

Genesis Bible Study

April 21- Genesis 1-2 Creation

Introduction

Genesis chronicles the beginning of the relationship between God, humanity, and creation, and Genesis fittingly means “the beginning” in Hebrew. Chapters 1-11 include important origin myths, rooted in Ancient Near Eastern mythology, but the writers of scripture (finding these stories helpful in shaping our worldview and understanding of the relationship between God, creation, and humanity) re-wrote these famous myths to fit them into a mono-theistic (or at the very least henotheistic) understanding of the cosmos, in line with the belief system of the Israelites. **Monotheism** is the belief that there is only one God -traditionally understood as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael. **Henotheism** is the belief that multiple gods exist, but that our God is the supreme God who blows all other gods out of the water. This is the perspective from which much of the old testament was written. In many ways the stories of the Hebrew Bible tell the tale of how our God is distinct from the gods and belief systems of the neighboring tribes of the Ancient Near East. The main themes of these origin stories from chapters 1-11 are: 1.) *the broken relationship between God, humanity, and creation, and 2.) God’s love of this good world and continued blessing of humans and creation in spite of human disobedience and brokenness.* Chapters 12-50 narrow the focus of this drama by telling the story of how it played in out one family -that of the patriarchs and matriarchs in light of the covenant of blessing, land, and numerous descendants which God promised to Abraham. The themes repeated through these stories are: 1.) *the regular threat to the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham, and 2.) God’s continuing commitment to the promises he made to Abraham and Sarah.*

Precise dating of the book of Genesis is difficult, but most scholars agree that the majority of it was written down, and editing completed either during the Babylonian exile, or just after the return home from exile, placing it between the 6th-5th centuries BC. We know this because of how closely the descriptions in some of these stories mirror what those in exile would have known and seen from Babylon. Incorporating such vivid imagery is a way of saying, “You think this is amazing here in Babylon, you should have seen what our God did when...”

Chapter 1

Why are there two Creation stories in the Bible? Because chapter 1 and chapter 2 come from two different authors/contexts. Chapter 1 is written by the **Priestly source**. The Priestly source authors were writing during the Babylonian exile (6th century BC), and included many allusions to life in Babylon and God’s ultimate supremacy over any and everything in the Babylonian worship life (particularly over Marduke, the main god of the Babylonians). The priestly source focuses on ritual and orderliness, the separating of things into their appropriate groupings. In Genesis 1, we see a liturgy of praise to God, which leaves no room at all for the work of Marduke. God is the subject, the author, of everything. Even the sabbath was knit into the fabric of creation (lending extra authority for sabbath laws and rituals). The priestly source refers to God as “God”, whereas the Yawist source of chapter 2 refers to God as “Lord God.” Everything we know is spoken into being by the Word of God, and the spirit (breath of God) broods over the waters and makes them ripe and fertile to spring forth with life. The first work of God in creation (according to chapter 1) is dividing and purposing, and then ordering creation from the greatest to the smallest environmental impacts (that which is life sustaining leads to the creation of life itself, which leads to the purpose to steward both life and the environment which sustains it, thus humans are meant to be life-sustainers). It’s fascinating that the stages of creation match pretty closely with what we know of evolution to be true! Of course, evolution took place over millions of years. One day in God’s time is an eon in human time. The creation of creatures, mirrored the creation of habitat (God creates birds to fill the air and sea monsters to fill the sea because God first created the sky and sea, before the dry land, only on the 6th day do the things that creep and crawl and meander on the dry land appear, along with humans)! In

antiquity, the sea was understood as that which was utterly chaotic, evil, and untamable, and thus the sea monsters were viewed as the evil deities which ruled over these chaotic forces. In other creation myths, the sea monsters were already present in the seas as an antagonist, but in our creation myth God is so supreme that it is our God who created those monsters and gave them and all creatures their natural purpose.

God's work of creation was good in and of itself, before humans showed up! And, all of that good creation worked together to create a place for humans in the framework of life. Humans being "made in God's image" creates the relationship between God and humans, humans are meant to be creative, productive, responsible for all creation on the earth. When we think about the idea of being "made in God's image" theologically, we can also interpret this as meaning created for relationship in community, since God is in communion with God's self, the Trinity. Male and female are created in God's image.

What do we know about God from chapter 1 of the Bible? God is unimaginably powerful! But also, gentle and relational as part of the creative process. God's nature is creation, therefore God must still be creating. God is a blesser and provider- God provides abundantly for all of the creatures of the world, from the very beginning of creation this was God's intention for our world. God instills dignity and purpose into humanity from the very start. God is generous! God shares co-creation with humans, God teaches humans how to have dominion and care for the world through the way God cares for humans. The future shape of this world God created is placed in the hands of humans.

Chapter 2

My seminary professor referred to chapter 2's creation story as "God makes mudpies." This story is written by the Yawist (J) source, which uses the name "Lord God" for God, and was written during a time of great agricultural blessing in society (written in the southern kingdom around 1000BC -the time of King David). This story speaks to a more intimate relationship between God and humanity, and a more active role of humans in creation (naming a thing is giving a thing its purpose and identity).

Instead of starting with watery chaos, chapter 2's account begins with an arid wasteland -a wilderness with no plants or anything else. Nothing was growing because there was no water, and there were no gardeners! Instead of having orderly, gentle rains, a stream would rise up and flood everything! What a nightmare! On that first day, the Lord God created Adam.... The human one. Adam is Hebrew for "for a man" and Adamah is "of dust from the ground." This wordplay is meant to convey the close relationship between humans and the soil from which they were formed. A human is literally an "earthling." The human becomes animate from inanimate by the breath of God breathing life into his nostrils. Each human being contains the breath of God. God plants the garden as a delight for the human (Eden means "place of delight"). We no longer know where the rivers Cush or Havilah are, many assume they're supposed to flow from Africa and Arabia, but the Tigris and Euphrates convene in Mesopotamia, in modern day Iran. The human is placed in the garden of Eden with the purpose of tilling and upkeeping it. In the garden of Eden, the human is gardening for pleasure, later the human will toil in the field out of necessity. God warns the human not to eat of the tree of Knowledge, for with the knowledge of good and evil comes the experience of pain and the responsibility of moral discernment. Beginning in vs. 18, God sees that the human is alone, and that is not good. First, God tries to fulfill Adam's need for companionship with pets..... or, at least with the further responsibility of naming all of the animals that God creates for Adam. "Helper as his partner" connotes an equal standing, not inferiority or assistant... God is referred to as "helper" in the psalms and elsewhere. Adam found no equal among the animals, so God created an equal human partner for him to share his life with. "Becoming one flesh" not only suggests sexual union, but also the forming of 1 household and the raising of children together.

April 28- Genesis 3-5 The Fall