

Setting the Stage

- The Bible tells a story.
 - We tend to view the Bible as an assortment of fragmented bits of history, poetry, and moral tales, but in reality, the Bible tells a true story.
 - This story gives meaning to our existence, our lives, and to all other stories on earth.
 - Like every good story the Bible has a beginning (Genesis) and an end (Revelations), though we are not there yet.
 - The story of the Bible has not yet come to a close, each one of us has a role to play in God's plan of redemption for the world.
 - To play our part we must believe His story so deeply that it shapes everything about our lives.
 - Ultimately, the Bible is about God, the world He created, and the incredible plan of redemption that unfolds as He creates a people for His own glory.
 - As we walk through key points in the biblical story over the weeks ahead, make sure you place yourself within this story.
- Q:** How do the actions, events, and truths presented in the story touch your life?
Q: How should you live now in light of this amazing story?

The passage you will consider in this session (Genesis 1–2) sets the stage for the rest of the Bible. In this section, we see the world as it should be. We see God crafting a world that is everything He desires it to be—no sin, no imperfection, everything glorifies God perfectly. Understanding this first part of the story will help us understand everything that follows.

1. Read Genesis 1–2. As you read, look for elements that will help orient you to the biblical story. Who are we introduced to in this section? What is being emphasized? What seems to be the point? After reading these two chapters, make some notes below.

Who Is God?

- The story begins with familiar words: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1)
- The first words in the Bible introduce us to the most important character in the story.
- The author teaches us about God by simply telling us what He did: He created.
- We must allow the story drive our understanding of who God is.

Read Genesis 1 - 2

2. Take a minute to reflect on what you read in Genesis 1–2. What do God's actions in this passage reveal about who He is?

This Is God's World

- Two things that we see in this passage is God's absolute power and unrivaled glory.
- The story starts with Him alone.
- There is great significance to the fact that God is the only character in Genesis 1.
- He is the only eternal person (Spirit) in the universe, nothing else can be equated or even compared with Him.

Allow yourself to feel the weight of this for a minute. There was a time when our universe did not exist. Immediately before our world began, God existed—and that's it! Then God began creating our world out of nothing simply by speaking. He told land to form and it obeyed. He called light into being and it happened. Every single thing in our universe came into existence in obedience to God's command.

Try to get a feel for the absolute difference between this all-powerful God who has always existed and the creation that He called forth through the repeated refrain: "Let there be _____." There is no person, force, or thing that can compete with God or claim any importance in comparison with Him. It is this absolute distinction between God and everything else that leads the angels in heaven to cry out, "Holy! Holy! Holy!"

3. How should God's eternity and power in the creation account affect the way we view and relate to Him?

- Genesis 1 & 2 reveal that this world belongs to God.
- No person or thing had any place in this world until God put it in its proper place.
- God alone can claim ownership of this world because He spoke it into existence.
- The power of God should lead us to great humility about our place in this world. We are not the center of the universe.
- All ownership and authority belongs to God.
- God does delegate a certain authority to us, but this authority is graciously given to us by God to be used as His has commanded.
- Any attempt to claim power for ourselves independent of God is like a clay pot challenging the authority of the potter who formed it.

4. How should God's power, authority, and ownership affect the way we view our place in this world?

In the Image of God

- God looked at everything He had created and declared it good.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen. 1:26).

There is something absolutely unique about humanity. On the one hand, we are utterly unlike God because, just like everything else in creation, He made us. But on the other hand, God specifically created us to be like Him.

This is impossible to wrap our minds around, but God created us like Him in some respects and then set us in the midst of this world to represent Him!

- There is great debate about what exactly the “image of God” is.
 - Everyone seems to agree that being created in God’s image is more than a physical resemblance—He is Spirit (John 4:24)
 - Suggestions as to what God’s image in humanity consists of are varied: our ability to reason, our ability to make moral decisions, our personalities, and our capacity for relationships are all leading views.
 - Others suggest that the image of God relates to the dominion over the rest of creation that God gave to man (this ties Gen. 1:26–27 to Gen. 1:28).

Perhaps it is best not to attach the image of God to any one faculty or attribute of humanity. In the New Testament, we are told that Jesus Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). Jesus is said to be “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3). It seems that being the “image of God” is about reflecting God in some way. Jesus did this perfectly, but humanity has also been given a responsibility to show God to the world—His handiwork, nature, and attributes are displayed in us in a way that they are not displayed in the rest of the creation. (Of course, this image has been tainted by sin, but that comes later in the story.)

The Image of God on Earth

In the ancient world, kings would set up an image of themselves as a visual announcement of who was in charge. It reminded the king’s own people and the surrounding nations that this land was under the king’s jurisdiction and authority.

- Psalm 8 says that God placed human beings in a privileged position amid the universe He created—it says we are “crowned with glory and honor” and that we have been given dominion over the works of God’s hands (v. 5).
- God has made people to humbly and graciously mediate His rule on the earth.
- Human beings stand as a reminder that God is the King of this world.

So rather than trying to identify the image of God with a specific aspect of the human condition, perhaps we should simply acknowledge that God made us to reflect Him to the world. We represent to the world its rightful King and we illustrate His workmanship, attributes, and characteristics.

5. In your own words, describe why it is significant that God created us “in His image.” How should this affect the way we view ourselves and the people around us?

The Personal God of Genesis 2

Something interesting happens when we move from Genesis 1 into Genesis 2. In chapter 1, God is referred to by the title “Elohim,” which simply means “God.” It’s a lot like referring to a person based on his or her title. But when we get to chapter 2, the name for God changes. Now He is referred to as “Yahweh Elohim,” which combines the title “God” with a personal name: Yahweh. (For good but complicated reasons, most English translations render Yahweh as the LORD (notice it’s in all caps).)

This is significant because God tends to use His personal name, Yahweh, when He is relating to His people in a personal way. God uses the name Yahweh when He enters into a covenant with His people. When God makes a covenant, He specifies what His relationship to His people will look like, makes them promises, and often charges them to be obedient in return. The personal name Yahweh is appropriate for this type of interaction.

- Gen. 2 is a much more intimate account of the world's origins than Gen. 1.
- Gen. 1 gives a broad overview of how the world was made.
- Gen. 2 tells the story in a much more specific way. It tells the story of humanity—created in God's own image—and the privileges and responsibilities that God gave them.

We see God doing something unique with humanity. God first formed Adam out of the ground, then bent down and breathed life into his nostrils. This is a much more intimate form of creation than we saw in Gen. 1, where God simply spoke the world into existence. Notice also that God spoke directly with the man in Gen. 2. He told Adam about the garden—in particular, He told Adam what he could and could not eat. Right away we see that humanity was made to communicate with God. Even in his perfect state (before sin entered the world), Adam was dependent on revelation from God in order to live in the world that God made.

And then notice that God did not want the man to be alone. This is the first time that God said something was “not good.” He created a “helper fit for Adam.” It's easy to imagine God enjoying His relationship with Adam and lovingly watching Adam enjoy the perfect companion that God made for him. While it is important to see the implications for marriage inherent in this passage, we should also see that God did not want man to live in isolation. God solved Adam's loneliness by creating a wife for him, but keep in mind that Eve was not just a wife—she was another human being. In other words, God designed human beings to live in relationship with other human beings. This will have major implications when we begin discussing the concept of the church in the New Testament.

6. What can we learn about human beings and their relationship with God and each other by reading Genesis 2?

Life in the Garden

Genesis 1–2 also gives us an amazing vision of what God originally intended the world to be. After creating the earth and everything in it, God took the time to plant a garden (2:8). God placed Adam and Eve in the midst of this garden and gave them the specific task of “working it and keeping it” (Gen. 2:15).

We sometimes think that work is the product of the fall, a punishment for sin. When humanity sinned, God cursed the ground, and labor became frustrating and painful (Gen. 3:17–19). But God's original intention for people was that we would be actively involved in caring for the creation.

God placed Adam in the garden (keep in mind that a garden is different from a wilderness or jungle in that it is tended, planned, and ordered) and gave him the specific task of working it.

- God intended for humanity to have a caring relationship with the surrounding world.
- God gave us dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:28), not so we could exploit and destroy the earth, but so we could lovingly steward, work, care and enjoy His creation.

It is also fascinating to read the account of Adam naming the animals (2:18–20). Here we get another taste of the interaction between God and humanity in a perfect world. Surely God could have named the animals on His own, but He chose to give them names by working together with Adam. At this early point in the story, it is clear that God's rule over the earth will be exercised in conjunction with His chief creation, Adam.

- God wants to work in, through and with us. (John 14:12, 1 John 4:12, Galatians 2:20)

We cannot miss the peace, harmony, and perfect beauty described in Genesis 1–2. It gives us a picture of the world as it was meant to be. It is a world that we all long for. But this is only the beginning of the story. As we will see in the next session (and as we all know from experience), something has gone tragically wrong. But this peaceful picture where everything works in perfect harmony with everything else will reappear. The paradise that we lost will eventually be regained when Jesus returns to set the world to rights. (Revelation 21)

7. Take some time to consider the picture of the world presented in Genesis 1–2. Why is this picture so appealing? Which aspects of life in the garden of Eden should we long to see restored in our world?

Conclusion

- All of creation was created to reveal and reflect the majesty and glory of the living God. (Isa. 43:1-7; 44:23; 48:9-11; 49:3, 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 1:16; Ps. 86:12)
 - Isa. 6:3 // “the whole earth is full of His glory!”
 - Isa. 42:8 // “I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other”
 - Isa. 48:11 // “My glory I will not give to another.”
 - Isa. 60:2 // “the Lord will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you.”
- God has been infinitely happy in the loving fellowship of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) for all of eternity. (Ps. 16:11)
- God did not create the world out of need. (Acts 17:25)
- God lovingly gifted us with existence and life. (Acts 17:25)
- God created us to know Him, love Him, serve Him, worship Him and show Him.
- God gave us a glimpse of what His glory is like in the vastness of the universe.
- Our identity is found in Christ (“the radiance of the glory of God). We are the image bearing children of God, redeemed by Christ, to reflect His glory. (Gen. 1:27; Jn. 1:12; Eph 1:7; Rom. 11:36)