

OLD PLACES, NEW FACES

**Bible Places Illuminating
Today's Christian**

**12 Studies Based on
Genesis**

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Introduction to

OLD PLACES, NEW FACES

Places have to do with geography. In the Bible we find God's people in many different places, both physically and spiritually, in their relationship to the Creator and Savior. We, like them, journey through many lands in our Christian walk. We move from chaos to order, from Ur to Canaan, and from obedience to disobedience. The geographical locations of Biblical characters can symbolically refer to places we find ourselves with respect to our faith. As we become more acquainted with our spiritual geography, we will better discern where God would have us go or what changes we need to make in order to serve Him better.

Old Places, New Faces seeks to make the stories and places of the Bible a reality in our lives today. It seeks to get at the relevant messages for today as found in the pages of the Scriptures. This study relates to the Bible as a book that speaks clearly about present realities through stories of the past. The Bible is not only intended to give the reader knowledge about events and people in the past, but through these events and people, inspire greater faith.

Old places from within the Bible can come alive with present significance to *new faces*—that is, us. May this be true for you as you use this study.

LESSON 1:

LIVING WITH CHAOS

The Uncreated World

The first “old place” we will look at is the universe at its creation. The point of this study is to help us understand what these stories are telling us about our life and our God.

Most scholars believe the creation account was written to the exiled Hebrews in Babylonia. At the very least, it would have been a powerful message to them about God’s ability and desire to enter the world He made in order to bring order out of chaos.

The first chapter of Genesis was written not primarily as a history about the beginning of the universe, but instead, to remind the people that the Creator who brought light into the first darkness is the God who cares for us today. He wants to enter our darkness and troubles to bring us peace.

The creation account is intended to say more about present reality than about the past. This first chapter of the Bible introduces the main character of the story (God), and hints that what He did then, He will do again. He will enter our troubled world to bring us light, be concerned with what happens on the earth, and use His power to bring peace in the midst of turmoil.

This story is a sermon to those in exile and to all who are overwhelmed by the darkness and floodwaters of suffering. There is hope! God has not forgotten His world or His people, and will act to help them.

READ GENESIS 1:1—2:4

1. Before God brought order and life to creation, two elements were present that caused chaos. What were they?
(See Genesis 1:2)
2. How did God create the universe and bring order and life from chaos? (Genesis 1:3)
3. Do you think this story relates in any way to the present day or to our lives?

Many scholars think the first chapter of Genesis was written during the time of the Babylonian captivity (the exile) when the Israelites were taken to Babylonia as slaves. Their land and homes were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's invading army. Much of Jerusalem, including Solomon's beautiful temple, was destroyed.

4. What message of hope does this chapter offer to those captives who wondered where God was when they were overwhelmed by darkness in Babylonia?

The end of the book of Isaiah may also have been written during the period of Israel's exile in Babylonia. Read the following passages from Isaiah to see a sampling of this message:

Isaiah 42:5-6

Isaiah 43:1-5

Isaiah 45:7-8, 12-13

Isaiah 51:12-16 and 60:1-2

5. What similarities do the above verses from Isaiah have with the first chapter of Genesis?

Throughout the Scriptures, personal or community troubles and crisis are often described with metaphors of darkness and floodwaters. Look at these two examples:

Job 17:11-16

Psalms 69:1-3, 15

6. What are those who are experiencing darkness and the flood waters seeking from God?

7. Where is there darkness in your life?

Have you ever felt like your circumstances were like a flood of water that was overwhelming you?

Darkness is a part of every human life, at least at times. Suffering and troubles can sweep over us like floodwaters. But the creation story tells us that the God who brought light into the first darkness promises to bring light into ours. The God who tamed the cosmic waters in the beginning will tame the waters that now engulf us. God is still in the business of entering darkness through His mighty Word in order to bring light and hope to a troubled world. God continues to shout, "Let there be light!"

8. How might remembering God's work at creation help us as we face troubles in the present?

God can help us in our times of chaos and offer us strength to go on with courage. The first chapter of Genesis is a promise that He will also enter the darkness of today's world with His Word to create life and peace.

CLOSING

Read Psalm 67 aloud.

Sing and/or read the words of the hymn, *Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me*.

PRAYER

Sovereign Lord, darkness is a very real part of my lives. At times, floodwaters engulf me. Grief and sadness are often my companions. Yet, you are also my companion. Help me to understand that you will not let the flood swallow me up. You will not let the darkness overwhelm me. Fill me with hope, even at the worst of times, as I rest my thoughts on your loving kindness and grace. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.