

Genesis and Genealogies¹

Before the lesson: Prepare AV equipment to show the 13-minute Bible Project video <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/genesis-1-11/> and the 3:23-minute interview and the 4-minute video with Amanda Mbuvi.

 Genesis and Identity Formation: An Interview with Amanda Mubuvi

Fellowship Question: (Use one of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

If you were to create a family tree, how far back could you go with your current knowledge?

Do you have a family legend that goes back more than three generations? (For example, your ancestor came over on the Mayflower or your ancestor served in the Civil War)

Information:

The Bible begins with the book of Genesis, which means “beginnings.” In the first two chapters, we have two beginning or creation stories. In Genesis 1, God (named Elohim) creates by speaking. In Genesis 2, God (named Yahweh) creates by physically forming. Actually, the last part of the first creation story takes place in the first three verses of chapter two. Verse four introduces the second creation story.

- Have a class member read Genesis 2:1-4.

The New International Version (NIV) and the Common English Bible (CEB), among others, begin this verse, “This is the account...” How do other translations read?

This is one place where the King James Version outdoes some modern translations. It reads, “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created.” (The New Revised Standard Version Updated (NRSVU) has the same reading.)

In Hebrew, this is the word used to describe the long lists of genealogies. So Genesis 1 and 2 could be called the “genealogy” of Creation.

From the first words of the Bible, we see interest in how things began - the universe, the plants and animals, the people, even the Sabbath. “How did we begin?” and “Why are we here?” are major questions about life that ultimately drive our beliefs and behaviors.

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As Genesis continues, we learn that our beliefs and behaviors are not in line with God's plan for Creation. There are multiple covenants attempted, all at God's initiative, to get things back to the way God intended. God makes agreements with Adam and Eve in the beginning and then with Noah much later.

Today, we start a series on the new covenant made by God to and through Abraham and Sarah. Why did God need to make a new covenant?

The covenant story with Abraham and Sarah takes up most of the book of Genesis, from chapters 12 to 50.

This video gives us a good reminder of the human story in the first 11 chapters of Genesis:

[Show the Bible Project video <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/genesis-1-11/>]

The Bible begins with four prominent stories, those of:

- Adam/Eve
- Cain/Abel
- Lamech
- Noah

- Have a class member read the genealogy of Genesis 4:25-26.

We often think of the brothers Cain and Abel because of the infamous story of man's first murder. But there is a third, less well-known, son – Seth.

- Have a class member read the genealogy in Genesis 5:1-8.

Ancient genealogies have many mysteries. There are no clear answers to many questions we may have. For example, Adam is said to be in the image of God. Seth is said to be in the image of Adam. This is the same word used in Genesis 1:27. The word image is not used again in the genealogies. Why do you think the writer of the genealogy uses this word only for Adam and Seth? (There is no right answer that we know of, so any guess could be right!)

Another mystery is the given ages of these men when they died. Here are some theories to explain the long years:

- Mistranslation – It should be lunar months rather than solar years, thus 969 months = 78.3 years
- Epochs – Long spans of time that were named for prominent figures
- Literal – In this view, humans were originally planned by God to live forever, then sinned, so the life span kept shrinking OR In a second view, before Noah's flood a "firmament" was over the earth (Genesis 1:6–8) which contributed to people's advanced ages until after the flood.

“How such figures were interpreted at the time is something that one may only guess at today. If a specific principle underlies these numbers, it is no longer apparent. Moreover, in marked contrast to names, the numbers were not dependably transmitted or handled, for both the LXX and the Samaritan readings depart from the Hebrew text as well as from each other. . . . Only rarely is there a hint as to how a given figure may have emerged.”²

“Genealogies are notoriously difficult to interpret. We can never be sure of the intent of the tradition. It is likely that this genealogy of ten generations is primarily for purposes of continuity, to show the lineage of humankind from its wholesome beginning to its shameful arrival at the flood. . . . If we knew more, we would likely discover that the genealogy is an index of extended traditional materials about each of these names. But by the time of the genealogy, the names seem largely to have lost their specific traditional content and are only ciphers, the key to which is largely missing.”³

Genealogies feature prominently in two of the gospels, Matthew and Luke. After the nativity stories of Jesus, Luke’s gospel includes a genealogy of Jesus.

- Have a class member read Jesus’s genealogy in Luke 3:23-24, 38.

Again, there are many mysteries. For example, the two gospels have two different genealogies for Jesus.⁴ This has been explained with several theories, including

- Luke uses Mary’s family line while Matthew uses Joseph’s family line.
- Matthew’s is a royal or legal genealogy, proving that Jesus came from the line of David, while Luke’s genealogy is a true “family tree”, proving that Jesus was fully human.
- Joseph had two fathers, one a physical father (Heli in Luke’s gospel) and one a legal father who adopted Joseph (Jacob in Matthew’s gospel), assuming that Heli and Jacob were brothers and the Levitical law of Deuteronomy 25:5 was being followed.

Either way (or for some other reasons that could include later Christians making up a genealogy to make their case), the role of genealogy was important, even if we don’t exactly understand why these days.

[Watch the interview video of Amanda Mbuvi – From 25:10 - 28:33 .

 [Genesis and Identity Formation: An Interview with Amanda Mubuvi](#)]

Listen to this quote from the interview: “Because [Genesis] includes the cosmos in our genealogy, because it includes all humanity in our genealogy, genealogy is how Genesis

² E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 42.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 67.

⁴ <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/why-are-jesus-genealogies-in-matthew-and-luke-different>

expresses that we are part of all creation and that we are all connected to each other.” (Amanda Mbuvi)

What is your response to what she said? Why is it important that we recognize that we are only one part of Creation?

Why is it important to recognize that all people are connected to one another?

Although these lists are long with strange-sounding names and with unexplainably long lifespans, they are important. They give us hints about our spiritual heritage. With that in mind, let’s hear from Genesis 10 with the genealogy of Noah and from Genesis 11 with the genealogy of Abram (later to be called Abraham).

And to show I am a nice person, I will not ask you to read every verse of the genealogies.

- Have class members read Genesis 10:1, 31-32 and Genesis 11:10-11, 26.

In Biblical genealogies, there is a difference between segmented (“family tree”; vertical and horizontal) and linear (only vertical: one man begat another, lived years, and died) versions. A segmented genealogy’s purpose “is to express actual kinship relationships between individuals. Such relationships are important in daily life because they are the basis of regulating social interaction, marriage, and inheritance, along with other social rights and obligations. ... In contrast to the multiple functions of segmented genealogies, linear genealogies have only one: to ground a claim to power, status, rank, office, or inheritance in an earlier ancestor.”⁵

- Have a class member read Genesis 11:27-30.

Transformational Exercise

[Show video of Amanda Mbuvi 20:45-23:24.]

We can look at genealogies as a spiritual exercise: “This struggle that we have, living between the identity of who we are in God and in God’s work and identity as defined by people – that’s not new to us. That’s already in Genesis.” (Amanda Mbuvi)

If we go to the basic - very basic – frame of identity for who we are, who are we? (images of God; distortions of what God dreams for us; maturing child of God; a sibling of all other people; part of God’s Creation; etc.)

⁵ Robert R. Wilson, “Genealogy, Genealogies,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 931.

We are not defined by our ethnicity, age, health, education, profession, gender, etc. Those traits or roles are in addition to who we are at our core.

In silent prayer, present yourself before God as your basic core person. Thank God that you are beloved by God simply because you are.

Prayer: God, you are the Creator of every star, every planet, every plant, animal, insect, and human being. We are all connected to one another because we are all connected to you. You are our alpha and omega, our beginning and our end, the generator of our Genesis. May this insight guide us in this new week. Amen.