

First, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living. If we don't have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get our lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at the center and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.

Genesis gets us off on the right foot. Genesis pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled. It gives us a vocabulary for speaking accurately and comprehensively about our lives, where we come from and where we are going, what we think and what we do, the we live with and how to get along with them, the troubles we find ourselves in and the blessings that keep arriving.

Genesis used words to make a foundation that is solid and true. Everything we think and do and feel is material in a building operation in which we are engaged all our life long. There is immense significance in everything we do. Our speech and our actions and our prayers are all, every detail of them, involved in the vast building operation comprehensively known as the Kingdom of God. But we don't build the foundation. the Foundation is given. The foundation is firmly in place.

Jesus concluded his most famous teaching by telling us that there are two ways to go about our lives- we can build on sand or we can build on rock. No matter how wonderfully we build, if we build on sand it will all fall to pieces like a house of cards. We build on what is already there, on the rock. Genesis is a verbal witness to that rock: God's creative acts, God's intervening and gracious judgments, God's call to a life of faith, God's making covenant with us.

But Genesis presents none of this to us as an abstract, bloodless "truth" or "principle." We are given a succession of stores with named people, people who loved and quarreled, believed and doubted, had children and married, experienced sin and grace. If we pay attention, we find that we ourselves are living variations on these very stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The stories show clearly that we are never outsiders or spectators to anything in "heaven and earth." God doesn't work impersonally from space; he works with us where we are, as he finds us. No matter what we do, whether good or bad, we continue to be part of everything that God is doing. Nobody can drop out-there's no place to drop out to. So we may as well get started and take our place in the story- at the beginning.

Below are several websites that provide commentary on Genesis in general and on chapters 11-12 specifically. Use these resources for additional preparation to lead the discussion about Genesis 11-12.

Commentary on Genesis 11-12 from bible.org

Genesis 11-12:

- <https://bible.org/seriespage/unity-unbelief-genesis-111-9>
- <https://bible.org/seriespage/12-call-abram-genesis-1131-129>
- <https://bible.org/seriespage/when-faith-fails-8230-genesis-1210-1341>

Commentary on Genesis 11.1-9 from John Mark Hicks (Professor of Theology at Lipscomb University)

- <http://johnmarkhicks.com/2012/07/09/the-tower-of-babel-whats-the-problem/>

For more information on Genesis visit:

<https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-genesis/>

READ Genesis 11-12

(The following discussion questions are adapted from The Serendipity Bible)

Opening

- Who of your relatives has lived the longest? What do you know or what have you been told about this person?
- Are you the firstborn to your parents? Or are you among their “other sons and daughters”? What difference did birth order make in how you were raised?
- Where is “home for you? When did you first leave there? What for? Who or what did you take with you? And leave behind?
- What do (or did) you hope to be doing at age 75?

Digging in — Discovering the Word

- Why do they build this tower? Why is such unity wrong?
- In light of God’s early history with mankind, why would the Lord be concerned that “nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them”?
- What do you learn about Abram, his family and his roots from this passage? Why might Abram migrate with his father and not Nahor?
- Why might they settle in Haran instead of Canaan, their intended destination?
- How does Genesis 11 interlock with the table of nations (ch 10)? With God’s covenant with Noah (ch 9)? With the genealogy of Adam (ch 5)? Why would these historical connections be important to Israelites? To you?
- What command and promises does God give Abram? With what qualifications? What do you make of their unconditional nature? Their universal scope? Means of fulfillment (v.7; see 11:30)?
- Why does God promise Abram a great name (v. 2), when God foiled the name-building efforts of others (see 6:4ff; 11:4ff)?
- When Abram comes to the promised land, only to find a famine there, how might he feel about God’s promise? Why?
- Could Abram’s sin thwart God’s plan? How does God extricate Abram from the mess?

Connecting the Dots — Applying the Word

- What’s the lesson here for empire-building? For church-building? For human ambition?
- How is unity “in Christ” different from the unity of Babel?
- Where are you feeling scattered or confused? Why might that be? Have you ever built a “tower” for yourself only to get “scattered” by God? What happened?
- Describe a time when you made a significant, personal sacrifice in response to God’s directive?
- To what (place, people, priority) might God be calling you? Why not go?
- At this junction between primeval history (ch 1-11) and patriarchal history (ch 12-50) a review is in order. What have you learned thus far about: (a) God’s original intention for his people and how this paradise was lost? (b) The degeneration of the human race, as well as its generation, since the Fall? (c) The everyday, as well as redemptive, history of God’s people? (d) God’s covenant with us, which involves judgment, as well as mercy?
- What new things about God have impacted you in Genesis?