

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, though, there was no water in the beginning of our universe because temperatures were so hot; however, the word "water" in Hebrew word, "mayim," [MAH-yeem] can mean water or other liquids. Scientists call this liquid quark gluon plasma (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. Again, according to science, this QGP was fluttering in the beginning as a result 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 the QGP liquid, and they compare these initial sounds to a beautiful, yet massive, orchestra directed by a cosmic symphony conductor. While scientists don't know where any of these elements came from, 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 [Gk: demuth] or image [Gk: tselem], which means similar in appearance like a man to his father.¹ The Bible uses many physical metaphors to describe God that are similar to how

¹ "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 are made. But when we consider the creation passage in Genesis, we might notice that we too have a voice to express our thoughts and emotions. God created us “in his image” because he was setting up a Father to son relationship with his children. If God looked and sounded 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 God gave man a special role of authority over the animals, birds, fish, and insects. This physical authority seen throughout the Old Testament, the first half of the Bible written before the time of Jesus, is a physical metaphor for the spiritual authority God would give his children after Jesus came. Just as God has authority over all things, he created his first son to also 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 does God give this man? (v. 17) What do you think man might do with this knowledge?

God wanted to create a very special place for his children to live, a place of peace, beauty, and protection, a home that man could watch over and care for. We will see that in this garden, God met with man, spoke with him, and walked with him, symbolizing a close, secure relationship with the Father. God also gave man every plant and tree as food, but he told man that he could never eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He could eat from any tree in the garden, even the tree of life, which we will see later is the tree of eternal life! But God knew he had created man in weakness and imperfection, since only God is perfect, God protected his children through his command. For if they had this knowledge, he knew they would surely choose evil at some point. And once they had this knowledge, they would be responsible for their choices. So, in the beginning, God had created mankind in a state of innocence and freedom, without this responsibility.

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 began to associate themselves with evil and sin, God would have to separate 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 He 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? How does this reflect the kind of relationship God wants to have with the children he created? (Hint: The Bible teaches us that God is love (1 John 4:16). How are love and choice connected?)

We might think that God is testing his children with this choice: Will they choose him over the tree? But since God knew 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)

How did the serpent (a metaphor for Satan) lead the woman into eating the fruit that God had commanded the man not to eat? What tactics 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 had heard God’s voice and knew what God had said. Adam was God’s chosen instrument to give this message to Eve. So, Eve had to trust Adam, and Satan saw that Eve could 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. And maybe Adam was wrong. Maybe God didn’t really say this. But Eve fought 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 that 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 began to lure her and Adam into sin. Both begin to mistrust God and trust their own thoughts, not realizing it’s Satan whom they’re 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 we might have thought today, "Yeah, God won't kill me. He loves me! Plus, 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 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 that 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 took time to look around the garden at all the fruit that God had told her she could eat. She wanted the one thing she couldn't have, as though she needed it. In her mind, she was missing something in her life— fruit, authority, value, and beautiful things. Yet God had already given her all these things, and wisdom too: His command *was* wisdom. She also had full access to God who has all wisdom. She believed that this fruit would give her value and importance, even equal to God's. Even though Eve and Adam had already been made in God's own image, she still wanted more. In truth, this fruit was the door to pain, suffering, and sin. Satan convinced Eve that she was incomplete and needed what she didn't have. Eve's own pride and self-glory became fuel for believing the lies that Satan was feeding her. She put her trust in herself and in other voices, instead of God's. She believed that neither God nor Adam would meet her needs. They weren't trustworthy, but she could trust herself. But who was she listening to?

Yet, Eve didn't sin by herself; Adam sinned right by her side. Eve looked for someone to join her in sin, to agree with her, and that person was Adam. Adam too may have wanted the same things Eve was craving. He was there with Satan and heard the lies too. Perhaps Adam wanted to please his new, beautiful wife, more than pleasing God. He too trusted Satan's lies and Eve's ideas more than he trusted God. This all reveals his true desire to please himself and his wife. His relationship with God was 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? Why do you think they did this? What do you think God would have wanted them to do? (vv. 7-8)

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

Adam and Eve did what most of us do when we sin: They tried to cover up their shame and hid from God. Before they ate the fruit, they had a peaceful relationship with God, but now that they'd sinned and were afraid of God. They didn't come openly and share what they had done. If we continue reading the story, their sin even caused disunity between each other: Adam blamed Eve for the sin, and Eve blamed Satan. Neither took responsibility before God, hoping that somehow they would avoid God's punishment.

In the garden, God created his children in weakness and created an adversary that would allow his children to make choices and to learn how these choices effect their relationship with the Father who loves them. With this adversary, God's children would learn right from wrong. They would begin to value God's voice and commands and believe his words over the lies of Satan. His children would learn to trust him in every situation that he could help and rescue them to keep them safe until the end. God was 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:

²¹The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²²The 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." ²³So the Lord God forced the man out of the Garden of Eden to work the ground he was made from... ²⁴Then 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? Why do you think he did this, and what do we learn about God?

Why does God expel Adam and Eve from the garden? (v. 22) What would have happened if God had not done this? What impact would this have on our world today?

To cover up their sin, Adam and Eve made fig leaf garments that would have fallen apart after the first washing. But God their Father gave them something much better: garments of animal skin. To create these garments, God sacrificed animals, taking their skin and sewing together clothing for his children to wear. This clothing took time, planning, and sacrifice, but these clothes would endure and truly cover and protect them. This concept of sacrificing living beings to provide covering for sin is a theme throughout the Bible, a sacrifice that ends with the sacrifice of Jesus who gives us spiritual clothes to last forever.

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 would have happened if God had left Adam and Eve in the garden in their sin with a tree that also looked enticing and promised them eternal life? His children would eat from the tree and live forever in sin. There would always be sin in our world that would never end: anger, hatred, wars, abuse, lying, stealing, cheating, sexual impurity, murder, and more. Satan's plan would endure forever, instead of God's. But God said "No! This may hurt, but get out of this garden so you're not tempted!" That's not punishment. That's love! If we read on, Adam and Eve were punished as well for this 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 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” [Heb: zera], who will be the descendent of Eve: “*he* will crush your [Satan’s] head, and you will strike *his* heel” [emphasis added]. This descendent or “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 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “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 you².’” (Zechariah 8)

We learn that this seed will bring hope to God’s children and their land, making them a blessing instead of a curse and bringing them an inheritance. We see the phrase, “God is with you” again in both the book of Isaiah and Matthew in 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 will be 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 tremendous 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.