



Genesis 1–12

Prepared by Allen Browne

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**RIVERVIEW
CHURCH**

Prepared by Allen Browne for Riverview Church, 2026.

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Contents

Week 1: Establishing God's earthly realm (Genesis 1–2)	5
Genesis 1: "And God said ..."	8
Genesis 2: Life in God's garden	13
So what?	20
Week 2: Trust and treachery (Genesis 3–4)	23
Genesis 3: The question of trust	23
Genesis 4: The question of justice	29
So what?	35
Week 3: The identity of God's family (Genesis 5–6)	37
Genesis 5: The family that trusts God	37
Genesis 6: Losing our identity	41
So what?	46
Week 4: The partnership that saves (Genesis 7–8)	47
Genesis 7: Ruined	47
Genesis 8: Rescued	50
So what?	54
Week 5: Re-establishing his realm (Genesis 9–10)	55
Genesis 9: God remakes the world	55
Genesis 10: The nations	61
So what?	63
Week 6: A tale of two kingdoms (Genesis 11–12)	65
Genesis 11: A kingdom trying to take God's world	65
Genesis 12: A kingdom representing God to the world	69
So what?	73

Week 1: Establishing God's earthly realm (Genesis 1–2)

“We can’t be friends” was Ariana Grande’s most popular song in 2024. It begins:

I didn't think you'd understand me
How could you ever even try? ...
We can't be friends ...

What is she saying? Is she choosing to break up because the bloke doesn’t understand her? It may sound like that at the start, but by the end we realize she wants to be more than friends. She’s feeling misunderstood and rejected, but waiting for him to change his mind and love her again. The refrain at the end is:

I'll wait for your love.

Even best friends misunderstand each other. We make assumptions about what the person is saying. We hear part of the message and miss the main thing. We don’t recognize the irony, or how this conversation connects with yesterday’s.

The chance of misunderstanding is greater when we don’t know someone well. With someone who comes from another *culture*, or another *language*, or another *time*, we’ve got work to do to understand who they are, what they’re saying, and what that means.

All those issues are present when we come to the Bible. All sixty-six books come to us from another culture, another language, and another time. We misunderstand them when we read them through Western eyes, though the dynamics of our culture and the assumptions of our time.¹

That’s why people divide up over how to read Genesis. We misunderstand it when we expect it to answer our questions about science and history, instead of hearing what it is talking about. Commentator Gordon Wenham said it well:

Though historical and scientific questions may be uppermost in our minds as we approach the text, it is doubtful whether they were in the writer’s mind, and we should therefore be cautious about looking for answers to questions he was not concerned with. Genesis is primarily about God’s character and his purposes for sinful mankind. Let us beware of allowing our interests to divert us from the central thrust of the book, so that we miss what the LORD, our creator and redeemer, is saying to us.²

Scripture is not a revelation about science. It’s a revelation of God. When we focus on the wrong questions, we miss the one who is revealed in Scripture, and then we end up fighting with each other.

That’s especially true of Genesis 1. People argue over how the Genesis account of creation and the scientific account of origins fit together. Some views:

¹ E. Randolph Richards, and Brandon J. O’Brien. *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Inc., 1987), liii.

1. **The Bible is true, and science is wrong where it doesn't agree.** Young earth creationists such as Ken Ham³ believe the universe was created in six literal days, just a few thousand years ago.
2. **The Bible and science both say the same thing.** Hugh Ross⁴ believes the Bible gives us scientific information about a universe that's ancient. For example, Isaiah 42:5 says "the Creator of the heavens ... stretched them out," and Hugh Ross identifies this statement with the inflation of the universe that followed the Big Bang.
3. **The Bible and science give us information about different things.** Francis Collins⁵ is a Nobel-prize winning biologist who helped unravel how DNA works. He wrote *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. In 2020 he was awarded the Templeton Prize for "harnessing the power of the sciences to explore the deepest questions of the universe and humankind's place and purpose within it."

I (Allen) personally started out supporting the young-earth creationists (#1 above). Over time, I realized that the Bible didn't fit my view of it. To honour the text, I had to change my view.

Let's take a New Testament example. According to Mark 4:31, Jesus called a **mustard seed** "*the smallest of all the seeds on earth.*" If you think Jesus was making a statement about biology, then he was wrong and the Bible contains errors.

Jesus went on to describe the mustard seed growing into "*the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree*" (Matthew 13:32). That's also wrong. Mustard seeds grow into good-sized garden shrubs, but not trees. Jesus made two biological errors in one story, and your Bible has multiple errors. If you think the Bible teaches science, that's the conclusion you're forced to accept.

Once you realize the Bible is not teaching science, you can listen to what Jesus was saying. If you were buying mustard seeds at the market and one little seed fell off the scales, you wouldn't worry about it. What's one seed? But that one little seed can grow to fill your garden, and Jesus said the kingdom of God is like that. If Jesus is God's Anointed (Messiah), the kingdom was arriving in him (the king)! His audience knew that Israel was meant to be God's garden, though it had been overrun by foreign powers (Psalm 80; Isaiah 5 etc). God was restoring his reign in his anointed.

And then comes the unexpected twist in Jesus' story. The little kingdom that was coming to life in Christ would grow into something no one expected: a *tree* far bigger than God's garden—a *tree so large that the birds come and perch in its branches* (Matthew 13:32). This was language that the big kingdoms used to describe their power (compare Daniel 4:12, 14, 21). The little mustard seed becomes the kingdom of God: far bigger than a garden, it fills the whole world! Wow!

³ <https://answersingenesis.org/bios/ken-ham/>

⁴ <https://reasons.org/team/hugh-ross>

⁵ <https://biologos.org/people/francis-collins>. For a sample see "Debating Evolution, Genetics and God" (Premier Unbelievable, 27 December 2024) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzna0mwwenk>

Jesus' story is not bad biology; it's messianic hope.⁶ Any attempt to make it fit science misses the point. When we try to make Scripture say something it never set out to say, we distort it into something it is not, and we miss what it is saying.

So, what is Genesis 1 about? If it's not a science text, **what is it saying?**

Israel's story

All Scripture reveals God. The Old Testament is God's interaction with his people Israel. Israel had a unique relationship with God, established through the Sinai covenant. The LORD freed them from human rule (Pharaoh), and formed them into the first kingdom of God on earth. This foundational story is in Exodus.

Genesis is the prequel. Why did God send Moses to rescue them? *God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with **Abraham**, with **Isaac** and with **Jacob*** (Exodus 2:24). Genesis is the backstory: God calling Israel's ancestors:

- Abraham (Genesis 12–25)
- Isaac (Genesis 25–36)
- Jacob, with his twelve sons who became the twelve tribes (Genesis 37–50).

But Genesis doesn't start with Abraham. It starts with God's relationship to the world. Genesis 1–11 makes the astounding claim that **the God of Israel is the God of all people**.

In the beginning, God established ... not just Israel! The *heavens and earth* are his. It was *formless and empty* until God gave it shape and significance. God's decrees gave it form and function.⁷ The heavenly sovereign declared how things were to be, empowering creation to be fruitful.

So, who is this God? And what can we know of God if God is in heaven and we are on earth? How does he govern the world? How does he care for and protect his earthly creatures? What's our place in his world? And what if we resist his authority?

Genesis 1–11 addresses the foundational issues of God's authority. It's a prelude to Israel's history. It's the account of heaven and earth in God's care, how the earthly realm turned from God, and how God responded. It explains why there are nations with their own rulers, and why God called Abraham to establish a different kind of nation.

That's what we're covering in the next six weeks. Any questions before we begin?

⁶ <https://allenbrowne.blog/2018/04/16/the-little-seed-that-filled-the-world/>

⁷ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 21–34.

Genesis 1: “And God said ...”

Genesis 1:1-5 (NIV)

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

This is a revelation of God: *In the beginning, God ... And God said ...* The revelation of God is framed in words that meant something to the Hebrews, so we must understand what they meant by terms like *heavens* (sky), *earth* (land), *deep* (seas), and *firmament* (vault between the heavens and the earth).

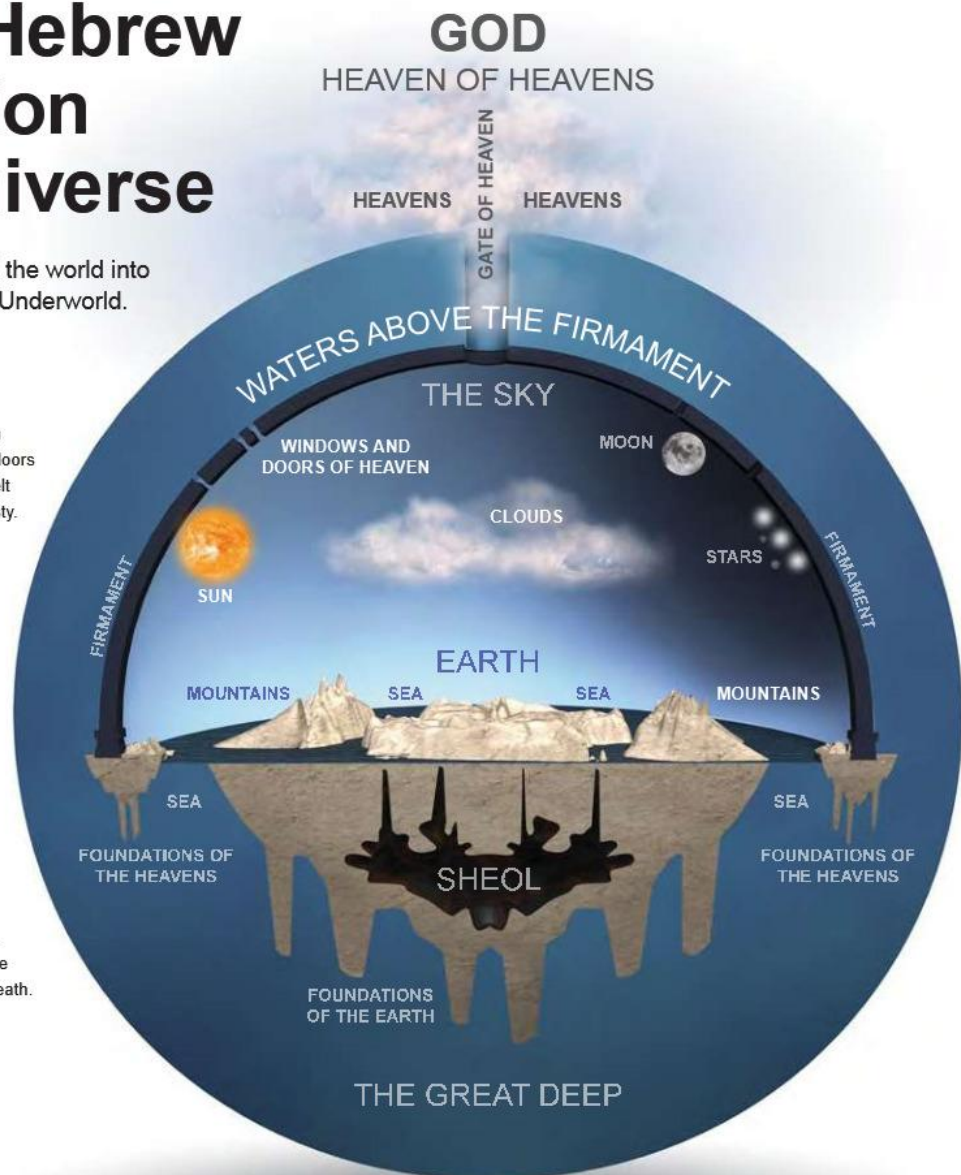
Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe

The ancient Israelites divided the world into Heaven, Earth, Sea, and the Underworld.

They viewed the sky as a vault resting on foundations—perhaps mountains—with doors and windows that let in the rain. God dwelt above the sky, hidden in cloud and majesty.

The world was viewed as a disk floating on the waters, secured or moored by pillars. The earth was the only known domain—the realm beyond it was considered unknowable.

The Underworld (Sheol) was a watery or dusty prison from which no one returned. Regarded as a physical place beneath the earth, it could be reached only through death.



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They did not see the *earth* as a planet orbiting the sun at 30 km/sec. They did not see the *sun* as a star orbiting the Milky Way galaxy. They did not see the *moon* as a satellite orbiting the earth.

The world as they saw it consists of the *sky* and the *ground*—the *heavens* and the *earth* (verse 1). Things that were not limited to the ground were in the heavens. They spoke of *the birds of the heavens* (Genesis 1:20, 26, 28, 30 ESV) and *the stars of the heavens* (Genesis 15:5; 22:17; 26:4) because birds and stars pass overhead. They spoke of *the God of heaven* because God is not limited to living on the ground (Genesis 22:17; 24:3, 7; 28:12, 17).

In addition to the *sky* and the *ground*, there was the *deep*—the waters below us (verse 2). We know the oceans plunge to 11,000 meters, but to them *the deep* felt threatening and unfathomable (Genesis 7:11; 9:2; Exodus 15:5, 8), like the realm of the dead (Ezekiel 31:15). The deep had a dark face (*darkness was over the face of the deep*), yet it was not outside God's control: *The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters* (verse 2 ESV).

God is sovereign over everything: in the heavens, on the earth, and in the deep. The opening claim of the Jewish Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy) is that creation receives its shape and significance through God's decrees. **And God said**—that's the main point of Genesis 1 (repeated in verses 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, and 29).

God's decrees put everything in their right place:

Genesis 1:6-8 (NIV)

⁶ And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

Ask a teenager to sort out their room, and they probably start by separating things—like clean clothes from dirty ones. God's decrees separate things that should be kept **separated**: *the light from the dark* (verse 4), *the waters above from the waters below* (verses 6-7), *the day from the night* (verse 15), and *the light from the dark* (verse 18). The Torah continues to separate what is holy from what is unholy, what is common from what is clean. This is central to Israel's identity:

Leviticus 20:24b-26 (ESV)

²⁴ "I am the LORD your God, who has **separated** you from the peoples. ²⁵ You shall therefore **separate** the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by ... anything ... which I have **set apart** for you to hold unclean. ²⁶ You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have **separated** you from the peoples, that you should be mine."

This separation results in everything being in its right place:

Genesis 1:9-13 (NIV)

⁹ And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

What God called *Day* and *Night* do not encroach on each other (verses 5, 14). The waters in the sky and the waters in the deep are held apart (verses 7-8), so what God called the *Seas* and the *Land* do not encroach on each other (verse 9-10). That's how it remains while the creational order holds. But if the earth was "corrupted" ... well, that's another story (Genesis 6:11-17; 7:10-11).

With everything prepared, God gives life:

¹¹ Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

God's decree enables life on earth. Three times we're told that God decreed *fruitfulness* (verses 11-12, 22, 28-29). Every meaningful enterprise on earth—every farm, every business, every family, every nation—ultimately relies on this decree.

As we'll discover, resisting the order established by God introduces disorder. The earth produces thorns and thistles, and life falls back into the ground (3:17-19). God's nation will be born because God made Abraham and Sarah fruitful (17:6, 20; 18:10-14; 21:1-7). God-given fruitfulness is crucial to the story (9:7; 28:3; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4; 49:3).

God gives life! That message echoes through the whole Bible.

Support system: Days 4–6 (1:14-31)

God now set up two signs that earth is under heaven's authority:

Genesis 1:14-19 (NIV)

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as **signs** to mark sacred times, and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so.

¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to **govern** the day and the lesser light to **govern** the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to **govern** the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good.

¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

In the dome of the heavens, the sun and the moon serve as *signs* that *govern* life on earth. Heaven directs our workdays and Sabbath, as God worked six days and rested on the seventh. Heaven marks the months and seasons of our year, the *sacred times* that were the festivals of Israel's calendar (Leviticus 23; Deuteronomy 16).

God set up creation with *lights in the sky* to signify that earth is **governed** by heaven. It's a word used of governing a kingdom (e.g. Jeremiah 34:1; 51:28; Daniel 11:5; Micah 4:8). The lights in the heavens remind us that we live under God's reign, that **earth is a kingdom of heaven**. That was Israel's uniqueness in Old Testament times. That's what Jesus came to restore for the whole world. The one who sits on the throne restores creation because he is faithful and true (Revelation 21:5).

Having established the kingdom, God now puts the living creatures in place:

Genesis 1:20-25 (NIV)

²⁰ And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

The emphasis is on each creature being in its right place, its assigned domain:

- **the waters**, teeming with living things and huge sea creatures
- **the heavens**, where birds fly across the dome of the sky
- **the land**, where domestic livestock, crawling creatures, and wild animals live.

With everything in place, God prepares a creature to manage the earth on his behalf:

Genesis 1:26-31 (NIV)

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹ Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

God wants to share his *dominion*, so he creates the human with authority to represent God to creation. It was common in the ancient world for a ruler to set up an *image* in the kingdom so people knew who their ruler was. But the Life-giver's image cannot be made of stone: only a living image can represent the living God!

The *male* and *female* humans *image* God. **Equally and jointly**, they are given authority to exercise God's *dominion* in his earthly realm. They are commissioned to manage all God's creatures in the domains where God put them: *the fish in the sea, and the birds in the sky, and the land creatures on the land* (verse 28).

But what are we not given authority over? God gave us dominion over the other creatures, but not over each other. The kingdom of God established in Genesis 1 has God ruling over humans, and humans ruling over the other creatures on his behalf. God is very pleased with this arrangement. What God made each day was good, but this is **very good** (verse 31).

We'll discuss the seven days of creation as we reach the seventh day in Chapter 2, but how does this understanding of Genesis sit with you? Do you have questions?

Questions (Genesis 1)

Since Scripture reveals God and defines our relationship with him, you might like to ask what light Genesis 1 sheds on these questions:

1. Who is God (in relation to creation)?⁸

.....
.....

2. Who are we (in relation to God and creation)?⁹

.....
.....

3. What do you make of Israel's claim that their God rules everyone and everything (Genesis 1–11)? Would that have been controversial? Is it controversial still?

.....
.....

4. Theology often starts with "original sin," but Genesis begins with original "good." What difference would it make if we started with original good?¹⁰

.....
.....

⁸ <https://allenbrowne.blog/2016/05/06/the-sovereign-structuring-his-realms-genesis-1/>

⁹ <https://allenbrowne.blog/2016/05/09/what-it-means-to-be-human-genesis-1/>

¹⁰ <https://allenbrowne.blog/2022/12/01/original-good/>

Genesis 2: Life in God's garden

In Genesis 1, God's work is set out in two parallel parts:

- In days 1–3, God established the spaces where his kingdom operates.
- In days 4–6, God filled those spaces with what belongs there.

Nahum Sarna (a Jewish commentator) describes it like this:¹¹

<i>Day</i>	<i>Group I: The Resource Creative Act</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Group II: The Utilizer Creative Act</i>
1	Light	4	The luminaries
2	Sky, leaving terrestrial waters	5	Fish and fowl
3	Dry land Vegetation (lowest form of organic life)	6	Land creatures Humankind (highest form of organic life)

The seven-day week was already used in the Ancient Near East, but the notion of God resting on the seventh day was unique to Judaism. Sarna explains:

This seven-day typology is **widely attested** in the ancient world. As early as the twenty-second century B.C.E., King Gudea of Lagash, in southern Mesopotamia, dedicated a temple with a seven-day feast. The literatures of Mesopotamia and Ugarit are replete with examples of seven-day units of time. Most common is a state of affairs that lasts for six days with a climactic change taking place on the seventh. While the Creation narrative conforms to this literary convention, it is **unique** in that a different action occurs each day, with no activity at all on the seventh.¹²

The chapter break is unfortunate. Chapter 2:1-3 is part of the seven-day story:

Genesis 2:1-3 (NIV)

¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

For Israel, the seventh day was **holy**, meaning set aside, devoted. The Sabbath was devoted to rest, set aside from other days (Exodus 20:8-11). God never gave this law to the nations, so Christians are not required to keep Israel's laws (Acts 15:28-29). But Israel's laws still reveal something about God, so **what does the Sabbath reveal?**

God provides everything: a habitat for all his creatures, meaningful work, fruitfulness, food to eat (1:28-29). God's abundant provision means we do not need to work seven days a week. God is not a slavedriver—unlike Pharaoh who accused the people of being lazy if they wanted time off (Exodus 5:8, 17). But *rest* is not just for personal recovery; everyone rested together, so they could enjoy family and community, God's presence in his people.

¹¹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 4.

¹² Ibid.

So if you're driven to work seven days a week, you're probably serving a god named Dollar. Open your eyes to the Father who provides for all creatures. Instead of seeking to accumulate resources for the self, seek first his kingdom and his justice. You'll discover the Father who provides for us all (Matthew 6:24-33).

The account of the heavens and the earth (2:4)

To understanding the Bible well, we need to recognize where each account begins and ends. In Genesis, that's really easy. It tells us when a new story is starting:

Genesis 2:4 (NIV)

This is the **account** of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

The word *account* (*tô·lē·dôṭ* in Hebrew) means a family story, a record of a family's origin and the descendants who carry on the family line. Each major section of Genesis is introduced as a new family story (*tôlēdôṭ*):

Gen 2:4:	The account of the heavens and the earth
Gen 5:1:	The account of Adam's family line
Gen 6:9:	The account of Noah and his family
Gen 10:1, 32	The account of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (the nations)
Gen 11:10	The account of Shem's family line (the Semitic peoples)
Gen 11:27	The account of Terah's family line (Abraham's father)
Gen 25:12-13	The account of Abraham's son Ishmael
Gen 25:19	The account of Abraham's son Isaac
Gen 36:1, 9	The account of the family line of Esau
Gen 37:2	The account of Jacob's family line.

That makes it very easy to see where each story starts and ends, but they're not a bunch of individual stories (a creation, a fall, a flood, ...). It's all one communal story, about families. Individuals matter in how they contribute to the family story.

It's Israel's story, of course, but other nations are acknowledged too. The nations come from Noah's sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth), as well as Ishmael and Esau. Those accounts are mentioned, but the main story is the origin of Israel.

The major sections of Genesis are therefore:

- A. Genesis 1–4 The heavens and the earth
- B. Genesis 5 Adam's family (through Seth)
- C. Genesis 6–11 Noah's family
- D. Genesis 12–25 Abraham (son of Terah) and Sarah
- E. Genesis 25–35 Isaac and Rebekah
- F. Genesis 37–50 Jacob (Israel) with his twelve sons (twelve tribes of Israel)

Genesis 2:4 introduces another important word too: the divine name. God (*Elō·hîm*) was the subject of almost every sentence in Genesis 1. Now we're introduced to **the LORD God** (*Yahweh Elō·hîm*). The word LORD in block letters is God's personal name.

This was the name that God revealed to his people in the Sinai covenant. As God told Moses, the name YHWH was unknown in the time of Genesis:

Exodus 6:3 (ESV)

“I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty [*El Shaddai*], but by my name the LORD [*YHWH*] I did not make myself known to them.”

So if the Name isn't revealed until Exodus, why is it used 165 times in Genesis?

About 400 years ago, some German scholars decided that Genesis must be the writings of different authors stitched together. They called the guy who used the name *Yahweh* (or *Jehovah*) J. The guy who used *Elohim* (God) they called E. The guy who wrote Deuteronomy they called D. And then they imagined a priest pulling all these writings together after the exile, so they called him P. Academics then identified every piece of the Torah as from the pen of either J, E, D, or P.

But that whole attempt to reconstruct the Torah's origin is theoretical. Modern academics write documents. They failed to understand how stories were transmitted by communities in oral cultures. Their whole approach is now regarded as uncertain:

No new consensus has evolved to replace Wellhausen's basic theory ... There is now widespread recognition of the hypothetical character of the results of modern criticism.¹³

As C. S. Lewis pointed out, the method doesn't even work for modern writings:

What forearms me against all these Reconstructions is the fact that I have seen it all from the other end of the stick. I have watched reviewers reconstructing the genesis of my own books in just this way. ...

My impression is that in the whole of my experience not one of these guesses has on any one point been right; that the method shows a record of 100 percent failure.¹⁴

Genesis is not the work of a bunch of individual writers. It's a communal story, ancestral recollections passed down orally, written by the community at some point, and adapted over time so it remained their story. The adaptations are obvious in some places. For example, there are additions to Genesis 14 to explain how place names that have changed over time (verses 2, 3, 7, 8, 17). Genesis 10:10-11 explains the origin of Babylon and Assyria, Israel's arch enemies in later centuries. But that doesn't mean the whole of Genesis was written after the exile to Babylon. It's an ancient story, adapted so that it remained the story of Israel across many centuries.

It comes as no surprise, therefore that Israel would use the Sinai covenant name for God as they told the story of things that happened before that name was revealed.

Any thoughts or questions?

.....

¹³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Inc., 1987), xxxv.

¹⁴ Lewis, C. S. "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," in *Christian Reflections* edited by Walter Hooper, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 159-160.

The human in relation to God

The story now shifts from God (*Elohim*)—the all-powerful sovereign over everything in heaven and on earth—to *YHWH Elohim*: God with a name, God in personal relationship with the human creature:

Genesis 2:7 (NIV)

Then **the LORD God** formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The Hebrew word for the human (or humankind) is *ā-dām*. Adam's name literally is Human. The human consists of the same stuff as the rest of creation, but we are living beings because God breathed his life into us.

Then God provides the human with a home, with everything we need to live well:

Genesis 2:8-14 (NIV)

⁸ Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold.

¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.)

¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Eden was not the name of the garden; Eden was the region where the garden was. Eden was east of Israel (verse 8). A river flowed from the region of Eden to water the garden (verse 10). While we're not sure of the Pishon and Gihon rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates were the rivers of Babylon (Iraq today).

But this is no literal **river**. Rivers begin as streams that combine as they flow towards the sea, like the Murray and Darling Rivers in Australia, or the three headwaters of the Jordan to the north of Israel. This river does the opposite: it starts as a single river, dividing into four and spreading out to water the earth.

This is the river of life that flows from the source of life. God himself is the source.

The river spreading out in all four directions represents God's abundant provision for creation. Water is foundational for all life (flora and fauna). This imagery of the river of life keeps recurring throughout Scripture (Ezekiel 47; John 4:14; 7:37-38; Revelation 21:6, 22:1-2, 17).



Source: The Bible Project

The **tree of life** also symbolizes God's life. They had access to God's sustaining life until the day they disconnected from God and started to die (3:19-24).

God's provision is abundant: *all kinds of trees ... pleasing to the eye and good for food*. God entrusts them to partner with him in meaningful work, serving God by tending and protecting his fruitful creation, as gardeners and guards:

Genesis 2:15-17 (NIV)

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Everything was theirs, with one exception: *the knowledge of good and evil*. God decides good and evil. The one thing we must not do is to take the one thing the Sovereign has reserved for himself. To disconnect from our life-source is to die.

When I define good and evil for myself, it ends up becoming "what's good for me." In all our power relationships (where one person has the power to decide), that's the problem.

The human in relation to others

So here's God's first instruction about what's good and what's *not good*:

Genesis 2:18-20 (NIV)

¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

You might expect God to give the human some time to discover his identity, to figure himself out. That's how we understand life in our Western culture today. We think the goal of life is to be my best self. Subtly, we've made it all about **me**.

God says this isn't good. God intends us to find our identity not in isolation but in relationship. God is relational (1 John 4:8, 16), and we're in God's image. That's why isolation feels like torture. We're designed for relationship with God, with each other, with the creatures of creation.

The Creator presents the human with all the other creatures of creation. Naming them is the first step in finding the meaning of our life, for our vocation is to implement God's care for them (1:28).

The first thing the human learns is that the animals are social creatures too. They have partners. The lesson highlights his sense that something is wrong. The isolation of his individualism makes him acutely aware that this is *not good*.

Now the human is ready for God's final gift:

Genesis 2:21-23 (NIV)

²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

God's creative drama blurred the line between "self" and "other":

- The partner is not another: *my bones ... my flesh*.
- The partner is another: a God-created identity with her own name.

Adam's response is to declare this paradox: "I recognize her as myself: my bones, my flesh. I recognize her as another person, with her own name, separate from me."

This shared identity (me, yet other) is the basis for the most intimate and enduring of human relationships:

Genesis 2:24-25 (NIV)

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Leaving their parents' households, the couple becomes a household for the next generation. *One flesh* is both sharing their bodies (sexual union) and sharing their lives as one intertwined being. Like Abraham and Sarah, they may move on from other friends and family, but they stick together as they share a life. People feel shame if their private parts are exposed to others, but as one flesh they feel no shame with each other.

Paul understands Genesis 2:24 to say that even casual sex creates a bond between people (1 Corinthians 6:16), so I guess it's understandable that many in our society feel their lives are fragmented. He also thinks the imagery of sharing a body as one flesh is a brilliant analogy for the holy relationship between Jesus and the church—the body through whom the Messiah restores his world (Ephesians 5:31).

Jesus treated Genesis 2:24 as the marriage ideal that God intended for us in the beginning (Matthew 19:5). Many things threaten that relationship in a world where people want to decide good and evil for themselves. The next chapter introduces the ultimate threat to our lives and relationships—death (3:19). Unfaithfulness also undermines the relationship by creating another bond with another person. So does divorce where one person is unwilling to keep sharing life. Abandonment can do that too. Marriage is God's gift of shared life, but it's fragile because we never have control of the other person.

The word *helper* in verse 18 does not imply Eve was inferior to Adam—unless you want to say God is inferior to us! In the Hebrew Scriptures, *helper* mostly refers to God (Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 29; Psalm 70:5; 121:1-2; 124:8; 146:5; Hosea 13:9).

We've already been told that God created both male and female with joint and equal authority over creation but not over each other (1:26-28). That equality continues in Genesis 2 in a relationship described as "one" in flesh and life.

Questions (Genesis 2)

Do you have questions about Chapter 2?

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What does this chapter teach us about our human **identity**? What does it mean to be human? Where does that identity come from?

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.....

What about **marriage**? Is it God's ideal for everyone? Can you think of any significant Bible characters who were single? What is marriage? Is it safe to commit to shared life with another person who is not under your control?

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What about the **Sabbath**? Is this God's ideal for everyone, or just for the nation established by the Sinai covenant?

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.....

If God was in Eden, and God invited humans to live in his garden, should we understand Eden as a kind of **temple**, the place where God was present among people?¹⁵ The temple was the centre of Jewish life in the Old Testament, so God's house among humans would be a beautiful way to describe creation,¹⁶ a creation that's restored as a temple in the end (Revelation 21:22). What do you think?

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What else have you learned from Genesis 1–2?

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¹⁵ <https://allenbrowne.blog/2016/05/11/was-eden-gods-palace-genesis-2/>

¹⁶ Greg Beale makes this case in *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

So what?

The opening chapters of the Bible give us two perspectives of God's creation, two sides of the relationship between heaven and earth:

- Genesis 1 is from God's perspective. God is revealed as the heavenly sovereign whose decrees give shape, significance, fruitfulness, and order to creation.
- Genesis 2 is from our perspective. We wake up with God's life in our lungs, invited into relationship with God, recipients of his astoundingly rich provision, called to recognize his authority to decide good and evil, with authority over the other creatures and shared life with other humans.

In preparation for next week, please read **Genesis 3–4**.

Going further

For more background, check out these videos from The Bible Project:

- [Genesis 1–11](#) (7:43)
- [The Tree of Life](#) (4:52)

or these articles from Allen's blog:

- [The kingdom story in Genesis 1–11](#), (as a [podcast](#)).
- [Why is the first book in the Bible called Genesis?](#)
- [Who is God?](#) (Genesis 1:1-19)
- [Who are we?](#) (Genesis 1:20-31)
- [Was Eden God's palace?](#) (Genesis 2:1-14)
- [What does it mean to be human?](#) (Genesis 2:15-25)

Recommended commentaries:

- John Goldingay. *Genesis for Everyone*. (2 volumes) Old Testament for Everyone. (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press; SPCK, 2010).
- Tremper Longman, III. *Genesis*. Story of God Bible Commentary. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).
- John H. Walton. *Genesis*. NIV Application Commentary. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).
- Gordon J. Wenham. *Genesis*. (2 volumes) Word Biblical Commentary. (Dallas: Word Inc., 1987).

Tremper Longman says:

The proclamation of Genesis 1 is that God, and no other, created the cosmos. This remarkable revelation is muted by those who insist that the main purpose of the book is to provide an alternative depiction of the process of creation as that offered by modern science. However, Genesis 1 (and we will see Genesis 2 as well) is not about how God created creation. It is not to be mined for hints about how long creation took or the specific way in which God brought the world and humanity into being. That said, the creation accounts provide profound

perspective on the nature of God, ourselves, and the world. Genesis 1 (and 2) imparts to its readers a worldview which affects the way they believe, think, and act. We will here concentrate on the contribution of the cosmic creation of Genesis 1, and in the next on the human-centered account in chapter 2.¹⁷

John Walton is great for hearing Genesis from the perspective of the culture that produced it rather than the cosmology of modern science. For example, he says:

The most important result of this study for the interpretation of Genesis is the realization that the Genesis account pertains to functional origins rather than material origins and that temple ideology underlies the Genesis cosmology. These conclusions have significant ramifications for the public discussions and controversies of our time, including those concerning the age of the earth, the relationship between Genesis and science, the interpretation of the biblical text in relation to evolution and Intelligent Design, and the shape of public science education.¹⁸

Elsewhere, Walton says:

Genesis 1 is a simple but majestic account of God's bringing order to the cosmos. The literary balance between days 1–3 and days 4–6 results in highlighting day 7 as the climactic moment, when God takes up his residence and history begins under his exclusive sovereignty. Disdaining the myth-laden concepts of the ancient world and disregarding any attempt at scientific sophistication either ancient or modern, the text charts a course of theological affirmation that results in a picture of an ordered, purposeful cosmos with God at the helm, masterfully guiding its course. The cosmos functions just as it was designed to function—it was good. People are portrayed as the pinnacle of creation, endowed with dignity as those made in the image of the Creator. They are made in order to serve God, not as slaves but as partners, whom he delegates to do his work in the world. They enjoy his favor (blessing), and he provides what they need (food).¹⁹

Nahum Sarna (Jewish commentator) says:

Genesis is a book about origins: the origins of humankind, the origins of Israel, and the origins of the unique relationship between God and a particular people. ...

The God of Genesis is the wholly self-sufficient One, absolutely independent of nature, the supreme, unchallengeable Sovereign of the world, who is providentially involved in human affairs. He is, therefore, Lord of history. And the human being in Genesis—the pinnacle of Creation—is a creature of infinite preciousness who enjoys a unique relationship with God. Humankind is endowed with free will and, consequently, is also charged with moral responsibility and inescapable

¹⁷ Tremper Longman III, *Genesis*, Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 38.

¹⁸ John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 198–199.

¹⁹ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 65.

accountability. Moreover, the human race constitutes a single family whose ultimate destiny is determined by God Himself.

This universal opening serves as the background for the rest of the Book of Genesis and, indeed, for the remainder of the Bible. Following the perverse exercise of freedom of will that fractured the unity of the human family, God singled out from this divided humanity one people as His chosen instrument destined to fill a central role in the unfolding of His plan of history.²⁰

John Chrysostom said this back in the fourth century:

Notice how the divine nature shines out of the very manner of creation, how he executes his creation in a way contrary to human procedures, first stretching out the heavens and then laying out the earth beneath, first the roof and then the foundation. Who has ever seen the like? Who has ever heard of it? No matter what human beings produce, this could never have happened—whereas when God decides, everything yields to his will and becomes possible. So don't pry too closely with human reasoning into the works of God; instead, let the works lead you to marvel at their maker. Scripture says, remember, "What the eye cannot see in him has come into view from the creation of the world and are understood through the things he has made."²¹

The New Testament quotes these verses from Genesis 1–2:

- Genesis 1:3 2 Corinthians 4:6
- Genesis 1:27 Matthew 19:4 || Mark 10:6
- Genesis 2:2 Hebrews 4:4
- Genesis 2:7 1 Corinthians 15:45
- Genesis 2:24 Matthew 19:5 || Mark 10:8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31

²⁰ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), xii.

²¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, ed. Thomas P. Halton, trans. Robert C. Hill, vol. 74, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 35.

Week 2: Trust and treachery (Genesis 3–4)

We've heard how God established the relationship between heaven and earth, forming us in his image to partner with him in caring for his creatures (Genesis 1). We find our identity in relation to God, to his creatures in our care, and to each other (Genesis 2). Any remaining questions on the first two chapters of Genesis?

Genesis 3: The question of trust

If your Bible adds headings over the text, it probably labels Genesis 3 as “The Fall.” Theologians use that term to describe humans “falling” from their perfect state, becoming sinners subject to death. Christian theology of the fall is based on Paul's letters (Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-46).

In reading Genesis 3, Christians often substitute “Satan” for *serpent*. We reason that it must have been the devil, because snakes can't talk. We think humans fell because the devil tempted them. And in the Bible's final book, *that ancient serpent* is identified with *the devil or Satan* (Revelation 12:9; 20:2).

But that approach misses the way the story is told in Genesis where it's about the chain of command. Say you're reading a spy novel and there's a kidnapping in the first chapter. Later in the book you learn the kidnapper was working for a foreign power, aiming to destabilize the government, but you didn't know that in the opening chapter. Let's try reading Genesis 3 in its immediate context.

God had honoured Adam and Eve by crowning them as king and queen of creation. They represented the heavenly sovereign's majesty to all the creatures of the earth. Psalm 8 is a beautiful Jewish commentary on Genesis 1-2:

Psalm 8:5-9 (NIV)

⁵ You [LORD] ... crowned them with glory and honour. ⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: ⁷ all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, ⁸ the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. ⁹ LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

In the context of Genesis, the snake is one of the creatures they'd been told to *rule over*, to *subdue* (1:28). The snake approaches Queen Eve as if it's treating her as the appropriate authority in God's earthly realm. But we're warned that this creature is not being up-front about what it wants:

Genesis 3:1-5 (NIV)

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” ⁴ “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God [or gods], knowing good and evil.”

The crafty creature plants the seed of an idea that Queen Eve could act independently of what God decreed (verse 1). The creature assures Eve she would be more powerful if she bypassed God. It pretends to be seeking their honour: they could be a *like gods* (*ělō-hîm*) if they decide good and evil for themselves (verse 5).

What is the crafty creature really after? Autonomy. If the Queen breaks the line of authority the humans have received from God, then the authority God gave humans over the animals is also broken. The creational order God established will fall.

Every king and queen of the ancient world has faced this kind of request. Citizens present a request as if it will benefit the monarch, when it actually undermines the monarch's authority. Politicians and parents know this strategy too.

In verse 6, we find that King Adam is present as well. In Hebrew, the pronouns give this away: the creature has been addressing Queen Eve, but it's been using masculine plural pronouns—including King Adam as well.

Queen Eve and King Adam don't yet have the wisdom to recognize the ruse. They now see the tree as a way to *know good and evil* for themselves, to be gods in their own right instead of relying on God for the knowledge of good and evil. They take the bait:

Genesis 3:6-7 (NIV)

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.



They experience evil. They feel the shame. Their relationship with God, with each other, and with the creatures will never be the same (verse 7).

It's a cosmic trainwreck, derailing the lines of authority God established. The impact is earth-shattering. They've undermined the peaceful order God established. Earth is now a warzone. People and creatures fight each other because we've rejected God's authority to define good and evil, redefining "good" to mean "what's good for me."

How does God respond? Well, God doesn't react swiftly or violently as human rulers do when someone threatens their authority. God doesn't drop everything and rush to apprehend the rebels who betrayed the trust he placed in them. God waits.

Genesis 3:8-9 (NIV)

⁸ Then 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.

⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

After their day's work, at the time when he would normally come to walk with them, God approaches. They hide. He doesn't part the bushes to expose them. He invites them to tell him why they're reticent to appear before him.

Genesis 3:10-13 (NIV)

¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The coup has been unsuccessful. God is still in charge, deciding good and evil. The creatures (man, woman, and serpent) must each give an account of themselves to the heavenly sovereign. Instead of gaining autonomy, they're ducking for cover, evading responsibility.

This is a court scene, but the heavenly court is less about meting out punishment than getting them to accept responsibility. The court explains the impact of what they have done: the pain and conflict introduced to God's earthly realm through their treachery.

The heavenly sovereign addresses each traitor in turn:

Genesis 3:14-15 (NIV)

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 between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

The serpent's attempt to dethrone King Adam and Queen Eve has backfired. Instead of gaining status and autonomy, it will now be regarded as the lowest of the low: crawling on its belly, eating the dust of the earth.

The serpent has introduced conflict with humans, an enduring battle for the generations to come. As God says later, animals now live in dread of humans (Genesis 9:2-3), while animals harm humans too. The earth is no longer a peaceful place, though Scripture also hints that one day a seed of the woman will restore divine peace to the world (Isaiah 65:25; 11:6).

God explains to Queen Eve the consequences of her attempt to throw off God's authority:

Genesis 3:16 (NIV)

¹⁶ To the **woman** he said,

"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with painful labour you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

What do you make of “*he will rule over you*”? Originally God decreed that men and women were to reign over creation jointly (1:28). Is God now changing the rules, saying that men must now rule women?

That doesn't fit the context. God is not redefining what ought to be; he's describing what is. God explains the trouble Eve brought on herself with her attempt to become a god in her own right. She has introduced conflict and pain into her most precious relationships. In fighting God for power, she will find herself fighting Adam too. The world is now a conflict zone where control is through physical force, and that's a fight Eve cannot win.

God is not establishing patriarchy as her punishment or protection. Watch how Genesis plays out and you'll see how absurd that interpretation is. By the end of the book, Jacob has all the power in the family, with multiple wives seeking his attention. They give their servants to bear children for him when they feel diminished because they can't. This is not good. It's not God-ordained. This is patriarchal society in a world that has rejected relationships as God established them (2:24), a world where physical strength rules. This is the painful door Eve has opened by rejecting God's authority. Patriarchy and gender wars are the consequence of rejecting what God said.

The first part of verse 16 needs explanation too. It's commonly interpreted to say that God punished Eve by making her labour pains worse. Some of you know what that feels like. While I haven't felt that pain, I was present when two of my children were born. It's intense. But did God punish Eve by making it worse?

The Hebrew words do not support that interpretation:

- The word translated “childbearing” (*hē·rôn*) does not mean childbirth. It means conception or pregnancy.
- The word for “pain” (*iṣ·ṣā·bôn*) is not the word for birth pains. It means grief and suffering in general. In verse 17, Adam also feels *iṣṣābôn* as he struggles to grow food among thorns and thistles. (Adam was not facing labour pains.)

Tim Mackie from *The Bible Project* translates verse 16a like this:²²

I will greatly multiply your grief and your conception,
in grief, you will birth children.

What grief and anguish did Eve face as a mother? Having opened the door to conflict by fighting against God's authority, she will see that conflict playing out in her own family. Can you imagine the grief of watching one of your children murder the other?

God was explaining to Eve what she had unleashed by rejecting God's authority to decide what was good for herself. She would now face unspeakable grief as her children did the same.

In summary, by rejecting God's authority and grasping power for herself, Queen Eve has introduced pain and conflict to human relationships, pain she will feel as a mother and as a wife.

²² Tim Mackie, “Does God Punish Women with Pain in Childbirth?” (The Bible Project, 2023) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_zlJtOKpes accessed 4 January 2024.

God then addresses Adam as an accomplice in Eve's crime:

Genesis 3:17-19 (NIV)

¹⁷ To **Adam** he said,

“Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’
Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food
until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken;
for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Because Adam participated in the rebellion against God's authority, the creation entrusted to his care is now in rebellion against his authority. The ground that God blessed with fruitfulness (1:11-12) now rebels: it produces thorns and thistles. The world is now a grievous, toilsome place where we fight creation to survive.

Without God's breath, Adam is just dust. *Ādām* (the Hebrew word for human) comes from *ādāmāh* (the Hebrew word for ground):

Genesis 2:7 (NIV)

The LORD God formed a man (*ādām*) from the dust of the ground (*ādāmāh*)
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,
and the man (*ādām*) became a living being.

But if he has turned from God to become a god in his own right, *adam* is just *adamah*. Inevitably, he *returns to the dust of the ground* (verse 19).

The **Tree of Life** was God's sustaining life that kept them alive. They no longer have access to that privilege, having declared themselves gods in their own right, deciding good and evil for themselves:

Genesis 3:22-24 (NIV)

²² And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”

²³ So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴ After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

The humans have betrayed the trust God placed in them when he invited them to share life with him in the garden of his royal house in Eden. Exiled from God's garden, they must fend for themselves in the world that fights against their claims to be gods.

In 2:15, God trusted them with two jobs: to *till* the garden, and to *keep* it—gardeners and guards of God's presence. But they haven't kept God's commands at all. They can no longer be trusted as guards of his presence. God now gives that job to angelic beings instead. Cherubim (the plural of “cherub”) were symbolic heavenly guards who

“served as the traditional guardians of sacred spaces in ancient Near Eastern iconography.”²³ The cherubim now guard God's house ... from the humans!

In summary, Genesis 3 describes how the creatures commissioned by the heavenly throne to implement God's dominion over the creatures of the earth had instead joined the creatures of the earth in a rebellion against God and the authority entrusted to them. The betrayal introduced pain and conflict into every dimension of life on earth: relationships with the creatures, relationships between people, relationships with the earth and its productivity. Disconnected from God, they die. *Adam* falls back into *adamah*. They're exiled from God's garden, eking out a painful existence as “gods” of a world that rebels against them as they rebelled against God. Having betrayed God's trust, they're not trusted anywhere near God's house.

God has explained the tragic consequences of their rebellion, but God has not merely handed them over to death. They're banished and dying, but God has not executed the traitors as we might expect. Queen Eve will have offspring to fight the serpent (verse 15). She and Adam will die, but she will be remembered as *the mother of all living*. In a world where there's death and shame, God provides for them:

Genesis 3:20–21 (NIV)

²⁰ Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. ²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

God is still deeply connected with Eve's family (4:1-2, 25). Just as Adam was formed *in God's likeness*, he has a son *in his own likeness* (5:1-3). They have descendants who *walk with God* (5:24) and yearn for the day the LORD will give them relief from *the labour and painful toil of our hands* (5:29).

From Jacob's family, God will form a nation that lives around God's house, the temple decorated with garden imagery where cherubim guard God's throne (the ark). They will receive a land as the garden where God lives among them. Heaven's reign will come to them in David, the one God anoints to restore his reign on earth.

Then, tragically, because of their rebellion against God's authority, God's nation will also be exiled from his presence, no longer under his kingship, exiled from the land. They will wait for centuries for God's anointed to come and restore the kingdom of God to the earth.

The snake was wrong. Rejecting God's authority did not make us gods in our own right. Disconnecting from God's life turned us into *mortals*. When we disconnected from God, we didn't become free; we found ourselves under the power of death. This contrast—between God and mortal rulers—is a theme in the Old Testament (e.g. Psalms 9:19-20; 10:18; 56:4; 82:7; 90:3; 103:15; 118:6; 133:3).

Death is the ultimate enemy of our humanity. Death is the final enemy that must be removed to fully restore the LORD God's reign to the earth. We need another human (another *ādām*) to undo the treachery of the first king and queen appointed over

²³ Stacy Knuth and Douglas Mangum, “Cherubim,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

creation, the ruler to be raised up from the ground, defeating death, restoring God's reign, the gift of life.

That's the promise of the Old Testament, as Paul summarizes it:

Romans 1:2-4 (NIV)

... the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David,⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Questions (Genesis 3)

What are your thoughts on Genesis 3?

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Genesis 4: The question of justice

We're no longer in God's royal garden, but we're still under God's governance. Despite the unsuccessful coup, God's providence remains:

Genesis 4:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.

God is still caring for his earthly project. Although Adam and Eve are now dying, God gave them a future in their children (as promised in 3:15). The focus moves to the next generation.

Cain, Abel, and the fight against sin

Genesis 4:3-5 (NIV)

³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. ⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering,⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Giving gifts to God recognizes his providence. Israel offered food offerings to God every morning and every evening, as did most Ancient Near Eastern cultures. You still see food offerings to the gods in some countries today.

We're not told why God found Abel's offering acceptable but not Cain's. Some Christians assume God wanted a blood offering to cover their sins, but that's wrong on so many levels: it's a wrong view of God, a projection of their sinfulness into the text, a misunderstanding of the purpose of offerings, and a failure to understand that grain offerings were an acceptable form of worship (see Leviticus 2).

There's no point speculating on why God *looked with favour on Abel and his offering* but *did not look with favour* on Cain (verse 4). What we miss is how shocking this was in their culture. Who was the older son?

The firstborn was trusted to lead the family. That's why Cain was so upset: God's favour rested on Abel. It wasn't just about the offering: God *looked with favour on Abel*. Cain was *very angry* (verse 5) because God had bypassed him, favouring his younger brother instead.

This theme is central to the storyline of Genesis. Ishmael was born first, yet God chose Isaac (Genesis 21:12). Esau was born first, yet God chose Jacob (Genesis 27–28). Joseph was younger than his brothers, yet Joseph received the double-blessing to care for the family (Genesis 47).

Cain is angry that God's favour rests on Abel, so Cain plots to murder his rival. That way, in Cain's twisted mind, God has no choice but to accept him.

The heavenly sovereign is aware of the plot:

Genesis 4:6-7 (NIV)

⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."



This is the first mention of *sin* in the Bible. And what God says here does not match the way Christian theology usually speaks about sin.

"Original sin" is the doctrine that Adam's original sin (in Genesis 3) means we're all born as sinners, because our parents were born sinners—all the way back to Adam:

- **Augustine**—the most important theologian of the first four centuries—taught that we are all born sinful, and that baptism removes original sin. Any child who dies unbaptized is therefore doomed (since we're sinful at birth).
- **John Calvin**—the most important theologian of the Reformation—taught that humans are born in sin. He described our human nature is "totally depraved" so we're incapable of even asking for salvation unless God chooses to save us.

Does that fit with what God says to Cain? Does God say, "Your father was a sinner, so you were born totally depraved, incapable of making the choice to do right"? The warning God gives (in verse 7) implies that Cain does have a choice.

God's understanding of *sin* is different from ours. We think of sin as our acts of disobedience, the things we've done that we feel ashamed of. God wasn't talking about what Cain had done. God described *sin* as something external—an outside force wanting control over Cain.

Sin is a power wanting control of God's creation. Throughout the Old Testament, sin wanted control of God's nation. In the New Testament, *Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin* (Romans 3:9). People are *ruled by sin*, ... *slaves to sin* (6:6). We are not to *let sin reign* over us, not to *offer any part of yourself to sin* (6:13). Because Christ has overturned the power of sin, *sin shall no longer be your master* (6:14). Through what Christ has done, *you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God* (6:22).

Romans has much more to say about how Christ overturned the powers of sin and death. Part of that discussion contrasts how the original human used the authority God gave him with how the Messiah used his authority to reverse what Adam did (Romans 5). That chapter is often used to construct the doctrine of original sin. We'll discuss this further if we do Romans next term.

For now, just note that the first use of *sin* in the Bible is God defining sin as a **power seeking control**. At issue is **who** controls us. That's the issue salvation addresses. It's very different to say that every person is born into a world that is under foreign control than to say that every infant is born guilty, a wicked person deserving condemnation.

Perhaps Christian theologians have been quick to condemn because that puts salvation in our hands. By telling parents that their children were condemned unless the church baptized them, Augustine was putting salvation in the hands of the church. Calvin was reacting to the power claims of the Catholic Church when he insisted that only God saves (election) and wicked humans have nothing to do with it (total depravity). Yet, in trying to protect God's sovereignty, Calvin's condemnation of humanity was more vitriolic than Augustine's.

A more balanced view of God's sovereignty would recognize that both judgment and salvation belong to God. Instead of condemning people, we would echo God's gospel (good news) proclamation that his Christ is our Lord because God freed the earth from the reign of evil by raising him from the dead. What do you think?

How God deals with evil

Genesis 4:8 (NIV)

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Death is the ultimate destruction of our life. Death entered the world by disconnecting us from our Life-source. Cain sees it as a way to be rid of his rival. When we reject God's perspective of good and evil to do what's right in our own eyes, we don't care what's good for the other.

So who will make Cain pay for the murder? In these early chapters of Genesis, there's no human government deciding whether people have done evil. God delegates that authority only after the flood (Genesis 9:4-6). God reigns directly, so God investigates Cain's crime, just as God investigated the three rebels in the garden (3:9-19).

Genesis 4:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

¹⁰ The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”

As his parents and the serpent had done, Cain evades responsibility. His defence is that God never made him his brother’s *keeper* (*șă-măr*). God had made them *keepers* of the garden (2:15), but that responsibility had been taken from them (3:24). Abel “kept” flocks (4:2) because God gave humans responsibility for the animals (1:26-28). But God had never given people responsibility over each other’s lives.

Cain’s claim that he had no responsibility for Abel’s life doesn’t wash. Cain had in fact taken Abel’s life into his own hands! The blood stain in the dirt was evidence of Abel’s life returning to the ground from which humanity was taken (3:19). Abel’s blood demands the heavenly sovereign’s response (compare Hebrews 12:24).

Genesis 4:11-14 (NIV)

¹¹ “Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.

¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

¹³ Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear.

¹⁴ Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

The blood-stained soil will be unresponsive to Cain. God originally decreed fruitfulness for the earth (1:11), but creation in rebellion bears thorns and thistles (3:17-19), and the blood-stained soil rejects the murderer.

His family will reject Cain too. Our sense of justice demands criminals pay for their crimes. We expect the punishment to match the crime, that what they have done be done to them. But God does not execute Cain. God simply explains the consequences: that Cain can no longer be part of his family. He’s a fugitive now, *a restless wanderer*.

Cain appeals this absurdly light sentence. Since God has not given him justice, he fears his family will. He shows no remorse, only self-interest. Does the sentence God gave to Cain satisfy your sense of justice?

Later, God does authorize the death penalty for murders (Genesis 9:6). The Sinai Law is based on retribution: “life for life” (Exodus 21:23; Leviticus 24:18; Deuteronomy 19:21). But God’s response here is truly astounding. God protects the criminal:

Genesis 4:15-16 (NIV)

¹⁵ But the LORD said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. ¹⁶ So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

What do you make of that? In the world before human governments, when the heavenly sovereign dealt with crimes and delivered justice, God did not take a life for a life. God protected the murderer, marking him as under royal protection.

Jesus would later describe how some provisions of the Sinai Law represented God's response to the *hardness of human hearts* rather than God's ideal, for *it was not this way in the beginning* (Matthew 19:8). The way God reigned over the world in the beginning may be closer to the kingdom of God ideals than the Sinai covenant laws.

The heavenly sovereign's judgement combines God's love with Cain's trauma:

- Cain is not outside God's sovereignty: God extends protection to Cain (verse 15).
- Cain is outside God's presence: he's a restless wanderer, isolated from those who know God's presence (verse 16).

Tragically, **Cain's sin divides the world**. The LORD still reigns over the whole earth, but Cain's mob are separated from those who live in the LORD's presence. They construct another culture, based on human achievement:

Genesis 4:17-22 (NIV)

¹⁷ Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. ¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

¹⁹ Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah.

²⁰ Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. ²¹ His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. ²² Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

What's it like in this community that lives away from God's presence?

- God gives them children so they can survive, but we don't hear them acknowledging God's provision (verse 17, contrast verses 1 and 25).
- Their cities are dedicated to human honour rather than God's (verse 17).
- Men take more than one woman (verse 19), ignoring what God intended (2:24).
- They're creative with arts and crafts (verses 21-22), but the metallurgy mentioned produces the weapons that define their era (bronze age, iron age).

These early chapters of Genesis reflect the story to come. Even before the flood, humanity was split into two communities: one away from presence of the LORD (4:16); the another in God's likeness (5:3), walking with God (5:24) looking for the comfort he will bring (5:29). Unfortunately, this distinction breaks down as the whole earth is corrupted by violence (6:11), but God will call Abraham to re-establish a nation in God's presence so the nations can see what they're missing (12:1-3).

In each Genesis narrative, a key character responds to the story we've just heard. First it was Adam, responding to God's provision of a partner for him (2:23). Now in

the seventh generation of Cain's city, Lamech describes life in the community that relies on human power:

Genesis 4:13-24 (NIV)

²³ Lamech said to his wives,

“Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words.

I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me.

²⁴ If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.”

Lamech looks and sounds like a Hollywood trailer for his culture. With a girl on each arm, he brags of his superhero strength, his ability to enforce justice, his power to take revenge.

Tragically, this is no Marvel comic. This is the world where God did not execute the murderer, so people who live apart from the LORD's presence take matters into their own hands. Just like Cain, the self is valued while the other is not. “A life for a life” is not enough; Lamech wants seventy-seven lives for a life.

The cycle of revenge makes the world a deadly place. What kind of world is God running? What does the world become when the good guy (Abel) dies while the killer (Cain) lives on to produce offspring?

Lamech's wisdom seems right to so many: all it takes for evil to take over God's world is for good people to do nothing. Fighting back is the only way to survive. If it's “kill or be killed,” Lamech's wisdom wins. The killers win the world.

What do you think?

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As we're sinking in despair, the narrator tells us what God does. (Hint: it's not killing.)

Genesis 4:25-26 (NIV)

²⁵ Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.” ²⁶ Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.

God was not heartlessly saying, “Don't fret over your dead child; here, have another one.” God was saving the family by giving them another child so they didn't die out and leave the world to the killers. Where people like Cain and Lamech save themselves by giving death, God saves by giving life.

Giving life is God's enduring solution: *Enosh* in another generation after *Seth*. Like God said, the offspring of the woman defeats the serpent (Genesis 3:15). The voice of a child is the sound that silences the avenger (Psalm 8:2). The birth of a child is God's strategy to save the world (Isaiah 9:6).

That's how the family that lives in God's presence lives on in the world where people fight and kill. But since God denied them the right to kill the killer (Cain), how do they get justice if they don't follow Lamech's wisdom?

They make their appeals directly to the heavenly sovereign instead of taking matters in their own hands. That's the final sentence of Chapter 4:

This was the time when people began to call on the name of the LORD.

They trust in the justice of the heavenly court as they make their appeals. In a violent world, that's the crucial contrast between the two communities.

Questions (Genesis 4)

How do God's actions in Genesis 4 fit with your expectations of justice?
Is God responsible for the crimes that occur on his watch? Should God have given Cain the death penalty? Should God have prevented the murder?
What do you expect from God in a world where violence and death are part of life?

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What do you make of the contrast between Lamech's response to violence and the community that remained in the LORD's presence and called on him for justice?

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What else strikes you from Genesis 4?

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So what?

How do these two chapters shape your understanding of God's authority and human nature and responsibility? We're born into a world that's devastated by the power of sin, but does that mean we're born condemned? Is salvation mostly about making a personal decision to receive forgiveness for my personal sins, or is salvation the restoration of God's authority over the world that will ultimately be achieved in Christ?

As God said to Cain, each person's choice matters, so do we have choices? Is it about individuals finding God for themselves, or about recognizing God as present in the community that calls on the name of the LORD?

What do these chapters teach about suffering? Do I suffer because I deserve it (my own sin)? Or do we suffer because we live in a world where the power of sin impacts us all? Is there hope in our suffering? Or will it always be the way it looks on the news each night?

Listening to Lamech's boast, do you recognize the ways that human power makes our sufferings worse? Do you see this in movies? In real life?

What about the theme of God as the life-giver? How does this hope help with our present sufferings as we wait on the Lord, trusting him to sort it all out in the end?

In preparation for next time, please read **Genesis 5–6**.

Going further

Some posts relating to Genesis 3 and 4:

- [Who's in charge now?](#) (Genesis 3:1-14)
- [What changed with the rebellion?](#) (Genesis 3:15-24)
- [What kind of world is God running?](#) (Genesis 4:1-15)
- [How far does the kingdom of God extend?](#) (Genesis 4:16-26)
- [The faith of Abel](#) (Hebrews 11:4)
- [Original good](#) (Genesis 1–4)

Week 3: The identity of God's family (Genesis 5–6)

What we've heard so far defines our identity as humans, who we are in relation to God.

In the beginning, God established heaven and earth in relationship. His proclamations transformed what was formless and empty into a living, fruitful world. The lights in the sky serve as signs that we're under heaven's reign. On the ground, humans represent the heavenly sovereign's care for the creatures that live in the boundaries God set for them. With his good world at peace, God rested (Genesis 1).

God invited us into his garden, serving him with the abundant life he provided. Only the knowledge of good and evil was reserved for the sovereign himself. God gave us meaningful relationships with him, with the creatures, and with each other (Genesis 2).

But that wasn't enough. Grasping at God's power for ourselves, we brought pain and conflict into God's good world. Life is a struggle we lose. Instead of becoming gods we became mortals (Genesis 3).

Ignoring the warnings of our true sovereign in heaven, people opened the door for the powers of sin and death to rule over us, cutting us off from each other and from the LORD. We create societies that rely on violence for justice. Everyone suffers. Yet God gives life to those who call on his name (Genesis 4).

Any thoughts or comments on the first four chapters before we proceed?

Genesis 5: The family that trusts God

Genesis 5:1-2 (NIV)

¹ This is the written account of Adam's family line.

When God created **mankind**, he made them in the likeness of God.

² He created them male and female and blessed them.

And he named them "**Mankind**" when they were created.

So begins a new branch of the Genesis story. In Hebrew, verse 1 reads:

"This [is the] family record [*tô·lē·dôt*] of humanity [*ādām*]."

Tô·lē·dôt means generations, descendants, family line. In Genesis, each new family-story is introduced with this word. Previously we heard *the family-story* [*tôlēdôt*] of *the heavens and the earth* (2:4). Next will be *the family-story* [*tôlēdôt*] of *Noah* (6:9).

Ādām means humanity, and the first human was named Human (*Adam*). The same word is translated as "mankind" in the next sentence and again in verse 2.

The human family-story [*tôlēdôt ādām*] is defined by God's decree. Even after our attempt to become God (Genesis 3) and establish societies controlled by violence (Genesis 4), the good news is that God reigns and what he decreed still defines us (echoing 1:26-27). Recognizing God's **image** in humans is foundational for ethics in both the Old Testament (Genesis 9:6) and the New (James 3:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:8).²⁴

²⁴ For example, see Ben Witherington III. *The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament* (2 volumes). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009, 2010.

The human made in God's *likeness* passes on that *likeness* to their descendants:

Genesis 5:3-5 (NIV)

³ When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. ⁴ After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters.

⁵ Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died.

It took a long time, but the human died as surely as God had said (2:17; 3:19). This is going to be a long story, but one day the authority God gave humans in the beginning will be restored to the earth through *the Son of Man* (the descendant of humanity).²⁵ By installing him as head of the human family, God restores earth to heaven's reign:

He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves ... The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [family-head] over all creation (Colossians 1:13, 15).

That's where the story is headed, but there are many steps along the way. The joy of Genesis 5 is God's providence: the birth of an heir in each generation. The tragedy of Genesis 5 is the refrain, "and then he died" (verses 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31). The exception in Genesis 5 is someone who did not die *because God took him*:

Genesis 5:21-24 (NIV)

²¹ When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah.

²² After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. ²³ Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. ²⁴ Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

Enoch has evoked much speculation. When the Jews came under Persian rule (539 BC), they wondered how God would free them to be his people again. They imagined Enoch returning from his journey into the heavens, revealing that God had judgement all prepared to pour out on the nations and the ungodly. In the centuries that followed, they kept developing this story, imagining a "son of man" who would receive the authority God promised in the beginning. In the end, the story identifies Enoch as this son of man (1 Enoch 71.14).

It's not clear if the "son of man" parts of Enoch were written before or after Jesus' time. What is clear is that the notion of a human descendant (*son of man*) restoring the reign of heaven to earth was already there in Daniel 7.

The other message of hope in Genesis 5 is found in Noah's name:

Genesis 5:28-29 (NIV)

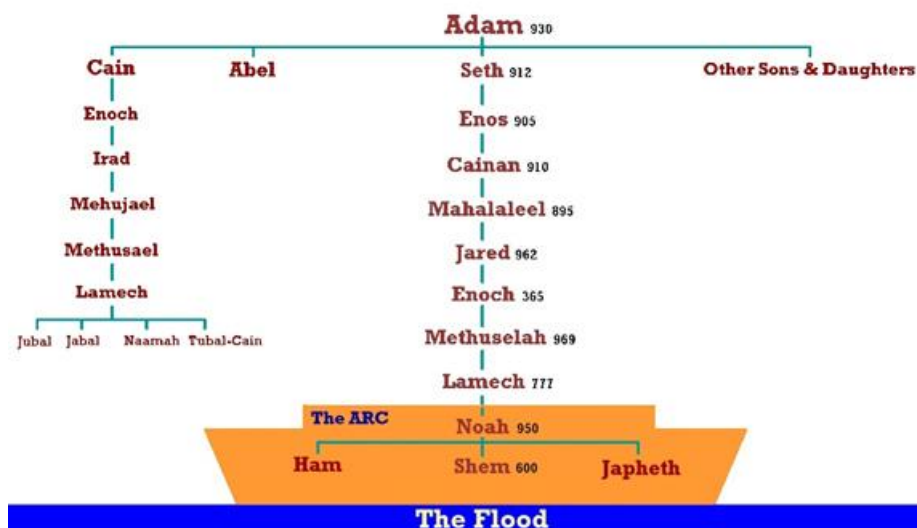
²⁸ When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. ²⁹ He named him **Noah** and said, "He will comfort us in the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed."

The name *Nō^ʾh* sounds like the Hebrew word *nmh*—to feel sorry or to be comforted. Noah's name bears the hope that God will comfort us, saving us from our sorry existence.

²⁵ See <https://allenbrowne.blog/2023/10/23/son-of-man-the-backstory-of-jesus-authority/> and <https://allenbrowne.blog/2017/07/17/introducing-the-son-of-man/>

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ... See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm” (Isaiah 40:1, 10).

The Geneology of Adam



Is Genesis 5 saying that some individuals lived have for almost 1000 years? That doesn't match anything in our world today or in ancient history. Is what it sounds like to us what it meant to them? Or did it mean something to them that isn't obvious to us? Honestly, I don't know. At this point, I'm uncertain what to make of it.

Some have combined the lists from Genesis 5 and 11, assumed each name is an individual and that list covers all generations, performed math on the numbers, and concluded that the universe was created less than 2000 years before Abraham. But several things warn against copying these numbers into spreadsheets like this:

Genesis 5	Age at birth of son	Genesis 11	Age at birth of son	Total
Adam	130	Shem	100	
Seth	105	Arphaxad	35	
Enosh	90	Shelah	30	
Kenan	70	Eber	34	
Mahalalel	65	Peleg	30	
Jared	162	Reu	32	
Enoch	65	Serug	30	
Methuselah	187	Nahor	29	
Lamech	182	Terah	70	
Noah	500	Abraham		
Total:	1556		390	1946

Firstly, the assumption that these are complete genealogical lists doesn't hold water. Luke 3:36 lists another generation between Arphaxad and Shelah, a guy named Cainan.

Secondly, nothing in the history of the world supports the idea of individuals living for centuries. Do the numbers in the list represent something that would have been obvious in their culture but isn't obvious to us? Are there any similar lists from the ancient world that could help us understand what it meant to them?

The nearest analogy from the Ancient Near East is the **Sumerian King List**. The Sumerians (the region Abraham came from) compiled a list of their kings around the time of Abraham or shortly before (circa 2000 BC).

According to the mathematical system of the Sumerians (sexagesimal), each king reigned for thousands of years. But if the numbers are read as decimal (as the Hebrews did), the numbers of the Sumerian King List are intriguingly similar to Genesis 5. Evangelical scholar John Walton says:

If the notation is read with decimal values rather than sexagesimal values, the numbers are in the same range as the biblical numbers, and the totals of the lists are nearly identical.²⁶

Now, Genesis 5 is not a list of kings. In Genesis, God does not authorize human government until after the flood (Genesis 9). In the early chapters, God reigned directly. Yet, this is a list of **heirs**—a patriarchal list (always sons, never daughters) identifying the head of the family through the generations. While Cain went out from the LORD's presence to his own city (4:16-17), these generational leaders represent the authority God gave to Adam (1:26-28), the authority Adam passed on to them (5:1-2). In that sense, a kingship list of who inherited God's world is not a bad analogy.

That might help us to understand why this list is in the Bible. It's about those who inherit the promises and represent the heavenly ruler's reign in their generations. That helps us frame what the list would have meant in their world. And there's another striking similarity: the very next story in the Sumerian King List after the list of kings is the account of the flood.

But we still haven't resolved the question about what the numbers in this list represent. We don't know enough to be sure what these numbers meant to them.

Your thoughts on Genesis 5?

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²⁶ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 281.

Genesis 6: Losing our identity

Why was there a flood in Noah's day? Genesis 6 explains the reason, before we hear the details of the flood in next week's chapters (Genesis 7–8).

What do you make of this?

Genesis 6:1-2 (NIV)

¹ When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.

The sons of God

What does *sons of God* mean? In Job 1:2 and 2:1, the angelic beings who form God's heavenly court are called *sons of God*. Is this text saying that angels found the pretty girls irresistible, had sex with them, and caused the women to give birth to demons?

That strikes me as a very male (chauvinistic) interpretation. The underlying assumption is that angels are biologically male, lusting after women, capable of impregnating them and producing hybrid offspring. That's a very odd but old interpretation—one that can be traced back to the Persian period.²⁷

But *sons of God* also refers to God's people. In Exodus 4:22 and Hosea 11:1, Israel is God's *son*. Deuteronomy 32 spells out both sides of that relationship: God is their *Father* (verse 6), and so his people are called *the sons of God* (verse 8 ESV).

So who are *the sons of God* in Genesis 6:2? Is it the angels in God's heavenly court? Or is it the family who represent on earth their Father in the heavens?

Context decides. What fits the story so far? Humans or angels?

The only reference to angels was back in 3:24 when God sent *cherubim* to guard the Garden from the humans. There's nothing about angels in Genesis 4. There's nothing in Genesis 5. There's no reason to turn the discussion into angels in Genesis 6.

What we have in the previous two chapters is two communities of humanity:

- a) One group *went out from the presence of the LORD*. They built a city to honour humanity and human creativity. They celebrated a leader with multiple women and a physique to frighten people into submission (4:16-24).
- b) The other group responded to the pain of the violent world by *calling on the name of the LORD* (4:25-26). They saw God's image in Adam (5:1-2), walked with God (5:24), and looked for the promise of God comforting his people and saving them from the curse (5:29).

This is, of course, a very Jewish way to view the world. The people of God suffer at the hands of the "city" that relies on human power instead of calling on the LORD. The whole context is these two genealogies (4:17-22, and 5:1-32). So, which group could be called *the sons of God*? (Compare Luke 3:37.)

²⁷ For arguments in favour of this view, see Michael S. Heiser. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

The trouble comes when the distinction between these two groups breaks down. They intermarry. The godly sons take partners from the community of mankind on the basis of how *good* they look, without regard for what is good in God's eyes.

Here's a very literal rendition of the Hebrew words in verses 1 and 2:

Genesis 6:1-2 (my translation)

¹ And it came to be that humankind began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born to them ² and the sons of God **saw** that the daughters of humankind were **good** and they **took** them for wives from all that they chose.

Are those phrases familiar? Remember what happened when Eve and Adam turned from how God defined *good and evil*, when they *took* what looked *good* to them?

Genesis 3:6 (my translation)

The woman **saw** that the tree was **good** for food and a delight to the eye and the tree was desirable to make wise, she **took** from its fruit and ate and gave also to her husband with her.

That didn't end well. Pain and conflict came into God's world. Violence and death came to their family. They became not gods but mortals (3:14-24).

It's like that again as *the sons of God* reject his values. God will not keep wasting his breath/Spirit on non-responsive people. He sets a deadline:

Genesis 6:3 (NIV)

³ Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years."

If the disobedient sons of God were angels, God got it wrong. God thinks the problem was with the humans. What do you think?

The next verse is crucial to the Enochian interpretation that *the sons of God* were fallen angels who produced demon-children:

Genesis 6:4 (NIV)

⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

Who were the *nēpîlîm*? That's an untranslated Hebrew word. It means something like big muscly guys, people who were hard to fight (Numbers 13:33). The Septuagint (Greek translation) calls them giants. The parallel expression at the end of this verse explains who they were: *the heroes of old, men of renown*.

Big burly blokes like Goliath were feared in the ancient world where warfare relied on physical force. The boastful Lamech (4:23) fits the profile of a *nephilim ... a hero of old, a man of renown*.

The point of Chapter 6 is that the world had gone mad because God's people had lost their values. Their stories focused not on God but on human power. They were preoccupied with the human physique: how good a girl looked (verse 2), how well a guy fought (verse 4). All they thought about was imposing their own power on everyone else (verse 5). Their violence corrupted God's world (verse 11).

The Enoch literature tells a different story. It treats the *nephilim* as demons, the offspring of fallen angels and human women. According to 1 Enoch, these hybrid beings were so abominable that God sent the flood to rid the earth of them. But that didn't work: being half-spirit they survived the flood. So now these demons roam the world craving for bodies to possess because they're half-human.

Now, the point of this interpretation is to blame demons for the state of the world.

According to 1 Enoch, the demons taught war to men and seduction to women.

The reason the world is in a mess is not human sin but the invasion of evil spirits.

That's the exact opposite of what Genesis 6 says. God does not say, "My Spirit will not tolerate these hybrid demons causing all the wickedness." God is very clear who is responsible:

Overview of 1 Enoch

A collection of writings by different authors over a wide span of time.

Book I	Chapters 1-36	2nd century BC
Book II	Chapters 37-71	40BC-AD 68
Book III	Chapters 72-82	3rd century BC
Book IV	Chapters 83-90	175-171BC
Book V	Chapters 91-108	Early 2nd century BC

Source: https://images.slideplayer.com/34/10185839/slides/slide_7.jpg

Genesis 6:5-7 (NIV)

⁵ The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

⁷ So the LORD said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them."

In summary, 1 Enoch is a reinterpretation of Genesis 6. Influenced by Persian dualism (the cosmic fight between good and evil), and living century after century under foreign rule, the Jewish people became acutely aware of the spiritual power of evil. They wrote creative stories where evil spirits were responsible for their plight, but this is not what Genesis 6 said in the beginning. What do you think?

The judgement

Genesis 6:8-10 (NIV)

⁸ But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD.

⁹ This is the account [*tô-lê-dôṭ*] of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. ¹⁰ Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

The word *tô-lê-dôṭ* in verse 9 indicates we're now moving to Noah's family story. We started with the family story of *the heavens and the earth* (2:4), and then the family story of *Adam* (5:1). Noah's story runs from here to Chapter 9, and then Chapter 10 is the account of *Noah's sons*.

Noah's story raises all sorts of issues for Christian theology. How can Noah be a *righteous man*? He can't be *blameless* (i.e. without fault), because the Bible says *no one is righteous* (Psalm 143:2) and *all our righteousness is as filthy rags* (Isaiah 64:6).

More problematically, what kind of God kills all those people? Why do we treat it as a children's story? It should be R-rated.

When the Assad government fell in Syria, evidence of mass graves emerged.²⁸

Tens of thousands of people had gone missing. Their bodies are now turning up. But what Bashar al-Assad did to his enemies is nothing compared to what God did in Noah's time. Why the flood? And what does this say about God?

God is repulsed by the violence:

Genesis 6:11 (NIV)

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.

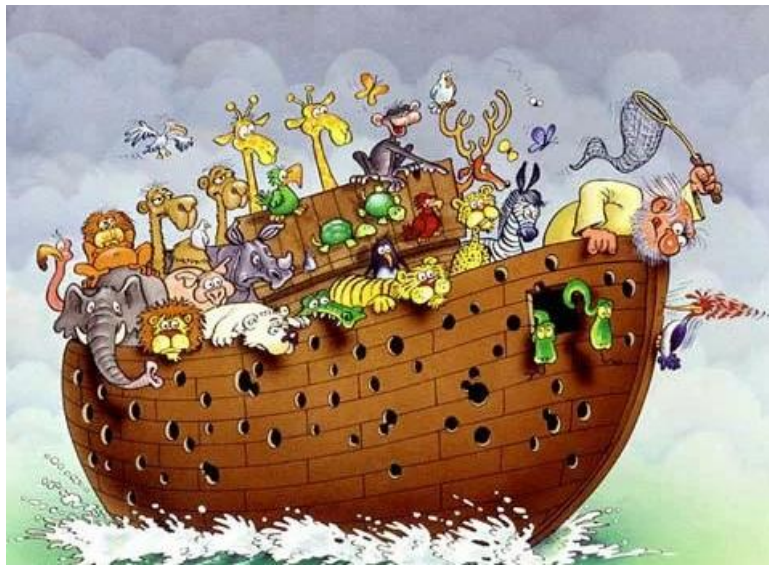
Violence comes from people forcing their will on others. It comes from rejecting God's authority to define *good and evil* (Genesis 3). When I define *good* to mean "what's good for me," I can take whatever I like from you—even your life (Genesis 4). When the godly community rejects God's values it's indistinguishable from the rest of humanity (6:1), worshipping *warriors, human legends* (6:4). Human wickedness then spreads over the earth because all we think about all the time is *evil*—how to force our will on others (6:5).

And when there's no community left to represent God's authority on earth (because we're enforcing our own), there is **no hope** for the world. Even God loses hope. God is deeply grieved, regretting his decision to entrust his world to humans (6:6-7).

The world God created had been corrupted (*šā·ḥāṭ*). To *šā·ḥāṭ* something is to ruin or destroy it. Violence has ruined/destroyed God's world.

In the beginning God spoke order to a world that was *formless and void* (1:2). He did this by separating things such as light and darkness (1:4, 14, 18). God separated the waters above from the waters below (1:6-7). *God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear."* And it was so (1:9).

But it's no longer so. By rejecting God's decree, humans introduced conflict and death into what had been good (Genesis 3). That led to a world ruled by violence (Genesis 4). In their suffering, the godly sons *called on the name of the Lord* (4:26) as they waited for God to comfort them in their misery (5:29). But when they lost their values (6:2), all hope was gone. God set a deadline (6:3), but evil had taken over. The whole world was *šā·ḥāṭ*. The story cannot continue.



²⁸ Lina Sinjab, "Syria mass graves: Daunting task of searching for and naming the dead" (BBC News, 18 December 2024). <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj90wz8weymo> accessed 28 December 2024.

The Hebrew text portrays the heavenly sovereign as willing to deal with the failure of his earthly realm. God announces he will *šā·ḥāṭ*, (ruin, wreck, destroy) the world that is already *šā·ḥāṭ* (ruined, wrecked, destroyed) because of the violence of his servants:

Genesis 6:11-13, 17 (NIV)

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt (*šā·ḥāṭ*) in God's sight and was full of violence.

¹² God saw how **corrupt** (*šā·ḥāṭ*) the earth had become, for all the people on earth had **corrupted** (*šā·ḥāṭ*) their ways. ¹³ So God said to Noah,

"I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to **destroy** (*šā·ḥāṭ*) both them and the earth. ... ¹⁷ I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to **destroy** (*šā·ḥāṭ*) all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish."

What are your thoughts about God *šā·ḥāṭ*-ing what is already *šā·ḥāṭ*? Does God have responsibility for what he has made? Should he wash away the wreckage of what is already wrecked? Is God doing right by putting a failed creation out of its misery?

However else you understand this event, the flood is not a paradigm for how God manages the world. It was a unique situation, requiring a unique response. God assures us repeatedly that this is something he will never do again (8:21-22; 9:11, 15).

God does judge evil in other ways, and God also saves. As the Old Testament prophets keep reminding us, God's management of the world involves both judgement and salvation.

The rescue

In a world beyond rescue, God finds a way to rescue the world:

Genesis 6:14-22 (NIV)

¹⁴ So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ¹⁵ This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high.

¹⁶ Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. ¹⁷ I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy (*šā·ḥāṭ*) all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. ¹⁸ But I will establish my

covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you.

²⁰ Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive.

²¹ You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."

²² Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

God's problem is that he has chosen to partner with humanity. All it takes to save the world is **one person in partnership with God**. That's the point of verse 22.

The kingdom of God established in Genesis 1 involves God as the sovereign over all creation, with humans exercising his authority over the animals. If that partnership is to continue then God must save the humans, and the humans under his authority must save the animals.

That's why Noah must build such a large box (*ark*)—around 135 metres x 23 metres x 14 metres. With no way to power or steer it, it's more of a preservation box than a ship.

The details of the ark prepare us for the divine rescue mission God brings to the world through Israel. The ark and the Tabernacle are the only buildings the Torah describes. The ark has the same dimensions as the Tabernacle, but is three times the size. The ark had three stories, just like the temple (1 Kings 6:6). Claus Westermann says:

The parallel between the ark and the tabernacle has a profound meaning. The people of Israel which alone has in its midst the place where God reveals his glory is part of the human race which exists now because it has been preserved by this same God.²⁹

In the end, **the corrupted creation is saved through one person who follows God's decrees**. One obedient son of God was all it took to establish a new creation after the corrupted world was dealt with.

So what?

How do you understand the character of the God who destroyed the destroyed world? Meditate on how the Bible narrative describes the way God handles his responsibly to judge and save.

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What does Genesis 5–6 teach about the mission of the church? What's our role in a world corrupted by violence? How do we ensure we're not seduced by the values of a world that worships superheroes? How do we represent God instead?

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Read Genesis 7–8 in preparation for next week.

Going further

Blog posts:

- [Who will represent the sovereign?](#) (Genesis 5)
- [Who corrupted God's world?](#) (Genesis 6:1-6)
- [Is there any justice?](#) (Genesis 6:5-22)
- [The faith of Enoch](#) (Hebrews 11:5-6)

²⁹ Claus Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 421.

Week 4: The partnership that saves (Genesis 7–8)

In the movie called *Noah* (2014), Russel Crowe played the title character. It was very different to the Biblical story since the director/co-writer (Darren Aronofsky) was exploring a different question: would it have been better if humans had died out, leaving the world to the animals?

That's not the question Genesis asks. The question in Genesis is whether the world can survive if no one is partnering with God. After Cain left the LORD's presence (4:16) and built a city that relied on violence for justice (4:23), the rest of Adam's family (Genesis 5) redefined "good" as what was good in their own eyes (6:2), lauding the big fighters, the heroes of old (6:4). There was no one left in partnership with God: *every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time* (6:5).

Consequently, *the earth was corrupt in God's sight and full of violence ... for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways* (6:11-12). If no one is partnering with God, there's no future for the earth or any of its creatures.

God found one person who would partner with him. Noah listened to God's instructions to build a box (ark) for the preservation of his family and the creatures of the earth, *to keep them alive with you* (6:19). *Noah did everything just as God commanded him* (6:22). One person in partnership with God—that's all it takes to save the world.

Before we go into the flood story in Genesis 7–8, do you have questions or thoughts on previous chapters?

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Genesis 7: Ruined

How long did the flood last? Do you remember? It rained for 40 days, right? But after then the earth was flooded for 150 days (7:24; 8:3). Then Noah waited for the land to appear, for the earth to dry out, and for God's command to step out into the renewed world. Altogether, they lived in the ark for a whole year.

So why are we told the story in three phases: 40 days, 160 days, the rest of the year? The 40 days and the 150 days are the "unmaking" of creation. After that, Noah waits for the Lord's declaration that creation is renewed, ready for repopulation.

Structure of the Noah story

On the first day of creation, God decreed light in the heavens, separating light from darkness to give us day and night (1:3-5). On Day 2, God prepares the earth by creating a vault in the sky to separate *the waters above* from *the waters below* (2:6-8).

But the world is no longer functioning as God intended. The earth has been *corrupted* because of violence (6:11). The earth became *corrupt, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways* (6:12). When God's agents on earth run amok, the earth itself runs amok. When God's regents no longer follow what God decreed, the earth no longer follows what God decreed.

The flood is described as the collapse of creation. God separated *the waters above* from *the waters below*, but God's decrees have fallen. That's the 40 days:

The world as God decreed (Day 2)	Not functioning as God decreed
<p>Genesis 1:6-8 (NIV)</p> <p>⁶ And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.</p>	<p>Genesis 7:11-12 (NIV)</p> <p>¹¹ ... all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. ¹² And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.</p>

Then we see the unmaking of what God decreed on the next day of creation. God commanded the *waters* be gathered into one place, so the *dry land* appeared. In the corrupted world, that no longer stands. The waters transgress their boundary, rising against the earth, overwhelming it. That's the 150 days:

The world as God decreed (Day 3)	Not functioning as God decreed
<p>Genesis 1:9-10 (NIV)</p> <p>⁹ And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.</p>	<p>Genesis 7:18–8:3 (NIV)</p> <p>¹⁸ The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth ... ¹⁹ They rose greatly on the earth ... ²⁰ The waters rose and covered the mountains ... ²³ Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out ... ²⁴ The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days. ... ^{8 3} The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down.</p>

Noah must then wait until the overwhelming waters recede, until the land appears and dries out, until God decrees that the re-formed earth is ready for habitation (9:15-17). That's the rest of the year.

Does that make sense? What are your thoughts on the structure of the Noah story?

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God's partner in a corrupted world

If the disobedience of the earth means its demise, how does anyone survive in a world that no longer follows what God commanded? There's hope if one person follows God's instructions. That's all it takes to save the world.

The earth was *corrupted* (no longer following God's decrees) because humans had *corrupted* their ways (6 :12). But in that chaos, one person who *did everything just as God commanded him* (6:22) saves himself and the world.

Genesis 6:12-22 (NIV)

¹² God saw how corrupt (*šā·ḥăṭ*) the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted (*šā·ḥăṭ*) their ways. ¹³ So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy (*šā·ḥăṭ*) both them and the earth. ¹⁴ So make yourself an ark of cypress wood ...

¹⁵ This is how you are to build it ...

¹⁷ I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy (*šā·ḥăṭ*) all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish.

¹⁸ But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ... ²² Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

Noah constructed the life-preservation box (ark) as God instructed. When God says it's time to enter the box, Noah obeys, leading the creatures of the earth to safety:

Genesis 7:1-12 (NIV)

¹ The LORD then said to Noah,

"Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. ² Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, ³ and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. ⁴ Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made."

⁵ And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him. ...

¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. ¹² And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

The corrupted earth cannot stand. The waters below (*springs of the great deep*) and the waters above (*floodgates of the heavens*) flow together to flood the earth.

But even as the waters ruin creation, the waters lift the little preservation box:

Genesis 7:17-24 (NIV)

¹⁷ For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. ¹⁸ The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. ¹⁹ They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. ²⁰ The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. ²¹ Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. ²² Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. ²³ Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. ²⁴ The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

What God did in partnership with Noah saved the world. The ruination (*šā·ḥăṭ*) of the world with the flood became its rescue.

The ruin and rescue of creation: is that what you hear in Noah's story? What questions does the Noah narrative raise for you?

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Genesis 8: Rescued

It took a full year to cleanse the corrupted earth:

- Noah entered the ark in: year 600, month 2, day 17 of his life (7:11-13).
- Noah left the ark in: year 601, month 2, day 27 of his life (8:13-18).

The years of Noah's life were probably measured in lunar months, so a year and ten days would be a full solar year (365 days).³⁰

That's when God's decree proclaimed the ground to be ready for habitation. God restored and blessed the earth with fruitfulness as it was in the beginning:

Genesis 8:15-19 (NIV)

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah,

¹⁶ "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. ¹⁷ Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it."

¹⁸ So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹ All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

³⁰ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Eerdmans, 1990), 305.



"The mountains of Ararat" in eastern Türkiye. Photo: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Ararat

Noah's sacrifice

After this amazing rescue of Noah and the other creatures, why does Noah kill some of his precious cargo?

Genesis 8:20 (NIV)

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he **sacrificed burnt offerings** on it.

In Christian theology, the word *sacrifice* is often connected with Jesus dying for our sins. We think sacrifices must have been about taking away personal guilt. That's not what the text of Genesis says. It's already told us twice that Noah was a *righteous* man (6:9; 7:1). Noah was doing right. So why was he offering a burnt offering?

The truth is that God never asked for animal sacrifices. It's what people did in the ancient world. Not just Israel, but the nations too. They worshipped by offering gifts to their gods, usually food offerings. Every morning and every night, Israel offered a burnt offerings as a meal for God. They offered other meals as well, such as the fellowship offering where the priests symbolically sat at God's table, representing the covenant people as they shared his meal.

The Torah regulated how burnt offerings were to be sacrificed:

- only to YHWH (the LORD) (Exodus 3, 6).
- on an approved altar (Exodus 20, 27).
- in the approved manner (Leviticus 1, 4).
- offering only approved (clean) animals and birds (Leviticus 14).

God's name had not yet been revealed and the laws of clean animals had not been given, yet verse 20 presents Noah as worshipping in the Torah-approved manner.

So God responds as the Torah anticipates. The scent of the meal (*pleasing aroma* of the burnt offering) rises into the heavens (verse 21, compare Exodus 29:18, 25, 41; Leviticus 1:9, 13, 18; 2:2, 9, 12; 3:5, 16; 4:31; 6:15, 21; 8:21, 28 etc).

God understands that Noah was expressing his gratitude for rescuing and recreating what had been ruined. Noah's worship recognizes the LORD's authority over the earth.

God responds to Noah's gift by affirming his partnership with humans, even though they corrupted the original creation with their violence:

Genesis 8:21-22 (NIV)

²¹ The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart:

“Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

²² “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

What a story: ruined yet restored through a human in partnership with God!

Judgement and salvation

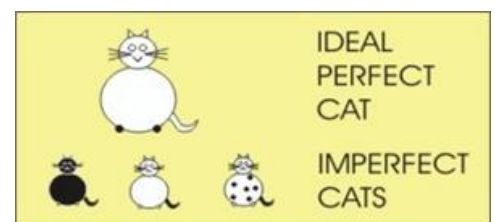
In Jewish and Christian literature, Noah's story has become foundational for understanding judgement and salvation. God judged the corrupted world, and God saved the world through Noah.

Old Testament scholar David Clines put it like this:

The Flood narrative does not function simply as yet a further stage in the development of human sin, but imports concepts of 'end' and 're-creation' into the *primaeval* history. When Genesis 1 is also taken into consideration, some case can be made out for suggesting that the theme of the *primaeval* history is 'creation—uncreation—re-creation'. ...

Re-creation occurs, in the first place, by the renewed separation of sea and land: the waters recede from and dry up from the earth (8:3, 7, 13). Then comes the renewal of the divine order to living beings to 'breed, be fruitful, and multiply' (8:17). ... The creation ordinances are re-announced ... (9:1–7), the separation of sea and land ... is assured (9:8–17), and humankind begins to be re-created (by procreation, ch. 10) and to fill the earth at God's command (10:32).³¹

The Greeks didn't think this way. Plato (around 400 BC) was fascinated by the “ideal” world. In his mind, there was a perfect reality beyond this one, with nothing in this present world measuring up to that ideal. As Christianity spread to the Greeks, some kept the belief that the material world is inferior, that all that matters is the spiritual realm.



The early church rejected that as heresy (Gnosticism), but the shards of Plato's belief still infect our thinking. Some Christians think of “salvation” as going to that perfect world when we die. Some hope to be snatched out this world before God destroys it, as if creation itself was a bad idea. In that framework, the resurrection of the body makes no sense. Anything material is imperfect, so all humans must be evil from birth and there can be no such thing as a *righteous human* like Noah (7:1), someone who *did all the LORD commanded him* (6:22; 7:5).

Noah's story challenges how we think of judgment and salvation. God did not judge the world because a material world is bad. God judged the world because the good

³¹ David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 80-81.

earth was corrupted when humanity turned from partnering with God. God saved the world when one person partnered with God.

Un-creation and re-creation reverberate as themes through Scripture. It's what God does in Israel (Isaiah 65:17–66:24), in the Messiah (Colossians 1:19-20), in the church (Ephesians 1:18-23). Re-creation is the goal (Revelation 21–22).

That's how the Hebrews thought and worshipped:

Psalms 104:5-9 (NIV)

⁵ He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.

⁶ You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.

⁷ But at your rebuke the waters fled,
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight;

⁸ they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys,
to the place you assigned for them.

⁹ You set a boundary they cannot cross;
never again will they cover the earth.

Flood stories in the ancient world

It's interesting how widespread the story of a flood was in the world of the Ancient Near East.

The best known is *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.³² It was written in cuneiform, by pressing a wedged stick into wet clay, and then baking the clay. It spans twelve clay tablets, with the flood story on Tablet XI. Yale University describes it as:

“the oldest surviving literary work ... composed nearly 4,000 years ago in ancient Mesopotamia (roughly equivalent to where Iraq and eastern Syria are now).”³³



Babylonian clay tablet: “The Epic of Gilgamesh.” Photo: <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/2020/04/30/the-epic-of-gilgamesh/>

The stories are not identical. The boat in the Babylonian story was square, and it came to rest well south of Ararat, on Mount Nisir (near Sulaymaniyah in central Iraq).

But there are striking similarities, such as sending out three birds as they waited for land to appear. It's possible that both accounts derive from the same experience in Mesopotamia. One Bible scholar draws these conclusions:

There are a variety of flood stories from the ANE, not just in Gen. 6-8. The Babylonian Genesis story known as Enuma Elish, has some similarities to the Gen. 1-2 story except it involves pre-existing matter and dueling deities. It's clear the Genesis story did not derive from the

³² James Bennett Pritchard (editor), *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 93–95.

³³ John Carey, “The Epic of Gilgamesh” at <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/2020/04/30/the-epic-of-gilgamesh/> accessed 13 January 2025.

seventh century B.C. story found in the palace of Ashurbanipal. But there is also the Gilgamesh epic in which Utnapishtim tells how he survived the great flood, but this story is in fact based on a yet earlier account called the Atrahasis epic from Babylon dating to about 1600 B.C. The retelling of the latter epic by Berossus 280 B.C. is known to Josephus, and there are some close parallels between the Genesis story and this earlier epic. Now the proper conclusion to draw, since there are various ANE flood stories is that there was indeed a giant flood, known to various ANE peoples, and the stories are similar enough to make clear something drastic happened.³⁴

So what?

What does Noah's story teach us about the themes of *judgement* and *salvation* that are crucial to the Bible narrative?

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Have you considered the flood as a story of *uncreation* and *recreation*? How does that sit with you? How does it sit with the rest of the story of Scripture?

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What conclusions to you draw from Genesis 7 and 8?

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In preparation for next week, read Genesis 9–10.

Going further

- [The kingdom is a partnership](#) (Genesis 7–8)
- [The faith of Noah](#) (Hebrews 11:7)

³⁴ Ben Witherington III. "What Difference Can a Literal Translation Make— Part Six" at <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2024/12/27/what-difference-can-a-literal-translation-make-part-six/> accessed 13 January 2025.

Week 5: Re-establishing his realm (Genesis 9–10)

God's world was corrupted when the godly descendants lost their values (Genesis 6), so God took responsibility to cleanse the corrupted world (Genesis 7). God saved the world through one person in partnership with him (Genesis 8). After the flood, Noah recognized the LORD's sovereign authority (worship), and the LORD committed to continue the relationship (8:20-22).

Any questions before we look at the world God replanted the world through Noah?

Genesis 9: God remakes the world

Genesis 9 is effectively a new creation. As Noah emerges from his little preservation box after a year, what's the same in this new creation, and what's different? That's what Genesis 9 is all about.

Will God trust the world to human hands again? From the start, humans abused the authority God gave us, grasping God's power for ourselves, killing each other and the animals he entrusted to our care. Don't forget, *The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled (6:6), for the earth was ruined and full of violence (6:11).*



Image: <https://learningfromchrist.com/noahs-flood-debate-history-evidence/>

Surely God could do better than partnering with us? Don't we compromise God's integrity? Those who suffer wars and abuse cry, "How can there be a God?" It's not like God needs us to rule the world. Seriously, what do we contribute that God couldn't do better? Don't we merely misrepresent God's authority?

These big questions are explored again and again in the history of God's people, in the Psalms, in the Prophets, in the Gospels, in the Letters, and in Revelation. Why does God, with all power at his disposal, want to partner with our weakness?

Genesis doesn't explain why God uses his power in a way that seems foolish to us. Only later in the story do we recognize the Father who doesn't force his authority on us because he's **raising a family to maturity through his love**. He calls us to *kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name* (Ephesians 3:14). With his Spirit in our inner being and his Messiah dwelling in our hearts through trust, humanity becomes rooted and grounded in his love, coming to know the love he has given us by raising up his Messiah as the full expression of the width and length and height and depth of his immeasurable love, so we're filled with the full measure of God (Eph. 3:16-19). Does that seem to you like an impossible hope? Seriously, this is what the power of God achieves: *immeasurably more than all we can ask and imagine, through his power that is at work in us* (Eph. 3:20).

That's why God did not give up on humanity, on the original vocation he gave us to image him to creation. Through his partnership with Noah, God restored creation.

Addressing violence (9:1-7)

But not everything is the same after the flood. The problem is the human tendency to violence. People do evil to each other from their youth (8:21).³⁵ So, in replanting the world, God makes changes to address violence:

Genesis 9:1-7 (NIV)

¹ Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them,

“Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. ² The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands.

³ Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

⁴ “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.

⁵ And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting.

I will demand an accounting from every animal.

And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

⁶ “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

⁷ As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

Humans have been killing each other (4:8, 23), but the violence is broader than that. God had given them green plants for food (1:30), but they'd been killing animals too. The violence corrupted the earth (6:11), leaving the creatures in *fear and dread* of the humans (verse 2).

It's not what God intended, but almost from the start Abel was keeping flocks and offering some as a gift to God (4:4). God accepted Abel's gift, as he did Noah's (8:20), but it seems that offering animals as food to God was what ancient cultures practiced rather than what God wanted (Psalm 50:9-13).

God offers a concession. They can kill and eat animals if they drain the life-blood from the creature, recognizing they've taken its life (compare Leviticus 17:11, 14; Deut, 12:23).

But human blood is another matter. God does not want to see human blood spilled on the soil, as it was when Cain killed Abel (4:10). God cares about every bird that falls to the ground, yet his love for his human family is so much more (Matthew 10:29-31). They must stop killing each other.

Humans bear God's image (9:6), so striking down another human is striking at God. Whatever we do to another human, we're doing to God since God made us in his image.

God now does something counterintuitive. If people abused authority I'd given them, I'd withdraw or diminish their authority. God does the opposite. Humans have

³⁵ The Hebrew word *nēûrîm* refers to youth (e.g. Numbers 30:43; Psalm 25:7; Isaiah 54:6; Malachi 2:15), so this verse is not teaching that infants are born sinful.

overstepped the boundaries God set for us: taking the lives of the animals entrusted to our care, and taking each other's lives in violation of our calling to image God in creation. Yet, instead of reducing the trust God gave us, God gives us more! For the first time, God gives us authority over each other's lives.

Literally translated, this is the decree God issues in Genesis 9:6: *"Whoever sheds blood of the human, by the human shall their blood be shed, because in his image God made the human."*

For the first time, the human community has authority over human life. God authorizes the use of **capital punishment**, a practice that's still lawful in [55 countries](#) today.³⁶

The strange thing is that this is **not what God himself did** when he was managing the world directly. Instead of taking Cain's life as the community expected, God put a mark on Cain to protect him so the community would not kill him (4:15).

So God gives us the power to punish each other, as a deterrent to limit violence. What you do to another may be done to you. Does the threat of punishment inhibit evil-doers? It probably does have some effect.

On the other hand, if God puts the power of life-and-death into human hands, aren't we likely to abuse that power too? Doesn't this open the door to human rulers forming nations and killing (war) to build their kingdoms? That's exactly what happens in Genesis 10. And it isn't just the other nations; God's own people regularly abuse this power too (e.g. Genesis 37:20; 2 Samuel 11:15; 2 Kings 21:16).

"A life for a life" was not God's creational ideal. It's not what God himself practiced before he authorized human government. It's an accommodation to limit violence in the world. Right or wrong, *anyone who is hanged is under God's curse* (Deuteronomy 21:23) because the authority is delegated from God.

God authorized the power of human government because it's better than anarchy. God authorized this power knowing that one day he would face and deal with that evil himself (John 12:47-50; Galatians 3:13). So, until the world is set right in the Messiah, this is the world we live in (Romans 13:1-5).

Thank you, God for not giving up on us, for working with us towards a new creation where heaven's government is restored to earth in Christ, as *we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ* (Ephesians 4:13).

Your thoughts?

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³⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45835584> accessed 2024-02-25.

God's commitment to reign (9:8-17)

If God has given the community authority over human lives, has God stepped away from managing the world? Has God abdicated, leaving governance of the world to us?

God's answer is a resounding, "No!" With a covenant, the heavenly sovereign proclaims he will never give up reigning over us, no matter how difficult we are to manage:

Genesis 9:8-17 (NIV)

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ "I now establish my **covenant** with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹ I establish my **covenant** with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹² And God said,

"This is the sign of the **covenant** I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a **covenant** for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the **covenant** between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my **covenant** between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting **covenant** between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

¹⁷ So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the **covenant** I have established between me and all life on the earth."

Covenant is a keyword in the Bible. God covenanted himself to **Abraham**, promising a nation from his descendants (Genesis 15, 17). God's covenant with **Israel** established them as a nation under God's reign (Exodus 24). God's covenant with **David** promised him the kingship (Psalm 89:3), so when the kingship fell the prophets declared God would make a new covenant in the **Messiah** (Jeremiah 31:31; Mark 14:24).

God's covenant with Noah promises God's on-going governance of all people (verse 9), all creatures (verse 10), the earth itself (verse 11). In the Ancient Near East, almost every nation had a covenant with their ruler setting out the responsibilities of the ruler and the people. But none of the other nations had covenants with their gods.

The point of this covenant is therefore God's **kingship**. Although he has authorized human authorities, God unilaterally commits to never giving up the earth as a kingdom over which he reigns, a kingdom of heaven.

God commits to never wiping out his kingdom, regardless of how difficult we are to manage. If you can imagine how terrified the people may have felt next time the rains set in, the rainbow in the clouds stood as a sign of the light of heaven beyond, God's covenant commitment to care for us forever.

That's the significance of the Noah covenant: God's faithfulness to all people, all creatures, and earth itself.

And ultimately, all God's covenant commitments find fulfilment in Christ:

- The faithfulness of God is revealed in his Anointed as Christ fulfils God's covenant to **David**.
- The faithfulness of God is revealed in the Messiah as he fulfils God's covenant commitments to **Israel** (Romans 3:21) and **Abraham** (Galatians 3:16-22).
- The faithfulness of God is revealed in Christ as he fulfils God's covenant commitment to all people through **Noah**, bringing the nations and Israel together as the kingdom of God in Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).
- The faithfulness of God is revealed for all creation as the one who sits on the throne finally declares, "See: I am making all things new!" (Revelation 21:5)

That's the global significance of the Noah covenant. Your thoughts?

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The drunken leader (9:18-29)

In the world God reconstructed after the flood, Noah is the head of the family, and God has given authority to humans over human lives. **How does Noah use the authority God has given him?** That's what the rest of Chapter 9 is all about.

Genesis 9:18-23 (NIV)

¹⁸ The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) ¹⁹ These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth.

²⁰ Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. ²¹ When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. ²² Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. ²³ But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.

This is the first reference to **alcohol** in the Bible. Scripture does not condemn drinking wine (Matthew 9:17; John 2:7-11; 1 Timothy 5:23), but it does warn against drunkenness (Proverbs 23:20; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Peter 4:3). Specifically, drunkenness impairs the judgement of leaders (Proverbs 20:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:3, 9; Titus 1:7; 2:3).

Perhaps Noah was using wine as an escape. Can you imagine the horrific loss he felt? Outside his nuclear family everyone Noah knew was gone. Lot experienced that kind of loss at Sodom too, and that's the next time we hear about drunkenness (19:32-35). But drunkenness didn't solve Lot's problems. Or Noah's.

Noah's drunkenness only increased his shame. Inebriated, he *lay naked inside his tent* (verse 21). That's not criminal, but it was shameful for a leader to behave this way.

Noah's sons responded to his shame in different ways. One son (Ham) blabbed about it, thereby increasing Noah's shame (verse 22). The other two took steps to cover Noah's indiscretion, limiting his exposure and shame (verse 23). Seriously, that's all that's going on. There is no reason to read homosexual activity into the story as some have tried to do.

What matters is the way Noah responds when he comes to and realizes his shame. The first leader to whom God gave authority over the lives of other people responds in a way that has characterized human leaders throughout history. He demotes the one who blabbed his shame publicly, and elevates the ones who covered his shame:

Genesis 9:24-29 (NIV)

²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said,

“Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of **slaves** will he be to his brothers.”

²⁶ He also said,

“Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem!

May Canaan be the **slave** of Shem.

²⁷ May God extend Japheth's territory;

may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,

and may Canaan be the **slave** of Japheth.”

²⁸ After the flood Noah lived 350 years.

²⁹ Noah lived a total of 950 years, and then he died.

This is the first time we've heard the word *slave*, and it's here three times. God gave Noah authority over human lives, and Noah used his authority to enslave people! Noah used the authority of God's name to elevate those who covered his shame and enslave the descendants of the one who promoted his shame.

Does that sound familiar? Do you ever see leaders acting like that? If Noah was a *righteous man* (6:9; 7:1) who *did all the LORD commanded him* (6:22; 7:5) and yet Noah abused his power, won't other leaders have the same problem?

Think about the kings of Israel. Saul abused the authority God gave him (1 Samuel). So did David when he became king (2 Samuel). Solomon effectively enslaved the people, and it split the kingdom (1 Kings 12). Eventually God sacked the shepherds he'd appointed because they were eating the sheep (Ezekiel 34).

Of course, the rulers of the nations are like this too. Pharaoh enslaved Jacob's family. Assyria and Babylon took for themselves the nation God established. Rome crucified the King of the Jews.

So, what kind of world do we have now that God has given humans authority over each other's lives? Won't people form nations with their own leaders instead of living under God's sovereignty. That's what happens in the next chapter.

But first, your thoughts on Genesis 9?

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Genesis 10: The nations

Chapter 10 is a new section. Previously we were hearing *the account* (tô·lē·dôt) of *Noah* (6:9). Now we're hearing *the account* (tôlēdôt) of *Noah's sons* (verses 1 & 32). It's all about the *nations* that came from each son, structured like this:

Genesis 10 (NIV)

¹ This is the **account** [tôlēdôt] of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

² The sons of **Japheth**: ... ⁵ by their clans within their **nations**, each with its own language.

⁶ The sons of **Ham**: ... ²⁰ These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and **nations**.

²¹ Sons were also born to **Shem**, whose older brother was Japheth ... ³¹ These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their territories and **nations**.

³² These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their **lines of descent** [tôlēdôt], within their nations. From these the **nations** spread out over the earth after the flood.

Naturally, the list of nations only covers the nations Israel knew. There's nothing about the cultures of ancient China or south America, nothing on the first nations of Australia.

Nevertheless, God's nation was acknowledging the nations that existed before them:

The Table of Nations is a serious attempt, unprecedented in the Ancient Near East to sketch a panorama of all known human cultures—from Greece and Crete in the west through Asia Minor and Iran down through Mesopotamia and the Arabian peninsula to northwestern Africa.³⁷

Shem is the one we're interested in, because Abraham was his descendant (11:20-26). But before we get to Abraham as grandfather of Israel, Genesis 1–11 asserts **YHWH's authority over all nations**. Remember, God promised to never give up on reigning over all people (9:8-17).

If the nations were doing right, they would acknowledge the LORD as their ruler and live under his authority. But the nations rise with rulers of their own, since God has given humans authority over each other's lives (9:5-6). As we saw with Noah, human leaders twist that power to their own benefit: enslaving people (9:25-27). So it's no surprise that Noah's sons form nations with their own rulers, instead of recognizing God's authority.

God lets the nations go their own way. In time, he will call Abraham and establish a nation through him. The whole point of Israel is so the nations can discover the blessing they're missing by not recognizing the Lord's authority (12:3; 26:4; 35:11).

Does that make sense of this chapter, of why the 70 nations matter?

³⁷ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 42.



"Table of Nations" in *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* edited by Carl G. Rasmussen (Zondervan, 2010), 83.

Watch carefully where Noah's sons established their nations:

- Japheth's descendants went northwest, forming nations in **Europe**.
- Ham's descendants went south, forming nations in **Africa**.
- Shem's descendants remained in the **Middle East**. (*Semitic* comes from Shem.)

Watch also the emphasis given to each of Noah's sons in this chapter:

- Shem gets ten verses, since he's the line to Abraham (verses 21-31).
- Japheth is the eldest, but he gets just four verses (verses 2-5).
- The bulk of the chapter is about Ham (verses 6-19). Why?

Ham's descendants don't just build *nations*. They build *kingdoms*. And they don't do that in their own space (Africa). They do that by introducing **war** to the Middle East, invading the lands of their brothers to build kingdoms:

Genesis 10:6-12 (NIV)

⁶ The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan. ...

⁸ Cush was the father of Nimrod, who became a mighty **warrior** on the earth. ⁹ He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD."

¹⁰ The first centres of his **kingdom** were **Babylon**, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in Shinar. ¹¹ From that land he went to **Assyria**, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah ¹² and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah—which is the great city.

Warrior (*gib-bôr* in Hebrew) is the word used for *the heroes of old* (6:4) when people corrupted God's world with violence. Now God has authorized the community to take a killer's life (9:5-6), so Nimrod realizes he can use the power of death to subjugate people—making war.

God authorized killing for food (9:3), but Nimrod wasn't hunting animals. Nimrod hunts down to build kingdoms. That's what kingdoms do: from Nimrod to Alexander the Great, from Hitler to today's superpowers.

And the two kingdoms named in verses 10-11 are the ones that ultimately destroyed the nation God established through Abraham:

- In 722 BC, *Assyria* captured Israel, the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17);
- In 586 BC, *Babylon* captured what was left, the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 25).

Israel recognized the nations and kingdoms that should recognize God's authority, but these kingdoms show no respect for what God had decreed for Israel. It's a tragedy that's never resolved in Old Testament times.

Your thoughts?

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So what?

After David's reign ceased (Psalm 89), the Psalms kept declaring the LORD's reign over all the earth (e.g. Psalm 98:2; 99:1; 102:15; 113:4). The prophets promised a son of David who would bring God's reign back to earth, with the nations under his reign (e.g. Isaiah 11:10; 19:23-25; 60:3; Micah 4:2; Zechariah 8:22).

The announcement that Jesus is *the Messiah* (God's anointed ruler) *is the good news* according to Mark 1:1. According to Jesus, *God's good news* was that *the time had come* for the restoration of God's reign, that *the kingdom of God had come near* (Mark 1:14-15). That's why the kingdom that claimed to run the world killed the *King of the Jews* (Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26).

That's when God overturned the power of death, raising him to life with *all authority in heaven and on earth* (Matthew 28:18). King Jesus now calls **all nations** under his kingship (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

So, the nations that went their own way in Genesis 10 are now being called back into the kingdom of God that is formed in Christ. Heaven's gospel proclaims, *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever* (Revelation 11:15).

That's why Paul was called as *an apostle to the nations* (Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:8; 1 Timothy 2:7). Since God's anointed ruler (*the Christ*) had been raised up with authority over all peoples (*Lord of all*), Paul was sent to announce this *good news* to the *nations* (*Gentiles*). Jesus called him to "*proclaim my name to the nations and their kings and to the people of Israel*" (Acts 9:16).

In other words, **Paul's gospel**—the good news that King Jesus is Lord of all nations—is the announcement that **reverses Genesis 10**. The nations went their way, asserting their power through war. The Messiah restores peace to the earth, overturning national divisions, making peace by creating one new humanity in his leadership, reconciling humanity to God and to each other (Ephesians 2:14-16).

The gospel undoes the division of humanity that goes all the way back to Genesis 10. That's the significance of this unique chapter in our Bible.

Questions

So what do you make of **Genesis 9**? As God replants the world after the flood, what's the same as when God established heaven and earth in the beginning? And what's different?

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What do you make of the additional authority God gave Noah that wasn't there in the beginning?

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What do you make of the covenant God established with the humans the creatures and the earth?

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What do you make of Noah abusing that authority as slavery because of his shame?

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What is the significance of **Genesis 10** to the Bible story? Why does God let the nations go their own way at this point? How does that set up the story for the calling of Abraham and the establishment of a nation under God? And what is God's long-term plan to rescue the nations, and how is that fulfilled in the end?

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Going further

If you'd like to read further, here are some blog posts on Genesis 9–10:

- [Earthly government](#) (Genesis 9:1-6)
- [Capital punishment?](#) (Genesis 9:6)
- [God's commitment to reign](#) (Genesis 9:7-17)
- [Why slavery?](#) (Genesis 9:18-29)
- [Why war?](#) (Genesis 10)

In preparation for our final week, please **read Genesis 11–12**.

Week 6: A tale of two kingdoms (Genesis 11–12)

God cleansed and replanted the world that was corrupted by violence when the godly lost their way (Genesis 4–8). To limit violence, God gave humans more authority, covenanting to never give up his reign over us. Noah abused that power with slavery. His descendants formed nations and used war to build kingdoms (Genesis 9–10).

Tonight we see Babel (Babylon) trying to take over God's world (Genesis 11). God responds by calling Abraham to leave the Babel-builders region, to establish a nation that would restore to the nations the blessing they're missing—namely God's leadership (Genesis 12). Abraham's partnership with God lays the foundation for the whole Old Testament and ultimately for the salvation of the world.

Before we move on to tonight's chapters, any questions on the previous ones?

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Genesis 11: A kingdom trying to take God's world

You've heard of the *Tower of Babel*? The word *bā·bēl* is translated "Babylon" in every instance of the Old Testament, except Genesis 10:10 and 11:9. The region later known as Babylonia had various names in earlier times: Sumer, Shinar, and Chaldea.

Babylon (Babel) was not a tower. It was a city. And the city had a tower:

Genesis 11:1-4 (NIV)

¹ Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.

² As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.

⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

The Sumerians built these towering structures called *ziggurats*, probably for worship. Abraham's family came from Ur (11:28, 31). The ziggurat at Ur still exists today, though it would have been taller in Abraham's time.

To the Hebrews, these towering structures represented Babylon's attempt to take over God's world. They were trying to reach up into the heavens and grasp the power of the gods in human hands, so they could rule the whole world.



Ziggurat at Ur. Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ziggurat-at-Ur>

The city of Babylon and its tower (11:1-9)

Babylon wanted to build a city—an administrative capital, a central government that would hold all people under its power, instead of having separate nations spread out all over the world (verse 4).

The narrator notes that Sumerians built their ziggurats from baked bricks (verse 3). Why tell us that? It's an architectural statement: they created man-made building materials, rather than use the stones the gods provided.

The tower makes the same statement: they've reached up into the heavens, to bring the power of the gods into human hands. They want people to bow to their greatness, *to make a name for themselves* as the city that rules the world.

Babylon's attempt to take over the world poses a serious threat to God's plan to save the world through Israel. The kingdom God established through Abraham later falls to the government that was trying to take over the world (2 Kings 25).

So why didn't God crush the evil empire of Babylon at this early stage, before it became a plague on the earth? That's the question Genesis 11 is addressing.

God's covenant declared he'd never give up ruling the world (Genesis 9). But he didn't stop the nations from going their own way, forming their own governments instead of recognizing God's authority (Genesis 10). Will the LORD let the evil empire take his whole world?

Genesis 11:5-9 (NIV)

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶ The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel [Babylon]—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world.

From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

God does not cede the world to Babylon. God intervenes, but not as we might expect. Babylon fights wars to build its kingdom (10:9-10), but God doesn't bomb Babylon to bits. God simply frustrates them, *confusing* them so they don't understand each other.

By giving different languages to different peoples, God limits what they can plan to do together. The inability to get on with each other still implodes political powers today. History consists of national fights and international wars, but God does not permit one enduring evil empire to take over the galaxy.

In the Old Testament narrative, the Babylonian Empire was a major hurdle on the way to restoring the earth as a kingdom of heaven.



Hanging gardens of Babylon. Image: National Geographic

In the sixth century BC, Babylon did take over God's world as they knew it. But God frustrated Babylon, so it fell under its own weight (Jeremiah 51).

Babylon became a symbol for every superpower that seduces the nations into its web so it can take over the resources and the people of God's world (Revelation 17). But Babylon falls, like all the superpowers it represents (Revelation 18). God appoints the King of Kings (Revelation 19).

Your thoughts?

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Transition from Shem to Abram (11:10-26)

These seven verses are the briefest *tôlēdôt* (family story). It's just a bridge carrying us from Noah's son (Shem) to Abraham's father (Terah):

Genesis 11:10-26 (NIV)

¹⁰ This is the account of Shem's family line [*tôlēdôt*].

Shem ... became the father of Arphaxad. ...

¹² **Arphaxad** ... became the father of Shelah. ...

¹⁴ **Shelah** ... became the father of Eber. ...

¹⁶ **Eber** ... became the father of Peleg. ...

¹⁸ **Peleg** ... became the father of Reu. ...

²⁰ **Reu** ... became the father of Serug. ...

²² **Serug** ... became the father of Nahor. ...

²⁴ **Nahor** ... became the father of Terah. ...

²⁶ **Terah** ... became the father of **Abram**, Nahor and Haran.

But bridges are significant. These verses link Abram (later called Abraham) with the story of humanity. The rest of the Old Testament zooms in on Israel, the nation that comes from Abraham. Israel is different to the nations of Genesis 10 because it's a kingdom of God. In Israel, heaven's reign was present on earth.

Yet Israel's story is not disconnected from the nations. The other nations (Genesis 10) were also descendants of Noah, brothers in the same family. The LORD who reigns over the whole earth is the Father of the whole human family.

That's the meaning of this brief *tôlēdôt*.

Introducing Abram (11:27-32)

Verse 27 then introduces the longest *tôlēdôt*. The family story of Abraham and Sarah runs for 14 chapters (Genesis 25:11).

Genesis 11:27–12:1 (NIV)

²⁷ This is the account of Terah's family line [*tôlēdôt*].

Terah became the father of **Abram**, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. ²⁸ While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in **Ur of the Chaldeans**, in the land of his birth.

²⁹ **Abram** and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was **Sarai**, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.

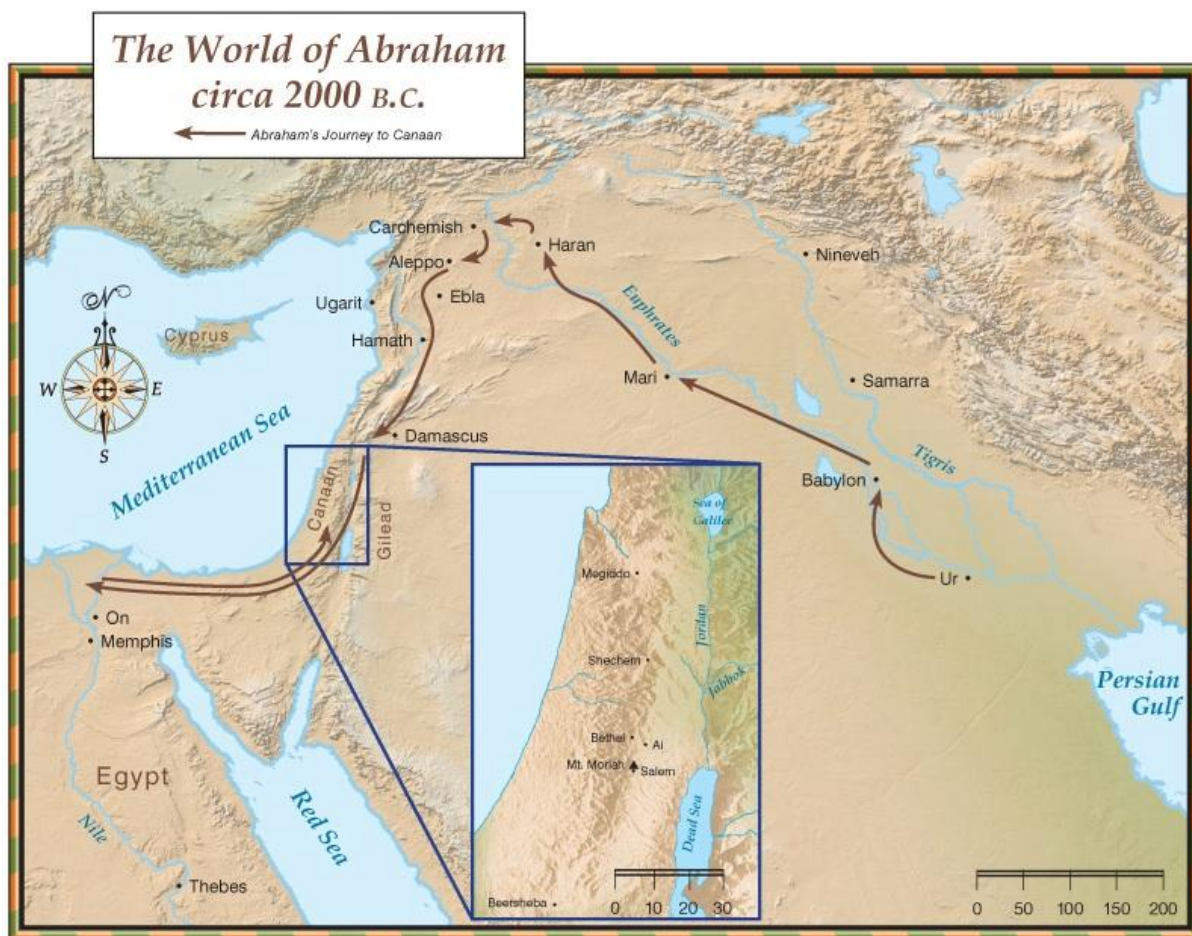
³¹ Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to **Harran**, they settled there.

³² Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

12 ¹ The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."

Abram's family is from **Ur**, a region of Babel (Babylon). The Chaldeans ruled it back then. Abram's father (Terah) decided to take his family elsewhere. The natural path to take was not westward, for that goes into the Arabian Desert. They travelled along the Euphrates River, the well-worn route along the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia (the region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers).

For a time, the family settled in Haran in the region of Aram (northern Syria today). After the death of his father, Abram hears the LORD calling him to continue southward towards **Canaan**, where God will establish a nation under his leadership through Abram's descendants. The problem is that Sarai can't have descendants (verse 30).



"Map 2" in *Standard Bible Atlas* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 2006), 4.

Genesis 12: A kingdom representing God to the world

Genesis 12 doesn't really belong with the first eleven chapters. The call of Abraham is the start of Israel's story, whereas Genesis 1–11 covered God's sovereignty over the nations. We're including Genesis 12 in this series so we can see how Genesis 1–11 sets up Israel's story within the broader claim that the LORD reigns over all nations.

Genesis 12–50 describes Israel's founding fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

- The family story (*tôlēḡôṭ*) of Terah's son **Abram** runs from 11:27 to 25:11.
- After Ishmael's brief *tôlēḡôṭ*, Genesis 25:19–35:29 is **Isaac's** *tôlēḡôṭ*.
- After Esau's *tôlēḡôṭ*, Genesis 37–50 is the *tôlēḡôṭ* of **Jacob** and his sons.

Abram partners with God (12:1-5)

God calls Abram to leave the land where the nations rule, to launch a different kind of nation, one established by the LORD's decree, living under his leadership:

Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV)

¹ The LORD had said to Abram,

“Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

² “I will make you into a **great nation**, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

What an amazing promise for a couple who expected their names to die with them since they could not have children (11:30). God's *blessing* the world with *fruitfulness* (1:22, 28; 5:2; 9:1), but the earth was no longer as responsive as barrenness and death took over when they separated from God (3:16-19). God chooses a **barren** couple so they themselves are a sign of what God will do: restoring creation through them.

Their descendants will be **a great nation** (verse 2). Greatness isn't measured by the human standards as physical size or military dominance. Its national greatness is the *blessing* of God's presence and leadership. With God at the helm, this nation will be guided by the wisdom of God's instruction and the voice of his Spirit (the Law and the Prophets).

This nation is the antithesis of Babel, the undoing of human sin, the restoration of what God decreed in the beginning (1:26-28). The God/Abram partnership restores what humanity is missing, what the other nations don't have: life under God's reign.

How other nations treat his people is something God takes personally (verse 3):

- Those who *bless* God's nation participate in their blessing (Isaiah 19:23–25; Zechariah 8:20–22), for all nations belong to him (Exodus 19:5).
- Those who *curse* God's kingdom are cursing its King (Psalm 48:1-7), making themselves God's enemies (Psalms, 18; 60:17; 92:9-11; 108:10; 110:1-2; 144:6).

This is precisely the criteria God's anointed uses to sort sheep from goats:

Matthew 25:40 (ESV) The King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

What's crucial, therefore, is Abram's response to God's call. Does he partner with God as Noah had done? Does he believe God and participate in what God said?

Genesis 12:4-5 (NIV)

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

This is the foundation for the rest of the Bible. Abram and Sarai believed God and put their allegiance to God (faith) into action. They became the founders of God's project to restore the whole of creation to heaven's government. They left the region of the Babel-builders and Haran because they were looking for a city under God:

Hebrews 11:8-10 (NIV)

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to **the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

From the moment Abram and Sarai entered this partnership with God, the Biblical narrative becomes the story of how God establishes this city, the kingdom that invites God's reign. The Sinai covenant established Israel as that kingdom, so **Jerusalem** was *the city of the Great King*, the place where God lives among his people (Psalm 48:2).

Misapplication: we're not them

What do you say if a childless couple comes to you and asks for prayer? Do you say, "God did it for Abram and Sarai, and he'll do it for you"?

We love putting ourselves into the story of Scripture, as if we are the characters we're reading about: Abraham or Sarah, Joshua or Deborah, David or Esther. We are living in God's story, but we're not them, and we're not living in the same chapter of the story they were.

Substituting "me" into every Bible story and claiming, "God will do it again!" is misguided and misleading. God will do what God needs to do for us in our situation, but our situation is not theirs. We have no grounds to promise God will do it again.

God released Paul from prison in Philippi (Acts 16), but God did not do it again when Paul was in prison in Rome. Even for the same person, God doesn't always do the same thing.

I know a childless couple who were promised the "Sarah" miracle repeatedly as they requested prayer over the years, but never had children. Sheridan Voysey candidly shares their disappointment with God and how they coped: *Resurrection Year: Turning Broken Dreams Into New Beginnings* and *Praying Through Infertility: A 90-Day Devotional for Men and Women* (Thomas Nelson, 2013, 2024).

Is that okay? Is this something you want to discuss?

Abram in the land (12:6-9)**Genesis 12:6-9 (NIV)**

⁶ Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an **altar** there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an **altar** to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

⁹ Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev [south].

Abram reached the land (verse 5). Wherever he went, he built *altars to the LORD*. (verses 7-8) The altars stood as markers of God's authority in this land, like planting a flag or staking a claim for God. Great start, Abram!

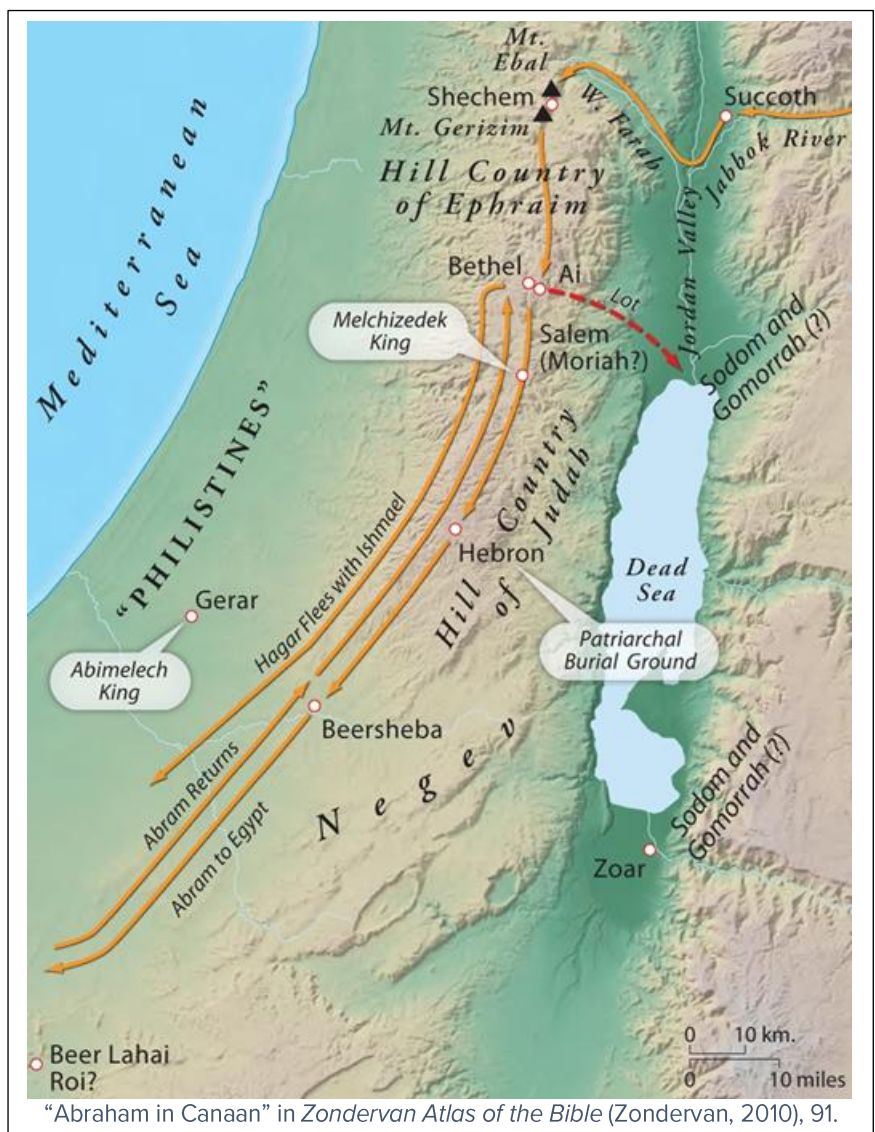
But this “Promised Land” falls short of what Abram and Sarai expect:

Genesis 12:10 (NIV)

Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.

Not only are there people already living there (verse 6), but this land could not support them. It's easy for us to idealize the Promised Land, but most of it is not great farmland. Particularly in the Negev (the south near the Dead Sea), it's a dry and barren place.

So why did God choose this location for his people? The reason is geography rather than agriculture. Canaan is the bridge between three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. It's at the heart of the nations as they spread out from Shem, Ham and Japheth. The Babel builders wanted to *make a name for themselves* so that people would not be *spread over the face of the whole earth* (11:4). God's people exist to proclaim, “*LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth*” (Psalm 8:1, 9).



“Abraham in Canaan” in *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* (Zondervan, 2010), 91.

Abram and this world's rulers (12:10-20)

This is not yet restored creation. Though God decreed fruitfulness for the earth (1:11-12), it fights back with thorns and thistles, dearth and death (3:17-19). And death doesn't only come from natural causes:

Genesis 12:11-12 (NIV)

¹¹ As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. ¹² When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live."

It's a violent world where brother kills brother (4:8), and people constantly plan evil against each other (6:5; 8:21). When God gave us the right to take a killer's life (9:6), warriors saw death as a means to build kingdoms (10:8-12). Abram left Babel, but the rest of the world also has rulers who use the power of death to take whatever they want. From a Jewish perspective, lust and violence characterize the nations.

Abram decides to sell off Sarai to save himself:

Genesis 12:13 (NIV)

"Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."

Abram gets a fat dowry for providing Pharaoh with a desirable woman.

The plan works: Abram gains wealth and honour:

Genesis 12:10-16 (NIV)

¹⁴ When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. ¹⁵ And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. ¹⁶ He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

Are you horrified? Abram just committed to partnership with God, and already he's selling out to Pharaoh. It's as if his commitment to God—and to Sarai—means nothing to him. Unfaithfulness to God dogs Israel throughout the OT, and it's often compared to marital unfaithfulness. (e.g. Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16; Hosea).

So, is this the end of God's restoration project to save the nations?

Has unfaithfulness already destroyed the partnership with God?

Wasn't this the problem in the garden (Genesis 3)?

Wasn't this why violence corrupted God's world (Genesis 6)?

If Abram has sold out to Pharaoh, isn't the partnership with God over?

God knows how to unravel Abram's unholy and deceptive alliance with Pharaoh:

Genesis 12:17-20 (NIV)

¹⁷ But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife?" ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" ²⁰ Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

The LORD reveals himself to Pharaoh. Pharaoh listens to the God Abram misrepresented. Pharaoh breaks this unholy alliance with Abram, commanding him to return to Canaan—exactly as God wants! Abram has been unfaithful to God, but God has remained faithful to Abram, rescuing him from his own deceit and disobedience.

But Abram has not dealt with his unfaithfulness. Later, he repeats the same deception, selling Sarah to a Philistine king, gaining both the dowry and a reparation payment (Genesis 21). Abram's son Isaac pulls a similar stunt (Genesis 26). And Isaac's son Jacob was a power-grabbing deceiver from birth (Genesis 25:26; 25:31; 27:19; **27:36**).

The problem of unfaithfulness to their covenant with God dogged Israel through the Old Testament. Ultimately, the relationship between heaven and earth can only be restored through a descendant of Israel who is faithful: *a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit* (John 1:47), someone whose *faithfulness* reveals *God-doing right* for all people (Romans 3:21ff). In the end, God's faithfulness undoes our unfaithfulness.

So what?

Genesis 12 is just the beginning of God's global rescue project, restoring the world to his reign through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who became Israel.

There are so many ups and downs along the way, as the city Abram was looking for (Jerusalem) misrepresented God's reign and fell to Babylon (2 Kings 25). God then declared that Babylon would fall (Jeremiah 51), and Jerusalem would rise again, so *the LORD rises upon you* and the *nations will come to your light* (Isaiah 60:2-3).

When God finally sent his anointed leader to Jerusalem, they handed him over to the "Babylon" of their day (Rome) to be put to death. That's when God overturned the power of death, raising him up with all authority to reign in heaven and on earth. That's how God's reign (the kingdom of God) was restored to the earth in Christ.

In the end, Babylon falls (Revelation 18). Heaven's government finally comes to the earth as a New Jerusalem, where all the peoples of the earth live in the reign of heaven's anointed ruler, the King of Kings (Revelation 21).

The partnership between God and humanity that launched in Abraham is finally fulfilled in the descendant of Abraham who restores the whole human family to God:

Galatians 3:7-9, 14 (NIV)

⁷ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

⁸ Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." ⁹ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. ... ¹⁴ He [Christ] redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Your thoughts?

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Going further

Because God *chose* Abraham, Israel became God's *chosen* people, the *elect* people of God. The call of Abram in Genesis 12 is therefore the foundation for the doctrine of **election**—a word we'll strike when we do Romans (e.g. 8:33; 9:11; 11:7, 28).

Why did God *choose* Abraham? Why was Israel God's *elect* people? It was not so that God could save them and damn the other nations. God's election of Israel was not about individual salvation; it was about their national vocation.

God chose (elected) to partner with Abraham in his mission to save the nations. Understanding God's *call* as a missionary calling (rather than personal salvation) deeply affects how we read Scripture, relate to God, and represent God in his world.

- Lesslie Newbigin (missionary writer):

The covenant of Noah is not revoked. The promised blessing is, in the end, for all the nations. Abraham, Israel, the tribe of Judah, and the faithful remnant are the chosen bearers of it. Bearers—not exclusive beneficiaries. There lay the constant temptation.³⁸

- Michael Bird (theologian):

The Abrahamic covenant enacts the mission of God to reach into the world through his chosen people. Thus, the reign of the Lord is exercised in and through Abraham's family, and the response that is required is principally faith in the promises and obedience to the subsequent commands.³⁹

- Chris Wright (Old Testament scholar):

God's blessing was not for Abraham and his family only. He would be the father of a particular nation through whom blessing would come universally to all nations. "We", then, if we are in Christ, are part of that family of Abraham, no matter what nation we come from.

But if, in Christ, we inherit Abraham's blessing, we also inherit Abraham's mission—that is, to go and be a blessing, to be the means by which God's blessing comes to others ... to participate in God's promised mission of bringing people from all nations on earth into the sphere of God's redemptive blessing through Christ.⁴⁰

- Tom Wright (New Testament scholar):

The narrative quietly insists that Abraham and his progeny inherit the role of Adam and Eve. There are, interestingly, two differences which emerge in the shape of this role. The command ('be fruitful ...') has turned into a promise ('I will make you fruitful ...'), and possession of the land of Canaan, together with supremacy over enemies, has taken the place of Adam's dominion over nature.⁴¹

³⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology*. (Eerdmans, 1978), 33–34.

³⁹ Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Zondervan, 2013), 502.

⁴⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People* (Zondervan, 2010), 81.

⁴¹ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (London: SPCK, 1992), 263.

Blog posts:

- [Can the nations take over God's reign?](#) (Genesis 11)
- [YHWH launches a nation of his own](#) (Genesis 12:1-3)
- [God shows up](#) (Genesis 12:4-9)
- [What if we're unfaithful?](#) (Genesis 12:10-20)
- [Piecing it together](#) (Genesis 1–25).
- [Looking for a city](#) (Hebrews 11:10)

On election, see this 8-part blog series by Tim Gombis:

- <https://timgombis.com/2012/05/29/election-according-to-scripture-pt-1/>

On how Genesis fits with Old Testament history:

- [Formed in God's story: Genesis – Esther](#) (6 weeks of notes and podcasts).



This gate to the northern city of Dan would have been standing at the time Abram and Sarai came to Canaan.
Photo by Allen Browne, 2017.