

SESSION 2: PRIMEVAL HISTORY (GENESIS 1-11)

PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION

Read Genesis 1—11, and the preparatory notes for Session 2.

Summary of the Video: Module 1, Episode 2

In the first chunk of the Pentateuch (Genesis 1-11), we study the origins of many important things: the origin of all that exists, the origin of evil, and the origin of humanity. This video digs deep into these subjects because they are foundational for all that we believe. They frame our view of the world and direct what we are called to do while on earth.

Throughout the video, you'll notice how differently people in the ancient world believed compared to people in your community. Pay attention to those differences as you watch. When we discuss this video, we'll focus on how the Bible's view of the world explains our experience better, and for that reason, better enables us to thrive in life.

The video begins with a clip from John Walton called "Origins Today." John Walton is an Old Testament professor at Wheaton College in Chicago (USA). It is a conservative, Bible-believing university. Andrew Wilson uses the video in order to unlock us from our cultural assumptions and the normal way that someone from our community would read the Bible. This is necessary because to be faithful interpreters of Scripture, we need to read it as the original audience was expected to read it.

In the rest of the video, Andrew Wilson goes chapter by chapter from Genesis 1 through 11. He does this under the following headings:

Genesis 1 Tohu-wa'bohu; Human beings are created in the image of God; Israel worships the real God

Genesis 2: The origin of man, the origin of the temple

Genesis 3: The origin of evil, the curses

Genesis 4: The consequences

Genesis 5: The genealogy of Adam

Genesis 6: The sons of God and the daughters of men

Genesis 7-9: The reason for the flood, the aftermath of the flood, Noah's curse and blessing

Genesis 10: The table of nations in Genesis 10

Genesis 11: The city and the tower

Central to this portion of Scripture is the notion of the “image of God.” The video devotes a lot of attention to this concept because it drives so much of what unfolds in the narrative. Be sure to listen well (and perhaps watch the video a couple of times) as it goes through the initial teaching on the image of God.

Terms You’ll Need to Know:

Cosmology—how people understand the earth, stars, planets, sun and universe; how people understand why things exist and where everything is heading.

Shoehorning—a shoehorn is a device that helps you squeeze your foot into a shoe; shoehorning means squeezing something that probably doesn’t fit into an argument.

Enuma Elish—a story from ancient Babylon that includes an account of creation and the flood.

Polemic—an argument or attack against something.

Eschatological—having to do with God’s ultimate, end goal for creation.

Tantrum—when little children express a bad attitude in immature ways.

Frank Sinatra—an American singer who sang, “I Did it My Way”.

Morgan Freeman—an American actor famous for playing trustworthy, authoritative people.

Invictus—a movie about the South African rugby team at the end of apartheid.

Donald Miller, *Searching for God Knows What*—American author and his book about the human need for relationship and the redemptive power of relationship with God.

Chernobyl—an infamous nuclear disaster that killed many people and ruined a city in modern Ukraine in 1986.

Baddies—the bad guys, the evil ones in the story.

Schindler’s List—a film about the Nazi holocaust in which millions of people were tortured and murdered in just a few years.

Soap—a TV show that has comically bad drama.

Table of Nations—a list of the nations in Genesis 10.

NIMBYism—Not In My Back Yard; it’s when people don’t want someone to develop housing or business or another industry near where they live.

Watch Video

Watch Module 1, Episode 2 (1hr 17 minutes).

Pentateuch

- I. Overview of the Pentateuch
- II. Primeval History (Gen 1-11)**
- III. Patriarchal History (Gen 12-50)
- IV. Exodus Narrative (Ex 1-15)
- V. Wilderness Narrative (Ex 16-19, 24, 32-34; Num 11-25; Deut 1-4)
- VI. Laws, Lists & Land at Sinai (Ex 20-23, 25-31, 35-40; Lev 1-27; Num 1-10, 26-36; Deut 5-28)
- VII. The Punchline of the Pentateuch (Deut 29-34)

Tohu wa'bohu → forming and filling

Context	Forming	Filling
When the universe was created, the earth was ...	<i>Tohu</i> (= formless, shapeless, chaotic, ugly)	<i>Bohu</i> (=desolate, empty, lifeless, void)
Creation days relating to space	1 – God forms by separating light from darkness	4 – God fills space, creating the sun, moon and stars
Creation days relating to the sky	2 – God forms by separating the waters above from waters below	5 – God fills the sea and sky, creating fish and birds
Creation days relating to the land	3 – God forms by gathering the waters together into one place, and creating plants	6 – God fills the land, by creating animals and finally humans, in his image, to complete the task
Commission to mankind	"Subdue and have dominion" (= form: bring order, structure, beauty)	"Be fruitful and multiply" (= fill: bring life, and the image of God)
Description in Genesis 2	2:4-17 – work, stewardship, leadership	2:18-25 – family, sex, marriage, relationship
Primary agent (in Genesis 2-3)	Man	Woman
Curse in Genesis 3	To man, on his primary role: earth will be chaotic (3:17-19)	To woman, on her primary role: producing life will be painful (3:16)

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Human beings are created in the image of God

- As the climax of the passage, man is created in the image of God, both male and female. There are all kinds of components of what it means to be made in God's image, but they include:
 - Representing God. Many ancient kings would establish statues, or images, of themselves and place them on the borders of their territories, to mark off where their kingdom began. Man serves as God's "image"
 - Resembling God. We physically look the way we do because that's what God looks like when he takes physical form (as in Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7, Joshua 5, and obviously in Jesus.) Compare the phrase "in his likeness" in Genesis 5:3
 - Ruling for God. Man is given the responsibility of governing creation on God's behalf, exercising "dominion"
 - Relating like God. As is often pointed out, the relationship in the trinity is mirrored in the way human beings form community, and have relationships with one another
 - Reproducing for God. Human beings were intended to have lots of sex and lots of children, so that the world would be filled with people bearing God's image and glory. No creature is as adaptable to different environments as a human (from Inuits to Bedouins) – we were intended to fill the earth
 - Reasoning like God. The capacity to use language and abstract reasoning is the intellectual component of what it means to be in God's image. "Get the big red hammer from my workbench"
 - Resting like God. No other creatures take one day off in seven, but we do, because we are made in the image of God. Notice that Israel observed this before the institution of the Sabbath in the ten commandments (Exodus 16)

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Israel worships the real God, and the gods of the nations are useless parodies of the real thing

- The whole chapter is written in such a way as to emphasise the sovereignty of God over all the “gods” of the nations, and the total contingency of the latter
 - God is completely sovereign. He says “let there be light”, and there is light. The phrase “and it was so” keeps recurring, as if to emphasise the immediacy of creation’s response to its Creator
 - God made the sky, divided the waters, “and it was so”. In contrast, in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, Marduk uses half the cadaver of an evil goddess to make the sky and control the waters: “Then the lord paused to view her dead body, that he might divide the monster and do artful works. He split her like a shellfish into two parts; half of her he set up and sealed it as sky, pulled down the bar and posted guards. He bade them to allow not her waters to escape”
 - The astral deities of other Mediterranean religions are humiliated by being created on day four, after light itself (and with stars, which receive priority in *Enuma Elish*, being made last, and casually: “also stars”)
 - The writer also refers to the “greater light” and “lesser light”, rather than using the words for sun and moon, because these words were frequently names of deities in the Near East
 - In the Ugaritic creation narrative (in which Baal is the chief deity), the sea and the great sea creatures are pictured as enemies of Baal that need to be conquered. On day five, however, God simply creates the sea creatures
 - Many Mesopotamian religions would have a place for the king, or a senior official, to be in the image of the gods. What is radical about the biblical picture is that all humans bear the divine image
- In a sense, then, Genesis 1 is a polemic against the “gods” of the nations

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The origin of man

- There is a fairly sudden change in style in 2:4
 - “There are the generations of ...”
 - Geographical specifics (“eastward in Eden”, “four rivers”, “the one which flows round the whole land of Havilah”, “the whole land of Cush”, “towards the east of Assyria”, etc)
 - Physical details (“every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food”, “the gold of that land is good”, “bdellium and onyx are there”, etc)
 - Therefore, I personally believe that although the genre of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 is poetic narrative – and hence Genesis fits with an “old earth” scientific perspective – the same is not true of the creation of man in Genesis 2
- Work is good, and belongs to the era before the Fall. The man is placed in the garden to work it and keep it – to produce order out of chaos, for human flourishing – and that is the purpose of work from then on
- 2:18 does not mean that it is not good for the man not to be *married*. This would undermine the teaching of Jesus and Paul (Matt 19; 1 Cor 7). It refers to man living *alone* (note that the first helpers to be created are animals!)
- Marriage was created as a picture of Christ and the church (Eph 5:22-33), not the other way round. So we mustn’t mess with it: headship, submission, respect, cherishing, etc

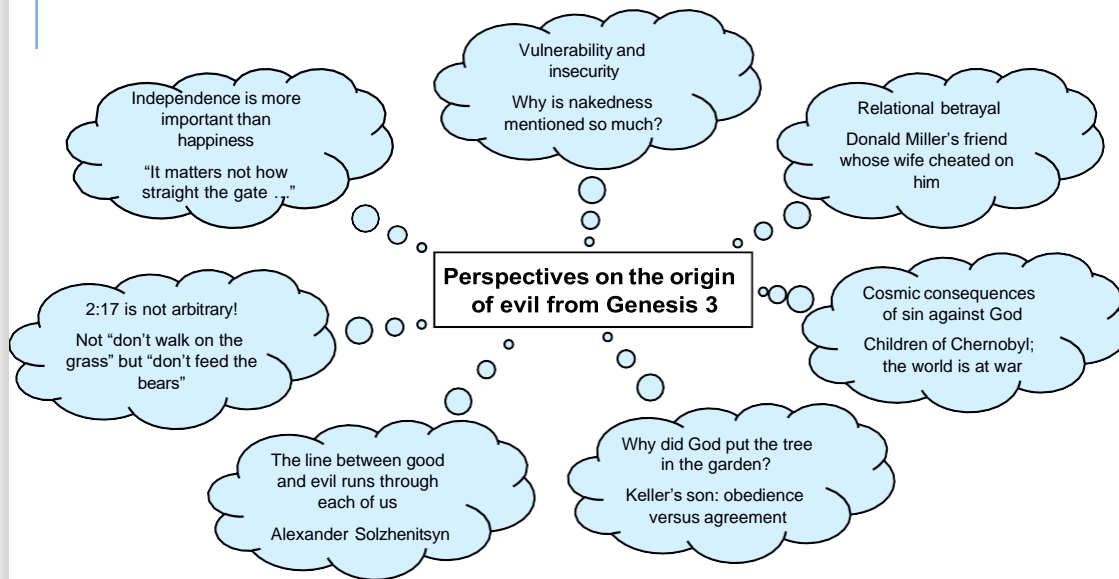
8

The origin of the temple

- In his superb *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, G. K. Beale makes a strong case for seeing the biblical story in terms of the expansion of the temple, beginning in Eden, developing through the tabernacle, Jerusalem temple and the church, and then culminating in the whole cosmos becoming a temple in Revelation 21-22
- Beale makes a number of observations that point to Eden as a prototypical temple
 - Eden is the place of God's dwelling, which is the essence of what the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple subsequently were
 - Adam was the first priest, who 'served' and 'guarded' the dwelling place of God (when these two words are used together in the OT, they often refer to priests serving and guarding the tabernacle [Num 3:7-8; 8:25-6; 18:5-6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14])
 - The garden was the first instance in which a cherubim guarded the dwelling place of God
 - The tree of life seems the most likely source of the tree-like lampstand that appeared in the Jewish tabernacle and temple ever since (see Exodus 25:31-40)
 - Subsequent tabernacles and temples were filled with garden imagery as well as precious stones, both of which find their original roots in Eden
 - Eden was the source of four rivers, and eschatological temple visions in Scripture frequently pick up Eden imagery with the river of life flowing from the temple / throne (Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 21)
 - The Garden had an eastern-facing entrance, like all subsequent temples in Scripture
 - In Ezekiel 28, the Garden of Eden is depicted as a sort of temple (see especially v18)
- The commission to man, then, was to expand the boundaries of the temple until the dwelling place of God filled heaven and earth. This helps explain why man is told to "go forth" as well as to "serve and guard" the garden

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The origin of evil



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The consequences

- It does not take long for the wheels to come off the wagon completely – within a few verses, murder and polygamy, among other things, have entered the world
- What is the difference between Cain's offering, which was not acceptable, and Abel's, which was? Possibilities:
 - Abel brought the firstfruits, and Cain did not
 - Abel brought blood sacrifice, and Cain did not
 - There was no difference at all, and it simply came down to Yahweh's sovereign choice
 - Abel brought his offering in faith, and Cain did not (cf Heb 11:4). This is probably to be preferred
- Verse 7 gives a chilling portrayal of the way sin works, picturing it as an animal crouching, waiting to pounce
- The curse on Cain is fourfold: exile, separation from God, nomadism and the probability of being killed. For Cain, this is too much to be bearable – and Yahweh acts in grace and protects him with a mark
- The whole chapter indicates that a number of other people are alive as well as the main characters. The two possibilities are (1) that God created other people than Adam and Eve, (2) that these others are Cain's siblings
- The genealogy of Cain draws attention to the introduction of various inventions (tent-dwelling livestock herding, harps and flutes, bronze and iron), as well as to expressions of sin (vengeance, murder, polygamy, arrogance)
- The generations of the heavens and the earth conclude with a twofold note of hope – the "seed" is back, with Seth replacing Abel, and men have begun to call on the name of Yahweh (4:25-6)

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The genealogy of Adam

- Genesis 5 begins with a restatement of the *imago dei*, as if to remind us that, despite sin, man is still created in God's image and likeness, male and female, and blessed by God (5:1-2)
 - This theme is then reinforced in v3, in which Adam begets a son "in his own likeness, after his image", and names him Seth. As such, Genesis 5 traces the image of God through the human race
- The genealogy runs: Adam (930) → Seth (912) → Enosh (905) → Cainan (910) → Mahalalel (895) → Jared (962) → Enoch (365*) → Methuselah (969) → Lamech (777) → Noah (950). Each ends with "and then he died"
- The genealogy itself may well be selective
 - Other biblical genealogies certainly are (e.g. Matthew 1:8c) – to say that "X fathered Y" sometimes means that X became the ancestor of Y
 - Biblical genealogies are often structured to bring emphasis to particular key individuals (hence Matthew's structure of 3 x 14, or 6 x 7; note also that Luke 3 has Jesus as Adam's 77th descendant)
 - In this case, the genealogy contains ten names, with Noah the tenth and Enoch the seventh
 - Consequently, few (if any) biblical scholars today would argue that the age of the human race can be precisely calculated by adding up the genealogies, à la Archbishop Ussher (4004 BC)
- In the midst of all this, we have the cryptic description of Enoch, who "walked with God, and he was not, for God took him"
 - Enoch lives on earth the shortest time of all the antediluvians, and his son lives longer than any others
 - Apparently, long life is not the greatest blessing that can be bestowed on humans – being taken by God without dying, as happened only to Enoch and Elijah, is an even greater honour

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The sons of God and the daughters of men

- The opening few verses of Genesis 6 are among the most difficult in the whole of Scripture, and pose a number of questions
 - Who are “the sons of God” and “the daughters of men”?
 - Sethite men and Cainite women? Pros: makes for a nice, neat solution, with no angels in sight, and points forward to subsequent injunctions against believers marrying non-believers (e.g. Nehemiah and 1 Corinthians.) Cons: Sethites are never called “sons of God” elsewhere in Scripture; conflicts with all Jewish and early Christian interpretation
 - Angels and human women? Pros: fits with interpretative history in Judaism (LXX has *angeloi tou theou*), and, many have argued, with Jude. Cons: bizarre, especially in the light of Jesus’ comments about angels in heaven being non-marrying. It would also involve Yahweh judging man for being “indeed flesh” when it was primarily the angels who sinned
 - Kings and harems? Pros: avoids the oddities of the angel view, yet has slightly more basis in the phrase “sons of God” than the Sethite view. The sin in question is that of polygamy, like Lamech. Cons: the phrase “sons of God” is still never used of kings in the plural (although it is in the singular); conflicts with almost all Jewish interpretation (the exception is a Rabbinic tradition)
 - Does “his days shall be 120 years” refer to human lifespan, or the time lag before the flood?
 - Are the Nephilim the descendants of the union between sons of God and daughters of men? The text doesn’t actually say they are, so it could just be a parenthetical detail (like Deut 2:10-12)
 - Are they “giants” (LXX has *hoi gigantes*), as in Num 13:33? If so, how do they reappear after the flood?
- Yahweh is said to regret his creation of man (6:6) because of their wickedness, which is an intriguing comment in the light of 1 Sam 15:29 (cf also 1 Sam 15:11)
- Noah, however, we are told, “found grace in the eyes of Yahweh.” Salvation from judgment is always by grace!

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The reason for the flood

- Yahweh’s reason for flooding the earth, which we will look at more fully in a moment, is given clearly in verse 5: “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”
 - Sometimes, the only way to wipe out evil is to wipe out all the people who cause it
 - And this generation, we are told, is as evil as they come: *every intent, only evil, continually*
- It is helpful to draw a contrast between the flood narrative at this point, and the most well-preserved alternative flood narrative, the Akkadian (ancient Mesopotamian) “Atrahasis Epic”
 - In the Atrahasis Epic, 1200 years after the creation of man, mankind becomes so noisy that Enlil (god of land) begins to suffer from insomnia
 - Enlil therefore sends a plague to wipe out man, which fails, and then tries a drought and a famine, which also don’t work
 - Finally, he sends a flood, at which point Enki (god of water) warns Atrahasis, the hero, to build a boat. Enlil is furious with Enki for telling Atrahasis, which he had previously promised not to
 - While the flood is going on, even the gods are afraid of its power
 - After the flood, the gods become hungry (!) because there are no farmers and no sacrifices left. When they discover Atrahasis has survived, the gods eventually agree on other means of population control (celibacy, infant mortality, childbirth) to keep the noise down
- In contrast, Yahweh is sovereign, faithful, gracious, covenant-making, patient and just. “Who is like you among the gods, O Yahweh?”

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The aftermath of the flood

- In the days immediately after the departure from the ark, a number of significant things take place for the relationship between God and man
 - First, the commission to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth is reissued, both to animals (8:17) and humans (9:1). This symbolises a fresh start, and a renewed desire to stop the earth from being *bohu*
 - Second, clean animals and birds are offered as burnt offerings on the altar (8:20), which causes Yahweh to be pleased, and to guarantee never again to curse the ground, strike down every living creature, or interrupt the regular pattern of seasons or days
 - Third, man is blessed once again (9:1). Blessing is a beautiful repetitive note throughout the Pentateuch
 - Fourth, man is given permission to eat animals (9:2-3), where previously he appears to have been limited to vegetables, although not to eat blood. (Surprisingly, there is no mention of animals being able to eat other animals; might that suggest that some of them were not created herbivorous in the first place?)
 - Fifth, God institutes capital punishment for those who deliberately take the life of a human being (9:5-6). Interestingly, this is not based on public safety, deterrent or even retribution, but on the value of a human life because it is made in the image of God
 - Sixth, God makes a covenant, not just with man but with every creature on the earth, never again to send a flood to destroy all flesh. He gives the rainbow as a sign
 - Seventh, Noah gets drunk and falls asleep naked in his tent, which shows (a) that the flood has not destroyed sin permanently, and (b) that Noah is not a perfect human being, but a man who found grace. The resulting curse is on Ham, and blessing on Shem and Japheth

The table of nations in Genesis 10



The city and the tower

- I think Genesis 11:1-9 is a very misunderstood passage. For a start, it's often told as if God doesn't like big buildings, as if that is the main point of the story
 - Man builds a big tower; God doesn't like it; so he muddles up everybody's languages, and in one fell swoop produces racial conflicts and foreign students and Latin lessons. What is all that about?
- Not only that, but the story is always called "the tower of Babel", when it's not just about a tower, but a city as well
 - Verse 4: "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth"
 - Man builds two things (a city and a tower), and he does it out of two motives (making a name for himself, and avoiding being dispersed over the whole earth)
- Both of these projects – the city and the tower – are in deliberate defiance against God
 - God had made man for the sake of his name, but man wanted to make a name for himself, so he built a tower. This is smugness at best, blasphemy at worst
 - God commissioned man to go forth and fill the earth with his glory and beauty and life and image – but man wanted to avoid being dispersed, so he built a city, to avoid being scattered
 - It's more like a gated community than the leaning tower of Pisa. In fact, Babel is the first middle-class gated community. It's full of Bronze Age NIMBYs – people who were created to rescue the world, but would rather stay safe in their little city, and avoid going out there
- So Babel is misunderstood – it's not about structures, but smugness and security. So God sorts them out

Discussion Questions

Before getting into these specific questions, spend a few minutes discussing what struck you or stuck with you from the video. What were some of the main points? Did any of Andrew's comments or questions open up the Bible in a profound way to you? Also, ask if anything was confusing or needs clarification.

1. Have you ever tried to understand something from someone else's point of view? What would help you succeed in such a task?
2. What will be necessary for you to be able to read Scripture from the point of view of its original audience?
3. How does the Genesis account of creation differ from your culture's most common way of talking about the origin of the earth or of humanity? Identify as many differences as you can.
4. In what ways does the Bible's teaching about being human (the "image of God") challenge the way your culture thinks about what it means to be human?
5. Every culture believes that problems started somewhere. They have an origin. How does the Scriptural story of the origin of evil differ from what your culture believes?
6. How do you think the Bible's approach to the origin of evil would help people make sense of their problems?

Meditation on Scripture

Genesis 1:1-2

Genesis 1:27-28

Putting This Session into Practice

The image of God tells us that we are called to spread the reign of God wherever we go and bring into order that which is out of order. Look around your home, neighbourhood and community. What is out of order that you can address? How can you help bring God's reign into this area?