

What does the Bible Say?

Lesson 1: The Problem – From the beginning

The story of God and his relationship with mankind begins in the book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible. The story displays God's heart and original plan for his children. But something happens that seems to disrupt and even distort this plan. Yet, no power or will of man is stronger than God's power and will. God's plan was and always will be to restore his children to himself. We can be a part of God's plan today, and this study takes us to the beginning of that journey:

God created the sky and the earth. At first, ²the earth was completely empty. There was nothing on the earth. Darkness covered the ocean, and God's Spirit moved over the water... ⁹Then God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered together so that the dry land will appear." And it happened.... ¹¹Then God said, "Let the earth grow grass, plants that make grain, and fruit trees. The fruit trees will make fruit with seeds in it. And each plant will make its own kind of seed. Let these plants grow on the earth." And it happened... ¹⁴Then God said, "Let there be lights in the sky. These lights will separate the days from the nights..." ²⁴Then God said, "Let the earth produce many kinds of living things. Let there be many different kinds of animals..." ²⁶Then God said, "Now let's make humans in our image and in our likeness. They will rule over all the fish in the sea and the birds in the air. They will rule over all the large animals and all the little things that crawl on the earth"... ³¹God looked at everything he had made. And he saw that everything was very good.

(Genesis 1, ERV)

From this passage, what do you learn about how God created our universe? What role did God's voice play in our creation? (vv. 9, 11, 24, 26)

From this passage, we see that the earth was empty, but there was water, and God's Spirit moved over that water. God used his voice to create all things. According to science, however, there was no water in the beginning of our universe because temperatures were so hot. But this passage was originally written in Hebrew, not English, and in Hebrew the word "water" is "mayim," [MAH-yeem], which can mean water or other liquids. Scientists call this earliest liquid "quark gluon plasma" [QWARK GLOO-on PLAZ-muh], or QGP, and compare this liquid to water, calling it the perfect fluid that moves and acts just like water. We then see in the Bible that the Spirit hovered or "fluttered" over the waters, which is true. According to science, this QGP was fluttering because of gravity and temperature changes.

But was there any evidence of a voice? Astrophysicists Wayne Hu and Martin White tell us that sound waves, gravity, and temperature changes were the key elements in creating our world through QGP liquid. Hu and White compare these initial sounds to a beautiful, massive, orchestra directed by a cosmic symphony conductor. They don't know where any of these elements came from, but the Bible does.

In Genesis 1, how did God create man in a special way? (v. 26) Why do you think he did this? Why do you think he didn't create us just like the animals?

God made man in his own likeness or image,¹ which means to be similar in appearance, like a man to his father. The Bible uses many physical metaphors to describe God that show how he looks like his children. God created us “in his image” because he wants a Father-to-son relationship with us. If God looked and acted completely different from us, then we might think he is strange and not recognize him as our Father. But God’s desire and plan is that we might know him and be close to him.

We might also notice that in Genesis, God gives man a special role of authority over the animals, birds, fish, and insects. This authority is seen throughout the Old Testament, written before the time of Jesus, is a physical metaphor for the spiritual authority God would give his children through Jesus. Just as God has authority over all things, he also creates his first son to have authority with special privileges that no other member of God’s creation was given.

⁸Then the Lord God planted a garden in the East, in a place named Eden. He put the man he made in that garden. ⁹Then the Lord God caused all the beautiful trees that were good for food to grow in the garden. In the middle of the garden, he put the tree of life and the tree that gives knowledge about good and evil.... ¹⁶The Lord God gave [the man] this command: “You may eat from any tree in the garden. ¹⁷But you must not eat from the tree that gives knowledge about good and evil. If you eat fruit from that tree, on that day you will certainly die!” (Genesis 2)

Why do you think God put man in a garden? What do you think this garden represented?

What command did God give this man? (v. 17) What do you think man might do with this knowledge?

God wanted to create a very special place and home for his children to live, a place of peace, beauty, and protection. We will see that in this garden, God meets with man, speaks with him, and walks with him in this garden, symbolizing a close, secure relationship with the Father. God also gives man every plant and tree as food, but he tells man that he can never eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He can eat from any tree in the garden, even the tree of life, which we will see later is the tree of eternal life! If people have this knowledge, God knows they will surely choose evil at some point. And once they have this knowledge, they will be responsible for their choices. So, in the beginning, God created mankind in a state of weakness to sin, yet man was born into innocence and freedom. Yet God protected his children’s innocence and freedom through this one command.

God says that his children will “die” if they eat of the tree of knowledge (v. 17). What does this mean?

In verse 17, we learn that consequence for eating from the tree of knowledge is death. This choice of choosing evil over good is called sin. The problem is that since God in the Bible is a holy God, he cannot associate or be united with evil or sin. If his children begin to associate themselves with evil and sin, God must separate himself from them. But God created man to have a relationship with him and to remain under his care for eternity. Without him, his children would surely die physically and spiritually because God is the key to physical and eternal life. And without holiness, no man or woman could enter heaven.

Knowing that man is weak, why do you think God gave man a choice to eat or not eat from the tree? (Hint: The Bible teaches us that God is love (1 John 4:16). How are love and choice connected?)

¹ “Likeness” in Greek is *demuth*, and “image” is “*tselem*.” See “1823.demuth,” Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Unabridged, Electronic Database, BibleSoft, 2006, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1823.htm>, and “6754.tselem,” <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6754.htm>.

We might think that God is testing his children with this choice: Will they choose him over the tree? But since God knows that his children were weak, the real question is, will they go to him for help? Will they depend on him for strength? Will they trust his command and listen to his voice? Or will they depend on their own thoughts and what they think is right? God also sees the future: He has a plan, and he loves his children! I John 4 defines God as love: “God is love” (vv. 8, 16). And it says that there is no fear in love (v. 18). God has set up a world for the sole purpose of helping his children know who he is and the kind of relationship he wants to have with them, a relationship of love. Love is a choice and can’t be forced. His children can choose to love and trust him or not. But even as they choose something else or someone else other than him, he is not afraid. His plan is to show them his love, even when they make wrong choices.

¹⁸Then the Lord God said, “I see that it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make the companion he needs, one just right for him.” ... ²⁴That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife. In this way two people become one. ²⁵The man and his wife were naked, but they were not ashamed. (Genesis 2)

The snake was the most clever of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. The snake spoke to the woman and said, “Woman, did God really tell you that you must not eat from any tree in the garden?” ²The woman answered the snake, “No, we can eat fruit from the trees in the garden. ³But there is one tree we must not eat from. God told us, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not even touch that tree, or you will die.’” ⁴But the snake said to the woman, “You will not die. ⁵God knows that if you eat the fruit from that tree you will learn about good and evil, and then you will be like God!” (Genesis 3)

The serpent is a metaphor for Satan. How did the serpent lead the woman into eating the fruit that God had commanded the man not to eat? What strategies does he use? (vv. 3:1, 4)

How could Satan’s voice change Adam and Eve’s relationship with God? What is Satan’s goal?

It’s interesting that Satan doesn’t attack Adam. Why? Adam is the one who had heard God’s voice and knew what God had said. Adam was God’s chosen instrument to give this message to Eve. Now Eve must trust Adam, and Satan knows that Eve can be tempted to doubt. With this opportunity, Satan says, “Did God really say you cannot eat from any tree in the garden?” Here, Satan tries to confuse Eve by changing God’s message: One tree becomes any or all trees (v. 1). And maybe Adam was wrong. Maybe God didn’t *really* say this. But Eve fights back for a minute: “No, we can eat fruit from the trees in the garden. ³But there is one tree we must not eat from. God told us, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not even touch that tree, or you will die.’” God did say she couldn’t eat from the tree, but now Eve is adding to God’s Word: she can’t even touch the tree. Maybe Adam added this phrase to prevent Eve from doing something wrong, but Satan uses these changes to cause confusion. Satan also makes himself the expert on God’s Word: “You will not die. ⁵God knows that if you eat the fruit from that tree you will learn about good and evil, and then you will be like God!” In other words, “Eve, you can’t trust what God says. He’s not going to kill you over a piece of fruit. That’s ridiculous. You’re his only daughter, and this will make you more like him!” At that point, Eve’s doubts begin to lure her and Adam into sin. Both begin to mistrust God and trust their own thoughts, not realizing it’s Satan they are trusting. And that’s exactly what Satan wants – to change and distort Eve and Adam’s view of God and their view of his Word – that even God’s Word can’t be trusted. Through his lies, Satan establishes his own truths. Sadly, Eve never goes back to the source of truth, which is God himself.

⁶The woman could see that the tree was beautiful, and the fruit looked so good to eat. She also liked the idea that it would make her wise. So, she took some of the fruit from the tree and ate it. Her husband was there with her, so she gave him some of the fruit, and he ate it...

What lie(s) did Eve believe that led her to eat the fruit? (vv. 4-6) What thoughts do you think she may have had about herself, Adam, and God that led her to eat the fruit?

What did Adam desire more than obeying God?

We don't know all of Eve's thoughts, but we can imagine what they might be: "Yeah, God won't kill me. He loves me! It's just a piece of fruit. How could such a beautiful fruit that God created be so bad? Maybe my husband's exaggerating. Maybe he made that up. He just wants to tell me what to do and control me. I don't think I can really trust him. And that snake said that God knows that this will make me wise like him. But he doesn't want me to be like him. He doesn't want good things for me; he just wants to control me too! I don't think I can trust him either. I'd better think for myself and do what's best for me. And that snake is right. Knowledge of good and evil will make me wise, and I need wisdom in my life, for my husband and my children. I know what's best for me. I want that fruit, and I'm going to eat it!"

Eve never takes time to look around the garden at all the fruit that God told her she *could* eat. She wants the one thing she can't have and believes that she needs it. In her mind, she is missing something in her life—fruit, authority, value, and beautiful things. Yet God already gave her these things and wisdom too: His command *was* wisdom. She also has full access to the God of wisdom. She believes that this fruit will give her value and importance that is equal to God's. Even though Eve and Adam have already been made in God's own image, she still wants more. In truth, this fruit is the door to pain, suffering, and sin. Satan convinces Eve that she is incomplete and needs what she doesn't have. Eve's own pride and self-glory become fuel for believing the lies that Satan is feeding her. She puts her trust in herself and in other voices, instead of God's. She believes that neither God nor Adam can meet her needs. They aren't trustworthy, and she should trust herself. But who is she listening to?

Yet, Eve doesn't sin by herself; Adam sins right by her side. Eve looks for someone to join her in sin, to agree with her, and that person is Adam. Adam too may be wanting the same things Eve is craving. He is there with Satan and hears the lies too. Perhaps Adam wants to please his new, beautiful wife, more than pleasing God. He too trusts Satan's lies and Eve's ideas more than he trusts God. This all reveals his true desire to please himself and his wife. His relationship with God is clearly not his priority.

⁷Then it was as if their eyes opened... [and they] saw that they were naked. So, they got some fig leaves, sewed them together, and wore them for clothes. ⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3)

How did Adam and Eve react to their sin and why? What do you think God wanted them to do?

Why do you think God allowed Satan to speak to his children and influence them? What does God desire for his children? What do we learn about God's confidence in his own power?

Adam and Eve did what most of us do when we sin: They try to cover up their shame and hide from God. Before they ate the fruit, they had a peaceful relationship with God, but now that they've sinned and are afraid of God. They don't come openly and share what they have done. If we continue reading the story, their sin even causes disunity: Adam blames Eve for the sin, and Eve blames Satan, hoping that they will avoid God's punishment.

In the garden, God created his children in weakness alongside an enemy to allow his children to make choices and learn how these choices effect their relationship with each other and with their loving Father. Through this enemy, God's children will learn right from wrong. They will begin to value God's voice and commands and believe his words over the lies of Satan. His children will learn to trust their Father in every situation. God is fully confident in his own power to rescue his children, if they chose to love him. This is God's story in the Bible, and we see his heart as we read the rest of Genesis 3:

²¹ The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²² The Lord God said, "Look, the man has become like us—he knows about good and evil. And now the man might take the fruit from the tree of life. If the man eats that fruit, he will live forever." ²³ So the Lord God forced the man out of the Garden of Eden to work the ground he was made from... ²⁴ Then he put Cherub angels and a sword of fire at the entrance of the garden to protect it. The sword flashed around and around, guarding the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3)

How does God respond to Adam and Eve's nakedness? (v. 21) How do you think he created this garment? What do we learn about God?

Why does God expel Adam and Eve from the garden? (v. 22) What could happen if didn't do this?

To cover up their sin, Adam and Eve make fig leaf clothing that will quickly fall apart. But their Father gives them something much better: clothes of animal skin. God sacrifices animals, taking their skin and sewing together clothes for his children. This takes time, planning, and sacrifice, but these clothes will last a long time and truly protect his children. This idea of sacrificing living beings to cover our sin is seen throughout the Bible and ends with the sacrifice of Jesus who gives us spiritual and eternal clothes to wear.

So, why then does God expel Adam and Eve from the garden? Is this punishment for their sin? Let's look at it this way: What could if God leaves Adam and Eve in the garden in their sin with a tree that promises them eternal life? His children will eat from the tree and produce a world of sin that will never end. Sin includes anger, hatred, abuse, lying, stealing, cheating, sexual impurity, murder, and more. This is Satan's plan, but God said "No! You must leave the garden so that you're not tempted!" That's not punishment. That's love! If we read on, Adam and Eve are also punished for their sin because in God's love, he's also just. God curses the ground that Adam will work and makes childbearing difficult for Eve. Throughout the Bible, God uses punishment and consequences for sin to show his children what will happen if they continue to sin because God doesn't want his children to ruin their lives. But there is hope!

¹⁴ So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly, and you will eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵ And I will put enmity [hatred] between you and the woman, and between your offspring [or seed] and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3, NIV)

In Genesis 3:15, God speaks about a specific person, translated in Hebrew as “seed.”² This seed “will crush your [Satan’s] head, and you will strike his heel.” This “seed” is mentioned again in the book of Zechariah:

¹² “The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people. ¹³ Just as you, Judah and Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong...²³ In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you³.’” (Zechariah 8)

We learn that this seed will bring hope to God’s children and their land. He will make them a blessing instead of a curse and bring them an inheritance. This “God is with you” in Zechariah is also seen in the books Isaiah and Matthew through the name “Immanuel,” which means, “God with us”: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (Matthew 1:12, Isaiah 7:14). From these descriptions, we know that this seed is Jesus, who brings eternal life: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23), and in this seed, we have hope. In this study series, you will learn all about this seed and the hope we have in Jesus.

Homework:

- Write up to 3 lies that you might be believing about yourself and up to 3 lies that you might be believing about God. Did these lies come from a person, an experience, or something else? Ask the Holy Spirit or a friend to help you identify lies, if you need help.
- Look through the handout [Identity in Christ](#) and [Promises of God](#), and find words of God that speak the truth about who he is and how he sees and feels about you.

² The Hebrew word is *zera*.