

TWO COMPETING VIEWS ... ONE COMPELLING TRUTH

# IS GENESIS HISTORY?

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**CHURCH & FAMILY  
DISCUSSION GUIDE**





“Nothing in the world makes sense  
except in the light of Genesis.”

**Del Tackett**

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

This guide is designed to provide topics for discussion for teachers and parents. It can be used after watching the film *Is Genesis History?* to explore different areas that were brought up in the film, as well as to dig deeper into what the Bible says about Creation and the Flood.

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## INITIAL THOUGHTS FOR TEACHERS:

Let's be honest: many people in the church get nervous when the first chapters of Genesis are brought up. A lot of pastors and teachers don't like to talk about them. In fact, when Dr. Del Tackett was considering being the guide for the film, some of his friends warned him against doing it.

Why is that? It seems the first eleven chapters of Genesis are the most controversial chapters in the Bible. Is that because they also are the most important chapters? Every time we turn to the first pages, we are confronted with creation in six days, Adam and Eve, the Fall, Cain and Abel, the Flood, and the tower of Babel.

The new documentary **IS GENESIS HISTORY?** takes the approach that the first chapters of Genesis are critically important. It sees them as controversial because they present a history of the world directly in conflict with the conventional history taught everywhere in the media, textbooks, and schools.

This conflict is one of the reasons so many Christians are interested in Genesis. They know the events recorded in those chapters are rejected as history by everyone outside the church, and even by some inside the church. It is a conflict that some Bible scholars have tried to smooth over by re-interpreting "days" as long ages and arguing that Noah's flood was not truly global.

Yet these interpretations do not appear to be a straightforward reading of the words in context. Although these reinterpretations may be well-intentioned, they seem to be an attempt to find a middle ground between two histories that are essentially contradictory. A brief glance at the history of Biblical interpretation reveals it was only after 19th-century geologists and paleontologists began to argue the earth was very old that some Bible scholars began to reinterpret Genesis in terms of long ages and a local flood — not before. They were clearly influenced by the current scientific environment to change the meanings of words and phrases that didn't fit with the new natural history of the world.

This is why everything comes back to history: what actually happened in the beginning? God could easily have said the world formed progressively as it was populated over billions of years, or that Adam and Eve evolved, or that Noah's flood was isolated in the Middle East. But He didn't.

In fact, Genesis is pretty specific about what happened in history. The following discussion exercises examine the text from different perspectives so that people can see what it says for themselves.



## GROUP DISCUSSION:

These discussion activities can be done with a small or large group of either adults and/or youth. They can last for as little as 15 minutes each or could take up an entire class session.



### Discussion 1:

#### What does Genesis say actually happened?

Ask the class to open to Genesis 1. Designate someone as the note-taker. Have them stand at the board to take notes or write it on a sheet of large paper.

Start at Genesis 1 and ask people to skim through and identify all the major events mentioned. List them out by chapter all the way through Genesis 11.

When you're finished, ask the class to go back through the list and identify those that have an impact outside of those chapters. Which ones have an impact in other parts of the Bible? Which still have an impact today?

#### Questions for the class:

1. Why is Genesis so controversial?
2. Does it appear that Genesis is presenting an accurate history of the world? Why or why not?
3. What is the only way to know for certain what happened in history?

### Discussion 2:

#### What did Moses, Jesus, Paul, Luke, & Peter say about Genesis?

Genesis is mentioned many times by other Biblical writers, so it's worth looking at what they say about these first chapters. Have someone read the scripture selection out loud, then discuss the question.

1. **Read Exodus 20:11** - What does Moses say about the days of creation and a normal week? Why does he make this comparison?
2. **Read Matthew 19:1-9** - Why does Jesus quote Genesis when talking about divorce?
3. **Read Luke 3:23-38** - Why does Luke include this genealogy in his gospel? If Adam was created on the sixth day of creation, what does it suggest about the age of the earth?
4. **Read Romans 5:12-21** - Why is a literal Adam important to Paul? Why does he make a comparison between Adam and Jesus? What is the relationship between Adam and Jesus?
5. **Read 1 Timothy 2:12-14** - Why does Paul refer to the history of Adam and Eve here?
6. **Read Romans 8:18-25** - What happened at the Fall to the Creation? What does this mean for us?



7. **Read Isaiah 54:9** - How does God speak through Isaiah about the Flood? Why is He using it as a comparison?
8. **Read Luke 17:20-27** - What did Jesus think about the Flood in Noah's day? What does He compare it to and why? What does this tell us about the extent of the Flood?
9. **Read 2 Peter 3** - Why does Peter say that people overlook the Creation and the Flood? What does he compare the Flood to, and why is this important? Some people want to say that vs.8 means that time distinctions are meaningless, but is it referring to man's experience of time or God being outside of time? Why should it encourage people to repent? Why does Peter use the Flood as a comparison for the Last Judgment?

Looking over these many passages, how do the authors of the New Testament view the events of Genesis? As real history or as a myth? If they are not real events, what does that mean for the gospel?

### **Discussion 3:**

#### **How important is Genesis to our world today?**

Some people think that Genesis doesn't have much relevance to the issues going on in our world today. When you stop to consider it, however, Genesis actually has the most to say to the issues going on around us.

In these discussion questions, you can talk through the importance of Genesis to various issues going on today. Feel free to add in more.

1. **The Sanctity of Life** - Why is it wrong to kill people, including babies in the womb? See Gen 9:6.
2. **Families** - Are children, families, and a growing population a good thing for the earth? Was it God's design to have a world covered with people? See Gen 1:28 and 9:7
3. **Marriage** - Why is marriage only a relationship between one man and one woman, and not between two men or two women? See Gen 2:18-25
4. **Male/Female** - Why can a man not change his sex (or gender) to that of a woman, or a woman to a man? And why is it wrong for people to want to do this? See Gen 1:27
5. **Work** - Why is it important to seek out a vocation that is pleasing to God and is in accordance with how He has made you? Why is work good? And yet why is work often difficult and painful? See Gen 1:28, 2:15, and 3:17-19
6. **Time** - How do we ultimately track the passage of time in terms of days, months and years? See Gen 1:14-18 Why do we order our calendars in weeks of six days of work and one day of rest? See Ex 20:11.
7. **Food** - Why are there so many different, pleasing things we can eat? And why can we also eat animals? See Gen 1:29 and 9:3
8. **Science** - If science is the process of seeking to study and understand God's creation in order to explain, predict, and control it, who was the first scientist? Gen 2:19-20
9. **Environmental Stewardship** - Why are we to take care of the environment and steward it according to wise principles? See Gen 2:8,9,15
10. **Climate Change/Global Warming** - Can man's actions significantly affect the earth's climate, or has God fixed the seasons and weather according to His own plans? See Gen 8:22
11. **Death & Corruption** - Why do people get sick and die, and why is the world running down? See Gen 3:17-19
12. **Struggle with Sin** - Why is sin such a struggle for all of us? See Gen 4:6-7



**13. Meaning of Life** - What is our ultimate purpose and the meaning of life? How do we find true fulfillment? See Gen 5:21-24

**14. Redemption** - When was the first promise given that Jesus Christ would come to redeem us? See Gen 3:15

These are just a few of the many historical events recorded in Genesis that have direct impact on our world and our culture today. Feel free to think of more.



#### Discussion 4:

#### What are the real differences between these two views of history?

Once you know what the Bible says about the history of the world, it's worth comparing the two conflicting views. Draw a chart on the board or large sheet of paper, then ask a series of questions to highlight the differences. (Answers are included below.)

Within a group, there is normally enough awareness of the views taught in textbooks and classrooms to be able to accurately construct its view of history.

As a bit of background, there are two basic views concerning the length of history that are at the heart of the conflict: a young earth view and an old earth view. But there are some variations within the old earth view:

1. The young earth, **Historical Genesis** view says the earth and universe are less than 10,000 years old and that the events recorded in Genesis happened in a literal way.
2. The old earth, **Conventional** view says the earth is approximately 4.5 billion years old and the universe is 13.7 billion years old. People who hold this view see key parts of Genesis 1-11 as being symbolic or non-literal.
  - A. All who hold to the **Conventional** view agree on what may be termed Cosmic evolution or development (the first 9 billion years of the universe) as well as Geological evolution or development (the next 4.5 billion years when the earth was forming).
  - B. They disagree, however, on the appearance of Biological life (the last 540 million years). Within the **Conventional** view, there are three different approaches:
    1. **Progressive Creation** - God created complex marine and animal life in 20+ progressive creation events every 25-30 million years, with numerous extinction events happening throughout the 540 million year period.
    2. **Theistic Evolution** - God created bacterial life that He guided over billions of years to evolve into all the life that has lived on this planet. Instead of unique creations, God used a form of descent from a common bacterial ancestor.
    3. **Atheistic Evolution** - After the spontaneous appearance of life, mutations and natural selection acted over billions of years to evolve into everything that has lived on this planet. Nothing is created, but everything alive today descended from a common bacterial ancestor.



We will try to note any distinctions under the **Conventional** view below. The point of this exercise is to try to reveal the differences between the two views in terms of the history of the world.

## How long did it take for the earth to be formed and become what it is today?

**HISTORICAL GENESIS:** 3 normal days of rapid transformation from a water ball to a livable biosphere.

**CONVENTIONAL VIEW:** 4 billion years of slow development from a molten ball to a livable biosphere.

## How long did it take for God to create the sun, moon, and stars?

**HISTORICAL GENESIS:** 1 day; God formed the rest of the universe, the sun, and the moon, on the fourth day.

**CONVENTIONAL VIEW:** Over 10 billion years; the universe developed before our solar system appeared 4.5 billion years ago; then the sun, earth, and moon developed.

## How long are the days in Genesis 1?

**HISTORICAL GENESIS:** A day was a normal solar day marked by mornings and evenings just like we experience days.

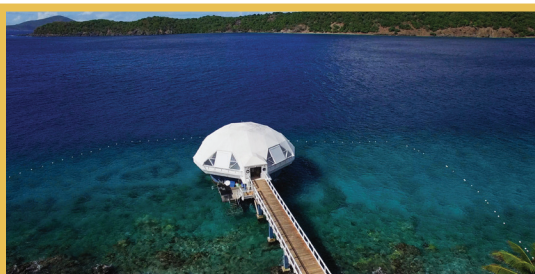
**CONVENTIONAL VIEW:** A “day” is a symbol that stands for varying periods of time lasting from hundreds of millions of years to billions of years; or, it is not meant to refer to normal time.

## How were plants and animals created?

**HISTORICAL GENESIS:** God created all the unique kinds of plants and animals over 3 days, designing them to reproduce according to their particular kinds. (*Plants on Day 3; Fish/Birds on Day 5; Animals/People on Day 6*)

**CONVENTIONAL VIEW: Progressive Creation** - God created unique plants and animals during 20+ progressive creation events over hundreds of millions of years.

**Theistic/Atheistic Evolution** - God/random chance developed all living creatures from a common bacterial ancestor over billions of years; there are no unique creations of kinds.





## How and when were man and woman created?

**HISTORICAL GENESIS:** God created man out of the dust and woman out of man on the sixth day of creation.

**CONVENTIONAL VIEW: Progressive Creation** - God uniquely created a man from the dust and a woman from man 50,000 to 200,000 years ago.

**Theistic/Atheistic Evolution** - God/random chance developed a group of pre-human hominids and the first man and woman were either chosen out of this group, or are symbolic ideas for that group of hominids.

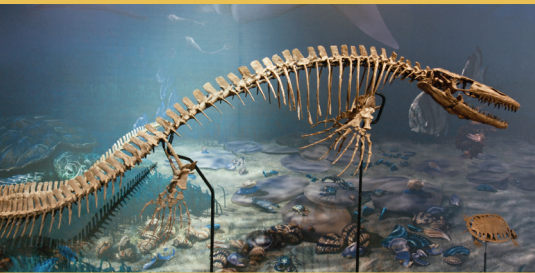
## When did death enter the world?

**HISTORICAL GENESIS:** Death entered the world as a result of Adam's disobedience, affecting both men and animals. At the same time, God cursed the creation with a "bondage to decay." (Romans 8) Prior to the Fall, there was no human or animal death, and the creation was "good."

**CONVENTIONAL VIEW:** Animal death existed for over 500 million years before Adam and Eve; this resulted in the death of billions of animals and the extinction of thousands of species.

**Progressive Creation** - Human death was the result of the disobedience of Adam.

**Theistic/Atheistic Evolution** - Human death occurred before the disobedience of Adam, and is actually an important aspect of evolutionary development by natural selection.



## Are the genealogies of Genesis useful for tracking the passage of time?

**HISTORICAL GENESIS:** The genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 are accurate records of father-son relationships from Adam to Noah to Abraham and can be used to track time.

**CONVENTIONAL VIEW:** The genealogies only represent a small percentage of the father-son-grandson line; up to 90% or more of the genealogical links are missing, so they cannot be used to track time. Some think the genealogies are symbolic.

## Was the Flood global or local?

**HISTORICAL GENESIS:** The Flood was a global catastrophe where the floodwaters covered the tops of the mountains existing at that time in history.

**CONVENTIONAL VIEW:** The Flood was a local/regional catastrophe somewhere in the Middle East; it did not affect the entire world.



## Did all the humans, birds and animals living on land die in the flood?

**HISTORICAL GENESIS:** Yes, all humans, birds, and land animals died during the Flood, with the exception of Noah, his family, and the animals on the Ark.

**CONVENTIONAL VIEW:** No one holds that all land animals and birds died.

Some hold that all humans died, but not all animals and birds.

Others hold that only humans, animals, and birds living in the region affected by the flood died.

## Was there a major dispersion from the tower of Babel as a result of the confusion of languages by God?

**HISTORICAL GENESIS:** Yes, there was a real confusion of languages that led to a dispersion of people around the world.

**CONVENTIONAL VIEW:** Some hold that there was a real confusion of languages and a real dispersion.

Others hold that this was a symbolic event and that human language evolved over tens of thousands of years.

It is possible to draw out more differences between these two views, but these are the primary differences.

### Questions for the class:

1. Are these views of history able to be reconciled with one another, or are they each telling a different story? Is there truly a conflict?
2. What events in the conventional view don't fit with specific comments of Biblical authors?
  - A. God declared the Creation to be "good" when He finished with each day. How does that fit with the idea of millions of years of death?
  - B. Moses bases our normal week of six days of work and one day of rest on the seven days of the Creation week. Why does this comparison make it difficult to interpret the days as long ages or as symbols?
  - C. Paul talks about a real Adam and Eve sinning. What does that mean for those who believe Adam and Eve are symbolic?
  - D. Paul says that death came as a result of Adam's disobedience, and that the creation is in bondage to decay. How does that fit with the idea of death before Adam?
  - E. Jesus compares His second coming with Noah's flood. How does a local flood change the meaning of Jesus' comparison?
  - F. God promises to Noah never to flood the earth again in the same way. If the flood was a local flood, and local floods are still happening, what does that mean for God's promises?
  - G. Peter talks about the Creation and the destruction of the world by the flood as two things that people want to ignore or forget. Why is that?

## FINAL THOUGHTS ON SCIENCE, HISTORY & THE BIBLE

It is obvious the one issue we've not discussed is the question of science and the Bible. That is one of the reasons for the documentary: 13 PhD's take time to dig into the science and philosophy surrounding Genesis.

But there is something we don't discuss in the film that may be helpful to consider. The following material is not really a question and answer, so if you want to read it and share it with your class, you can do so.

As was mentioned above, in 19th-century England, it was arguments from the first geologists and paleontologists that convinced some Bible scholars and pastors to interpret Genesis according to an old earth, and, (in some cases) a local flood.

During that time, some people pointed to the situation with Galileo and the Church in the 16th-century, saying the situation with geology and the age of the earth was the same. The Church should not use the Bible to influence science.

But there is an important difference. Galileo was talking about something happening in the present that could be observed (the rotation of the earth around the sun); the geologists and paleontologists in England were talking about something that happened in the past that could not be observed. Unlike Galileo, these early scientists were looking at the rock layers and the fossils and interpreting them according to particular assumptions about the age of the earth.

This is why geology and paleontology are considered historical sciences. They are seeking to explain events that are not now happening. But, like all areas of science, they rely on many unspoken assumptions. In fact, a cursory reading of the history of geology and paleontology reveals that many of the assumptions and conclusions of those early scientists are no longer held today; they have been replaced with new assumptions and conclusions.

This is what we see in every area of science. Over time, the views of scientists are consistently replaced, often contradicting what had been held before as true. The actual history of science does not reveal a straightforward progression of knowledge as often presented in textbooks. Rather, it shows that scientific thinking is a series of changing "paradigms," or ways of interpreting bodies of data that are ever-growing and necessarily re-evaluated.

In many instances, a new idea completely replaces a prior idea about the world. Whether one is looking at the history of physics, geology, or biology, one sees a fascinating series of shifts and movements that make one wonder how anyone could think science is an ultimate authority. After all, if our views of the world have changed since 1950, even more since 1900, and radically so since 1850, then why would anyone think our views won't change just as much (if not more) by 2050, 2100, or 2150?

This is why history is so important. The events of history never change. We don't debate whether Julius Caesar or George Washington really existed; we don't wonder if the Constitutional Convention actually happened in Philadelphia. We may not know every aspect of those people and events, but we do know there is an absolute fixity to them. No one can change what actually happened in history.

This is why the Bible is a history book, not a science book. The events recorded in it may have an impact on science, but they do not change like science. It is also why the Bible uses genealogies to track the passage of time: biological relationships can never be altered. The Bible is about recording real people and real events in real time. What happened in history does not change.



On the other hand, we can be sure that scientific ideas have changed and will continue to change. That's why we can't use them to interpret the Bible.

Just consider what happened in 19th-century England. Many of the early geologists and paleontologists were actually Christians who embraced the view called 'progressive creation': that God had used a series of creation events over long periods to populate the world (they were unsure exactly how long, just much longer than what the Bible presented). Although they accepted long ages, they rejected the idea of biological evolution as being incompatible with the Bible.

In 1844, however, a book was published entitled "The Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation." It argued for the evolution of the universe, of the earth, and of animals and man. It was extremely popular, but not considered scientifically accurate. A number of Christian geologists spoke out against it. Nevertheless, it paved the way for a much more important work by Charles Darwin entitled "The Origin of Species" in 1859. Within a generation, the views on the history of the world held by those prior geologists were replaced with the views of Darwin and his followers.

But what about Genesis? Just as the Christian geologists had influenced new interpretations of Genesis, a whole new set of interpretations began to appear that explained the first chapters in light of evolution. In fact, an American scientist named Asa Gray (a close friend of Darwin's), was one of the first to argue for theistic evolution as the guiding factor for evolution. Darwin didn't much care for this view, but it became popular with many Christians on both sides of the Atlantic.

The point is this: there's nothing really new in the world. There are some Christians today who say we must use the current findings of science to interpret the Bible. Some want to go back to progressive creation, others want to argue for theistic evolution. Both groups are just replacing the history presented in Genesis with a history of their own making.

The only solution is for Christians to recognize that the Bible gives us an accurate history of the world from Creation to the consummation of Christ's Kingdom. Genesis is as important as Exodus or Kings or Matthew or Acts. In fact, it can be argued that it is most important to the history of the world since it explains the origin of everything.

And how does Genesis relate to the natural world around us? That's the point of the documentary **IS GENESIS HISTORY?** It examines different lines of scientific evidence to show that it is quite reasonable to accept the Bible as a book of accurate history. Far from being exhaustive, the film is an introduction to seeing the world in the light of Genesis. As a number of scientists point out, there is still a lot of work to do.

After all, the world we live in is unimaginably complex. Any honest physicist, biologist, or geologist will tell you that we understand only a small percentage of the natural world. As our knowledge has increased, so too has our appreciation of the sheer immensity and complexity of the universe at every level, from atomic to galactic.

That complexity goes back to the beginning. This means that the best way to understand what happened is to rely on a historical record that is dependable and authoritative. It doesn't mean everything will be easy to understand - it won't be. The history of science also shows us that trying to understand the world takes time, effort, and intelligence. The fact that most of the greatest scientists in history were Christians who trusted Genesis should, however, be an encouragement to us. Perhaps that circumstance will one day come again.

Until then, Christians must strive to understand the natural world as best they can in light of the record in Genesis. We hope that our film is a helpful place to start.





Learn more about the film and buy tickets at  
**[IsGenesisHistory.com](http://IsGenesisHistory.com)**

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