

CHARACTERS

A one-year exploration of the Bible
through the lives of its people.



VOLUME ONE

The Patriarchs

ADAM AND EVE

The First Humans

INTRODUCTION

What is the meaning of life?

To find the true answer to this question, we have to go back to the very beginning. It's only through knowing where we came from that we know who we are, where we're going, and why we are here at all. At the beginning, we find the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, which documents human history and beginnings in Mesopotamia. Genesis focuses on God's perfect creation of the world and its inhabitants, including many key figures of the Old Testament.

Moses was the author/compiler of the first five books of the Old Testament, known as the Pentateuch. He probably wrote most of the Pentateuch during the forty years when the Israelites wandered in the wilderness.

In the beginning, there was God and God alone. Genesis 1 and 2 record God's creative process, fashioning all we see and know from nothing. After each act of creation, God reflected on His work and declared, "It is good." From God came everything else in creation, including the first human beings, Adam and Eve; and it's with the first human beings that the pattern is broken. Unlike everything else in creation, Adam and Eve were created "in the image of God." And unlike the rest of the days in the creation account, God declared His creation to be "very good," having created Adam and Eve.

Why is it important to know where we came from in order to answer the question of the meaning of life?

When you think of the world of Adam and Eve, what images come to mind?

Watch the video teaching for session 1 to discover "The World of Adam and Eve," then continue the group discussion.

GROUP DISCUSSION

FOCUS ATTENTION

List some abilities you would describe as creative. How does this kind of creativity imitate God’s creativity? How is it different from God’s ability?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

As a group, read Genesis 1:1-5.

What attributes of God can we identify from the fact that He existed before the universe was created?

How is God’s authority on display in these verses?

As a group, read Genesis 1:27.

How does the creation of man and woman in verse 27 speak to the inherent worth of every person?

As a group, read Genesis 3:1-7.

What lies did Satan tell or imply to Eve about God? About herself? Why do you think these lies are easy to believe and repeat to ourselves?

What do you think Adam and Eve hoped to gain by eating the fruit, despite God’s instruction to avoid it?

As a group, read Genesis 3:14-19.

Sin must be judged because God is holy. How did God curse the serpent? Adam and Eve? How do you see evidence of these consequences today?

APPLY THE TEXT

God demonstrated His power by creating the universe with purpose simply by speaking it into existence. He made human beings in His image and with the capacity to love and worship Him. He gave mankind the blessing of governing the earth in His stead, and He set apart a holy day for rest and refreshment.

Why is the story of creation central to a strong biblical worldview?

In what ways does the belief that God created mankind in His image impact your outlook on life?

How have you seen the sanctity of human life violated in the world today? What practical steps can you take to affirm that all people are made in God’s image and are worthy of respect?

Close your group time in prayer, reflecting on what you have discussed.

ADAM AND EVE

KEY VERSES

So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.”

— Genesis 1:27-28a

BASIC FACTS

- 1. Name *Adam* possibly means “to be red or ruddy”; related to the Hebrew word for “ground, land.”
- 2. Name *Eve* probably means “living”; called “the mother of all the living” (Genesis 3:20).
- 3. No human parents; created directly by God.
- 4. Lived in the garden of Eden (location uncertain) until driven out by God as a result of their sin.
- 5. Adam lived to age 930; Eve’s age at death is unknown.

KNOWN FOR

- 1. First human beings; created as male and female in God’s image (Genesis 1:27)
- 2. Adam gave names to all the wild animals and birds God created (Genesis 2:19)
- 3. First man and woman to be married and give birth to children (Genesis 2:24; 4:1-2,25)
- 4. Introduced sin and its consequences into the human race (Genesis 3:6,16-19); Adam bequeathed the “sin nature” to all human descendants (Romans 5:12)
- 5. First to cultivate food in a garden (Genesis 2:15)
- 6. First to face temptation from the devil (Genesis 3:6)
- 7. First to lose a child to violent crime (Genesis 4:8)
- 8. Cast out of the garden of Eden to work the ground (Genesis 3:23)

TIMELINE

CREATION

PRE-4000 BC

- Adam and Eve created
- Sin introduced
- Cain and Abel born; Abel murdered
- Seth born

4000–2100 BC

- Worldwide flood 2350?
- Tower of Babel 2250?
- Job 2100?–1900?
- Abraham 2166–1991

2000 BC

- God’s covenant with Abraham 2081?
- Ishmael born 2080?
- Isaac 2066–1886
- Jacob 2006–1859

FURTHER INSIGHT MOMENT

Creation

Young Earth Creationists believe the universe is likely 6,000 to 10,000 years old and reject evolution as an explanation for the human species. Old Earth Creationists generally hold that the earth is billions of years old, and they also often reject evolution. Those who affirm Intelligent Design would argue that scientific evidence supports the belief in a Creator God. Opinions by Christians about how and when God created the universe are quite varied. While all Christians may not agree on the details of how God created the universe and life, all believers would agree that He is the Creator of it all. The Hebrew word to express creation first occurs in Genesis 1:1 and is the word *bara'*. The term *bara'* is unique in that it “emphasizes the initiation of [an] object.”¹

God’s Initial Work of Creation

Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”² God is always the subject of this Hebrew verb when it means “create.” The first chapter of Genesis uses the verb *bara'* in only three verses. In Genesis 1:1, the context indicates God created the universe ex nihilo or “out of nothing.” Such action is beyond human capabilities. Other passages also affirm creation as ex nihilo (see Heb. 11:3; compare Ps. 33:6,9; Col. 1:16).

The next two usages of the word *bara'* in Genesis 1 highlight the creation of life, both animal and human life. Genesis 1:21 highlights the creation of animal life. Likewise, Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female.”

The use of *bara'* with reference to the creation of man indicates the special value that God places on humanity. In fact, man is the Lord’s highest creation, for man is created in His image. God formed (created) man from the dust of the earth (see Gen. 2:7)—a clear indication that *bara'* in this instance does not mean to create out of nothing.

Ancient Babylonian creation epic. In this story, Anshar, the god of the celestial world, summons other gods to celebrate the Babylonian god Marduk who has defeated Tiamat, the embodiment of primeval Chaos. The story also tells how Marduk used Tiamat’s carcass to form heaven and earth. The tall narrow shape is characteristic of tablets in this series.

Illustrator Photo/ British Museum, London (31/9/67)

Illustrator Photo/Louise Kohl Smith (33/36/12)

Overlooking the ruins at the ancient site of Ebla (now called Tel Mardikh) in modern northwest Syria. In the 1970s, archaeologists unearthed thousands of tablets inscribed with details of everyday life in the city of Ebla late in the third millennium B.C. Written in Sumerian script, the tablets contain many of the same names of people and places that are in the Old Testament, plus stories that are similar to the biblical accounts of the flood, the tower of Babel, and creation. However, the people of Ebla did not know or worship Yahweh. Instead, they worshiped several gods, including Dagan, Ishtar, Enki, Ninki, and others.

1. Thomas E. McComiskey, “ar’B” (*bara'*, to create) in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:127.
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

Read Genesis 1:26-31

God brought the universe into existence out of nothing, demonstrating His power by speaking everything into existence. Unlike some myths about creation that involve monsters and cosmic struggles, Genesis presents one God who spoke creation into being and who is still in control of His creation. His creation was orderly, purposeful, and powerful, and through reading about it we begin to learn just who this God is who is still ruling over His creation.

We learn even more about who God is, and who we are, through His creation of mankind. In Genesis, the creation of mankind is introduced in a warm, personal conversation involving the three Persons of the Trinity: “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness” (v. 26).

What does it mean to be created in God’s image? It doesn’t mean that human beings have a divine nature or can someday become gods. Instead, it means that God made us to resemble Him in ways that no other parts of creation do. Adam had the capacity to know, to have fellowship with, and to worship God just as we do today. This knowledge, fellowship, and worship was perfect at the very beginning.

If we keep going into Genesis 2, we see that it was not good for man to be alone. God created Eve, also in His image, and because both men and women bear the image of God, they are equal in dignity and worth to Him.

What is the best thing to you about being made in God’s image? In what ways does sin keep us from ruling over the earth as God expects?

What do you think life was like for Adam and Eve? How would their relationship have been different than our relationships today?

Adam and Eve began their existence in perfect harmony with God, with creation, and with each other. They tended the garden, and their work was a joy rather than toil. God commanded them not only to tend the garden, but to have children and fill the earth with human beings (see Gen. 1:22). Like any divine benefit, the gift of human sexuality is meant for our good, but it can be destructive when corrupted and misused.

God also gave Adam and Eve the responsibility of governing the earth as His representatives. As stewards of this amazing planet, we are to promote its well-being, including the well-being of all of its inhabitants and resources. Every living thing must have nourishment to survive, grow, and reproduce. God therefore gave humanity and all the wildlife of the earth access to the vegetation He created (see 1:11). Adam and Eve were vegetarians, for it was not until after the worldwide flood in Noah’s day that the Lord gave human beings the additional benefit of eating meat and fish as food (see 9:2-3).

What are some ways that believers can practice and promote good stewardship of God’s creation? What role does thanking God for the provision He has made for our well-being play in this stewardship?

When God surveyed the totality of His creative work, He declared that it was “very good.” Everything that was good, beneficial, and purposeful for His creation was in place and in harmony.

Read Genesis 2:4-9,15-18

Adam and Eve were special, unique among all the rest of God’s creation. To emphasize this, Moses used a different name for God in Genesis 2 than in Genesis 1. In Genesis 1, the English name “God” translates the Hebrew term *Elohim* [EL oh heem]. Here in 2:4, Moses used the name *Yahweh Elohim*, which is written in English as “the LORD God.” *Yahweh* is God’s personal, covenant name that He revealed to Moses at the burning bush; it means “I am” (see Ex. 3:13-15). Together the two names emphasize the all-powerful God who created the world related to Adam and Eve, and all humanity after, in a personal way.

These verses not only show the personal nature of God, but the deep connections He wove into His world. The two human beings needed a place to live, work, and fulfill their God-given purpose. The world needed human beings to cultivate and care for it. God prepared the earth first; then He made its caretakers.

God created out of nothing the materials He used to fashion the human body. Indeed, the Hebrew words translated “the man” and “the ground” are related. The picture is that of a skilled potter taking up a mound of clay in his hands and shaping it into a marvelous vessel. Even so, God fashioned the first man’s body of the dust of the ground (see Ps. 103:14). This was a “hands-on” process. The language in Genesis 2 shows us something of God’s personal and intimate creation of Adam and Eve, telling us that He fashioned the physical body, and then He “breathed the breath of life ... into the man” (Gen. 2:7), later called “Adam.” This special action set human beings apart from all other creatures. When God’s breath entered into the man’s nostrils, Adam became a living soul capable of relating personally with his Creator.

How can these verses encourage someone who feels insignificant?

God put the man in the garden to live there and to enjoy its benefits. However, the garden was never intended to be a place of idleness or self-indulgence. Rather, God expected the man to make the garden productive and to manage it wisely—key aspects of ruling over the earth in God’s stead. Human life has a God-given purpose. Important aspects of that purpose involve being productive and being good stewards of God’s creation.

How can we honor God through our work? How is being productive an extension of the wise stewardship of God’s creation?

God knew that it was not good for Adam to be alone. Companionship and intimacy are essential to human happiness, enjoyment, and fulfillment. Loneliness is not always caused by an absence of other people. It can also be the result of a lack of meaningful relationships. God wants people to live in mutually fulfilling relationships.

How does God use relationships to enrich our lives? What does our need for relationships reveal about our need for God?

Genesis 1:27 states simply that God created mankind as “male and female.” In 2:21-25, Moses described in greater detail the amazing surgery God performed to give Adam a helper. God put the man into a deep sleep, removed a rib from his side, and used the rib to fashion a woman, later called “Eve” (see 3:20). Adam immediately acknowledged that the woman was his perfect counterpart. God also used the moment to establish the sacred bond of marriage between the man and the woman. Adam and Eve had a wonderful place to live and work. Now they could join together without shame in establishing a home and family. All was as God intended it to be. But all of that was about to change.

Read Genesis 3:1-7,14-19

A new character pops up in Adam and Eve's story in Genesis 3—the serpent. In this case, the serpent was being used by another being, an evil being whose desire was to tempt, accuse, and destroy every good thing God had made, especially human beings.

The serpent asked Eve a simple question, but one that was designed carefully to raise doubts about God. Eve was caught in a bind, because to answer “yes” was to falsely accuse God of being stingy, untruthful, and unloving. To answer “no” was to suggest that it must be okay to eat fruit even from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

To her credit, Eve corrected the serpent's deceptive question. Adam and Eve had God's permission to eat from all of the trees in the garden except one, the tree in the middle. Interestingly, Eve added that she and Adam were forbidden to touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, lest they die. While God's specific command was that they were not to eat from the tree (see Gen. 2:17), perhaps the couple had agreed that not touching it was an even stronger safeguard against disobedience.

The serpent changed tactics, moving from planting doubts about God's goodness to openly questioning God's integrity. The “father of lies” (John 8:44) accused God of lying to the man and woman about the consequences of sin. The serpent insisted that God's warning about sin was just a smokescreen. God was holding out on them. These are still the arguments Satan makes today—that God isn't good, loving, and generous, and that true satisfaction can be found apart from Him.

Knowing how Satan operates, what are some things people can do to recognize and resist temptation?

Satan never directly told Eve to disobey God. He simply clouded her mind with doubt and then watched as an internal struggle took over. Eve now looked at the forbidden tree in a different way. It no longer seemed off-limits or dangerous; instead it looked pleasant and seemed to be a source of wisdom. Eve took fruit from the forbidden tree and ate. Then she gave some to Adam and he also ate, and the perfect harmony for which they had been created was broken.

As the serpent promised, the man and woman's eyes were opened. What they gained, however, was not a God-like knowledge but rather a sense of deep guilt and shame. They became self-conscious of their nakedness. In a futile attempt to hide their shame and guilt, they sewed fig leaves together to wear as coverings. They had lost their innocence. Life would not be the same again.

Why do you think people so often try to hide their sins? What do Acts 2:38 and 1 John 1:9 teach us to do instead of hiding our sins?

Sin entered the world, and being just, God pronounced His judgment on all involved—first on the serpent, then on the woman, and finally on the man. But even in the midst of judgment, God showed His grace. God's words to the serpent were also a declaration of war against Satan. These verses are also the Bible's first prophetic glimpse of the good news that would come in Jesus Christ. Christ defeated Satan by His death and resurrection. Although the battle continues for believers until Christ's return, our victory over sin and death is guaranteed through Christ (see Rev. 5:5-10).

Adam and Eve would one day return to dust. That is, physical death had entered the human experience.

In what ways do you see the consequences of humanity's fall ongoing in today's world? In what ways is God's mercy evident?

SESSION 1 | LEADER GUIDE

FOCUS ATTENTION

List some abilities you would describe as creative. How does this kind of creativity imitate God’s creativity? How is it different from God’s ability?

- Everything we think of as “new” is really a recombination of existing ingredients. Though we may create a never-before-tasted combination of ingredients, we must first have the materials to begin creating.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1-5.

What attributes of God can we identify from the fact that He existed before the universe was created? How is God’s authority on display in these verses?

- God was when there was nothing else. Both singular and plural references to God in Genesis 1 allude to the triune nature of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (John 1:1-3 points to Jesus being present and active during creation.)
- The Hebrew word translated “create” in Genesis 1:1 is only used in reference to God’s work. This is a unique process that only God can do.
- God drew a distinct boundary between light and darkness. Light-dispelling darkness was a beautiful picture of Christ on day one of creation, and it remains so for us today. Day and night are creations of God that were spoken, and His naming of them asserts His rule over them.

Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 1:27.

How does the creation of man and woman in verse 27 speak to the inherent worth of every person?

- Only people are created in God’s image with an eternal soul, spirit, intellect, depth of emotion, unique relational qualities, and the ability to reason.
- All people—regardless of age, health, mental acuity, or ability—possess precious, God-given worth because they are created in His image. Because of this, Christians must affirm the value of every person in attitude and action.

Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 3:1-7.

What lies did Satan tell or imply to Eve about God? About herself? Why do you think these lies are easy to believe and repeat to ourselves?

- One of Satan's lies is that he's not all that dangerous, active, or even real. He is the master manipulator and deceiver, without mercy. To think we are immune to his schemes is naïve. We need to trust God's wisdom, power, and protection. Pride makes us assume we can successfully be our own god.

What do you think Adam and Eve hoped to gain by eating the fruit, despite God's instruction to avoid it?

- God provided the way for them to avoid temptation, but Adam and Eve chose not to trust Him. Their disobedience broke their relationship with God and brought spiritual and physical death upon themselves and all their descendants.
- Instead of the power and satisfaction Adam and Eve craved, they received the constant presence of fear, shame, and a sense of failure and inadequacy.

Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 3:14-19.

Sin must be judged because God is holy. How did God curse the serpent? Adam and Eve? How do you see evidence of these consequences today?

- The hostility Satan brought against Jesus would result in a death blow to the head for Satan. Though Satan causes trouble, his end is sure through Christ, the only seed of woman. God's redemptive love, power, and authority are on display.
- For Eve, pain and suffering in childbearing would intensify as a direct consequence. Children would then be brought into a world where death reigns. Adam's relationship with work changed drastically. He would be reminded daily of his physical frailty and continual journey toward physical death.

APPLY THE TEXT

Why is the story of creation central to a strong biblical worldview?

In what ways does the belief that God created mankind in His image impact your outlook on life?

How have you seen the sanctity of human life violated in the world today? What practical steps can you take to affirm that all people are made in God's image and are worthy of respect?