 270 flood stories like this in cultures all over the world • Geology shows there was a major flood event: – Canyons without deltas – Rock layers bent and folded without cracks – Rapid burial and fossil formation of plants and animals – Clear boundary layers between sedimentary rock	This story is not isolated to the Bible – there are over 270 flood stories like this in cultures all over the earth. Much evidence from geology shows that there was a major flood event, including canyon formation without deltas, clearly defined layers of sedimentary rock, folded without cracking, and rapid burial/fossilization of plants and animals (including ones that penetrate multiple layers of rock). I can share more information later if interested.

Huge fossil discovery made in China's Hubei province By Helen Cheng BBC News © 24 March 2019  Scientists say the fossils have been "exceptionally" preserved	A recent discovery in China shows the same reality that is found all over the world – geology indicates a massive flood event that resulted in huge, mixed fossil deposits all over the world.
 The discovery is particularly remarkable because "the majority of creatures are soft-bodied organisms like jellyfish and worms that normally stand no chance of becoming fossilised", Prof Robert Gaines, a geologist who also took part in the study, said in an email to the BBC. The majority of fossils tend to be of hard-bodied animals, as harder substances, like bones, are less likely to rot and decompose. The Qingjiang biota must have been "rapidly buried in sediment" due to a storm, in order for soft tissues to be so well preserved, Prof Zhang says.  Most of all fossils collected by the public are trilobites	What does it take to make a fossil? When an animal or plant dies, it lies on the ground (or just under the surface) and rots away. To make a fossil requires rapid burial, high pressure and very special conditions. Like those in the great flood...
 Prof Gaines hopes his work will also strike a chord with modern readers. "Biotic diversity today is something that we take for granted, even though there are indications that extinction rates are sharply increasing." "Yet most of the major animal lineages were established in a singular event in the history of life, the Cambrian explosion, the likes of which have never been seen before or after. It also reminds us of our deep kinship to all living animals."  Researchers were lucky to find a trilobite and a nautilus	It is interesting to consider the fact that, every year, we see thousands of species go extinct, but we never see new ones emerging (i.e. we don't see evolution happening, we see the opposite). I love their conclusion: a singular event caused the establishment of all these creatures (and all of these diverse fossils), and it was one that had never been seen before or would be after.
<u>Things to Remember</u> • Even the very best efforts of man cannot please God. He is God – His way is the only right way. • God is grieved by the wickedness of people and will punish sin. • In the midst of judgment for sin, God shows mercy, providing a safe place.	When the Bible talks about "the heart," it's not just talking about our feelings – it also refers to our thoughts and the decisions we make. While we can hide from people, God sees the heart of every person and knows the truth of what we might try to hide. Since God made us and loves us, our sin causes God sorrow. He knows that our sin takes us further away from Him, leading us to darkness, death, and ultimately, judgment. Throughout the Bible, you will see stories of God showing <u>judgment and mercy</u> (e.g. warning Noah and closing the door). Here, we see another clue about God's plan – in the midst of judgment, He provides a safe place for men to survive. But the only safe place of survival is the one that He provides.
<u>God's Commands and Man's Response</u> • Genesis 9:1 What did God tell the people to do? ➢ Fill the earth = travel and <u>spread out</u> • Genesis 11:1,2 How many languages on the earth? ➢ Just one • Genesis 11:3,4 Did people obey God? ➢ No, they did not want to spread out across the earth • What name did they want to lift up? • Isaiah 43:7 What name should people lift up?	After the flood, were people better? No, the inclination of the human heart is still evil. What command did God give to Noah and his descendants? – God told the people to multiply and spread out over the earth. But man ignores God and desires to do their own thing... What does this say about the language on the earth at that time? (maybe everyone spoke Chinese 😊). What did the people want to do and why did they want to do this? <u>God told them to spread out</u>, but they wanted to stay together to <u>make a name for themselves</u>.

<u>God's Response to Man's Evil</u> • Genesis 11:5,6 What did God say about the men? ➢ With common language and goals, they will accomplish everything that they plan. • Is the power of man a good thing or bad thing? ➢ When it is against God, it is always a bad thing. • Genesis 11:7-9 Did God destroy the evil men? ➢ No, He multiplied their languages to force them to spread out. Again, we see mercy in judgment.	Who is the “Us” in verse 7? What did the Lord say about the people’s plan? What was the result of God’s introduction of confusion? Once again, the people directly disobeyed God. Why didn’t He just destroy them? This is another good example of God balancing His <u>judgment</u> with His <u>mercy</u>. When I struggle to learn the Chinese language, I must remember that our language difference is a result of His mercy! The people gathered there because they did not want to be scattered over all the earth as God commanded. These men were full of pride! They should have been interested in exalting God’s name, not their own.
Global Languages remind us that, even in His judgment, God shows mercy. 	Linguists tell us that, apart from this story of Babel, there is no good explanation for the diversity of languages that exist on the earth. Studies have determined that there are about 6900 distinct languages around the world, originating from about 15 unique “protolanguages.” Studies have also shown that, over time, language tends to <u>devolve</u> from <u>complex to simple</u>, not the other way around.
<u>Things to Remember</u> • Even the very best efforts of man cannot please God. He is God – His way is the only right way. • God is grieved by the wickedness of people and will punish sin. • In the midst of judgment for sin, God shows mercy, providing a safe place. • Evil is real and always pulls men away from God. We have only one hope – God must bring us back to Himself.	As I said earlier, the most serious sin of all is to reject the Creator God of the universe. When we choose to seek our glory instead of His, we are actually doing just that – putting ourselves into His place, making ourselves God.
<u>Evil is Inside Everyone</u> • The culture says our problem is outside of us and we can find the solution if we look inside. • When we pray “deliver us from evil,” we must recognize that the evil inside of us is our greatest danger (Matthew 6:13; James 1:14,15). • Although we may be able to run away from the evil outside of us, we cannot run from ourselves. • Only God's grace has the power to rescue us from the most threatening evil of all—the evil that still resides in our hearts (Mark 7:20-23).	Modern psychology assumes that our big problems are outside of us: societal pressures, financial hardships, unfairness, drugs and alcohol, temptations, etc. It then tries to reach inside of a person and use their “inner strength” to achieve a solution. But this is not the reality we experience and is certainly not the message of the Bible. The Bible is clear that we all are born with a sin nature, attracting us to opportunities for sinful actions around us. Our sinful nature (on the inside) can only be overcome by a greater power from God (on the outside).
神说：“这就是我与你，与一切跟你们同在有生命的活物所立之约的记号，直到万代；我把彩虹放在云彩中，作我与大地立约的记号。出现云彩中，我就纪念我与你们和一切有生命的活物所立的约；水不再成为洪水，来毁灭凡有生命的。”  There is evil, but there is also hope... And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh." Genesis 9:12,15	Yes, there is evil (bad news). But there is also hope. Remember Ezekiel 33:11 – God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. He has a plan to rescue sinful people...