

Chapter 1 - Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It

Every culture has a creation story. People in non-Western cultures do not ask, "How could such strange things happen?" That is not the point of creation stories. Creation stories tell a culture why the world exists and the meaning of that "why" and the place of human beings in the "why." Chapter 1 of THE STORY is the creation story of ancient Israel. Because it is part of the Bible, it also functions to tell **us** why the world exists and what our role is in this story.

The very first sentence is the key to the whole story: "In the beginning God created." God made everything and therefore God owns everything. Psalm 24 sums up this principle:

The earth is the LORD'S and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; **for** [God] has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers.

In this passage, **for** means **because**. The whole world and everything in it belong to God **because** God made them.

What are the implications of the Bible's claim that everything belongs to God because God made it? What does this mean about the material things we call "ours?"

On page 2 God is described as creating human beings simultaneously on the sixth day. Both males and females are said to bear "the image of God."

There is a lot of debate about in what way humans are "in the image of God." What are some that you have heard or some that you can think of?

Some say that humanity has fully obeyed the command to "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth." Do you agree or disagree? How would we know when this command has been fulfilled?

What do you think it means that God tells humans to "Rule over . . . every living creature?" What do you think God expects of those that are appointed rulers over God's stuff?

What is God's evaluation of creation (including humans)?

God rested after working and then "blessed" and "made holy (different, set apart)" the seventh day.

What is the significance of this part of the creation story---God's rest after work?

The creation of humans on page 3 comes from a different, but compatible, ancient Hebrew tradition. In this story God makes a human out of earth and breathes life into the human. The assignment God gives the human being in this story is similar to that of the first story: "work the earth and take care of it."

After pronouncing all creation "good," God now says that "it is not good" for the human being to be alone. The Hebrew word "helper" in this passage is a word that is often used for God in Scripture. It implies strength and assistance in difficult times. None of the animals that

God then creates fits the job description of “helper,” so God provides the appropriate partner from the same substance as the original human being.

The snake/serpent/dragon is important in most Mediterranean religions in one way or another.

How is the serpent described in this story?

What does the serpent give as the reason for God’s prohibition against eating from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”?

What does the woman find attractive about the forbidden fruit?

Right after the woman eats the fruit, we are told that “she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” If he was “with her” the whole time, why do you suppose he didn’t intervene?

When the humans’ “eyes are opened,” they “realized they were naked.”

Why would that be the result of gaining the knowledge of good and evil?

Earlier, after God had said they were “very good,” the narrator had said that “they were both naked and they felt no shame.”

So is their “knowledge of good and evil” even accurate?

As a result of feeling shame at being exposed, look at what the humans do:

- They practice concealment.
- They hide from God.
- They move from shame to blame.

The Bible acknowledges that the dominance of men over women is characteristic of human society but attributes this, not to creation, but to human beings’ arrogating to themselves the knowledge of good and evil.

The choice to disobey God in order to have the same powers as God to know good from evil results in our being subject to suffering and death and losing the day to day close conversation with God that was characteristic of Eden.

The story of the murder of Abel by Cain shows that not only death, but violence has been introduced into God’s good creation by human rebellion.

Many people interpret these first Bible stories as statements of fact: There were two original human beings who disobeyed God by eating a piece of fruit. Then they passed this disobedience on to their biological children. As a result, all the descendants of this first pair of humans have inherited a “sin nature” right down to the present.

Another interpretation puts more emphasis on the story’s ability to describe human beings as we are. We are not capable of being what God created us to be. We are “good” as created, but the way we actually behave is that we are always, in various ways, choosing to grasp equality with God, choosing to be our own gods, rather than being willing to be vulnerable, “naked” creatures in the presence of a loving God who provides for us. As a result, we attempt to dominate each other, we exploit creation instead of taking care of it, we choose violence

when we feel others are getting ahead of us and we are not able to walk in simple friendship with God. We make up our own standards of good and evil instead of trusting God to define good and evil for us.

The flood

Several cultures have flood stories similar to, but also different from, the Biblical story. The Biblical story shows God returning creation back to the watery chaos from which God had formed a beautiful world and starting over with the best human beings available and the animals God had allowed them to save. However, this was not going to be a solution, as later events showed. So God established the first covenant with all humankind. The rainbow, probably understood as God's weapon of destruction, was hung up, not to be taken down again. "Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." This is important, because even the book of Revelation does not foretell the destruction of creation, but its re-creation.

Can you express in your own words the meaning of the Creation story for your own life?

Thoughts on Christian maturity

It is difficult to maintain the mindset that everything belongs to God and that we are caretakers of God's stuff. As we mature as Christians, we learn to live into this truth, but it takes a lot of transformation by God's Holy Spirit. Some of us find plenty of time to stop working and rest. Some of us rest when we need to be working and taking care of the things God has asked us to take care of. This is sometimes the result of avoidance of what we regard as unpleasant. Sometimes it is a way of "getting back" at a system we regard as unjust. More time spent in the presence of God will help us grow into a balance of work and rest and allow the Spirit to show us active ways to counter injustice instead of passive-aggressive behavior.