

*Genesis 1:1-5, 26, 3:1-13 (NRSV)*

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

[God creates man and woman, Adam and Eve, and gives them a beautiful garden in which to live and to work. God tells them that the whole garden is theirs to enjoy with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They are not to eat the fruit of that tree, for God warns them that if they do so, they will die.]

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup>but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" <sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; <sup>5</sup>for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." <sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

<sup>8</sup>They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup>He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." <sup>11</sup>He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" <sup>12</sup>The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." <sup>13</sup>Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

*How well do you know the larger story of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation?*

*Today, we begin connecting the dots from the beginning to the end.*

This study is the first in a seven-week series that will take a look at the overarching story of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Yes, that's right. Seven weeks for all of the biblical story. Our purpose will be simply to see the larger story, to connect some dots, to put even the story of Jesus in the larger story of God's work to restore his creation.

I've taught a lot of adults over the years and I've learned that most have little idea how the larger biblical story works, even those who have spent time in Bible studies of one sort or another. Consequently, too many of us are reduced to making sense of isolated stories that we hear in church or read about in a daily devotional. We have no way to connect together any of them. Too often, everything gets reduced to finding a moral in a story or a moment of inspiration. Here's an example. If someone asked you whether Jesus needed to be Jewish, how would you answer? Where would you put Jesus on the map of the Bible's story? Without answers to those questions and others, there is just no way to grasp the story of Scripture.

This larger biblical narrative can be thought of as a six act play<sup>1</sup>:

Act 1 – God **creates** everything, including humans in God’s image

Act 2 – The humans **rebel** against God, separating themselves from God and one another.

Act 3 – God chooses and saves a people, **Israel**, through whom God will restore all humanity, indeed, all of creation.

Act 4 – When Israel, God’s people, proves unable to be faithful, God provides one faithful Israelite, **Jesus**, through whom God’s restoration is achieved.

Act 5 – God’s renewal project continues as the Spirit of God empowers **the church** to build for the kingdom of God.

Act 6 – Jesus returns and God’s **restoration and renewal** is fully consummated in the arrival of the new heavens and earth.

### *Act 1 -- Creation*

The story of Act 1, the beginning of it all, begins simply enough. God creates everything there is – yes, everything. If it exists, God created it. And God pronounces it all *good*. All of it. Every corner, every last bit and particle – good.

And of all the creatures that God creates, one creature is made in God’s image – the humans. And God gives the humans the responsibility for (that’s what we mean by

#### Genesis – a book of beginnings

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the book of Genesis to the rest of the Bible. It opens with two creation stories, the first written from God’s perspective and the second from the humans’ perspective. What quickly follows is the story of the humans’ tragic decision to turn away from God seeking to be like gods themselves. We then get the story of Noah, a story of “uncreation” and a fresh start that proves little better than the first. Then, in Genesis 12, we are told how God chose a lone husband and wife, Abraham and Sarah, with whom God made a covenant that all the families of the earth would be blessed through them. As the rest of the 50-chapter book unfolds, we see God’s redemptive work moving forward through Abraham and Sarah’s descendents.

“stewardship” or “dominion”) for God’s good creation (Gen 1:26).

We learn further, that this good God creates a beautiful place for the humans, where they can live and work and love. In beautifully evocative imagery, we’re told that God comes to walk with them in the evenings. There is even a tree in the garden from which the humans will eat so they will live in eternity with God. The humans are free to enjoy God, one another, and this garden with one exception. There is one tree from which they are not to eat. If they do, God tells them, they will die, not live.

That’s the big picture. God creates the cosmos and everything in it, including you and me. And it is all good. When the curtain closes on the first act, there is nothing but hope and anticipation of the glories to come. But soon, a dark shadow falls across the stage.

### *Act 2 -- Rebellion*

One thing. Just one thing that they are supposed to leave untouched. But they can’t. A serpent approaches Eve and tells her what she most what wants to hear, that by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she can know what God knows; i.e. she can be like a god herself. Who among us could resist such a promise? So Eve eats the fruit and then Adam does the same . . . and it all begins to plunge into ruin.

This act of rebellion, doing the one thing God asked them not to do, tears everything apart. Instead of walking with God in the evening, they hide from God, for shame has been planted in the garden. They point the finger at each other when God asks them what they

---

<sup>1</sup> I first encountered this way of teaching the story in the work of N. T. Wright, who used the metaphor of a five act play with an epilogue. Later, Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen wrote a book, *The Drama of Scripture*, built on Wright’s structure, though they changed it to a six act play. They maintain a website of resources related to this telling of the story at [www.biblicaltheology.ca](http://www.biblicaltheology.ca).

have done. The relationships have been ripped apart; they are estranged from God and from each other.

And so God sends them out of the garden. They will not be able to eat from the tree of life and live forever, instead, they will now die. Death comes as a consequence of their sin, their act of separating themselves from God. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, “For the

wages of sin is death . . .” (6:23).

### The Truth about Sin

I remember leaving a St. Andrew worship service some years ago at which I overheard a young woman say to her friend, “There was simply too much talk about sin today. That was such a downer.” Ok . . . those may not have been her exact words. I don’t think young people actually use the word “downer” anymore. But her point was clear to me.

Sin may be a “downer,” but if Christians are anything, we are realists. Rose-colored glasses have no place in our pockets. Sin is real and its presence explains a great deal about ourselves and our world. The problem when we begin to talk about sin is that it is commonly misunderstood.

We tend to think of sin only as the breaking of a rule, as if we might look back over our day and count the sins we committed. But this is not the best way to go about understanding sin.

Sin is whatever separates us from God. Sin is whatever diminishes the image of God in us all. Sin is whatever keeps us from functioning as God intended. Sin is our brokenness . . . and we are all broken . . . and we are often too blind to even know it.

Adam, Eve, you, and I were all created by God so that we might love God and one another. When we chase after false gods or dishonor our parents or covet our neighbor’s house or commit adultery, we are separated further and further from God. Adam and Eve, giving in to their pride and desiring to be like gods themselves, chose to follow their own way rather than God’s way. And the result was that when God came to walk with them in the evening, Adam actually hid from God! *Separation*. The biblical story is about God’s work to put back together what was torn apart that day in the garden.

In the biblical worldview, Adam and Eve’s choice is still with us. They ran from God, causing a tragic rip in the relationship between God and humanity. It is as if their bad choice passed on to us a flaw in our moral DNA, a flaw that we cannot fully heal ourselves, but must be healed by God. It is this flaw, shared by us all, that we can call Sin.

***All the rest of the Bible is the story of God’s work to put right what went so wrong in the Garden of Eden. It is the story of God’s rescue project.***

The story of the Fall,<sup>2</sup> as it is often called, is a sad story of human pride, imagining that we could be like God, that we could know what God knows. Indeed, the next major story in Genesis is Cain’s murder of his brother, Abel. It is a short walk from rebellion against God to envy and murder. And it goes downhill from there.

To grasp the larger story of Scripture, we have to see God’s larger purposes at work. Ever since the rebellion in the Garden, God has sought to rescue humanity and all of creation, to put right our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. Thus, for example, Jesus is asked for the most important teaching that God has given us. He responds that there are two: love God and love neighbor. In the Garden both were true – until Adam and Eve succumbed to pride and ate the forbidden fruit.

### *What about Noah?*

The story of Noah and the flood is the story of a rescue attempt. Basically, God “uncreates,” by means of the flood, and starts over with a new first family, that of Noah. Of course, pretty much as soon as they step off the ark, things go downhill; sin and shame is still with them. Soon, the humans build a tower to the heavens, the Tower of Babel. Why? So they can reach the heavens, just like the gods. Sound familiar? God knocks the tower down, scattering the people and their languages.

God’s rescue project will have to proceed on a different course. We might be tempted to think that God would just wave his magic wand and make all things right. But love, and God *is* love (1 John 4:16), is not a matter

<sup>2</sup>The label, the Fall, though commonly used by Christians is actually derived from Plato. It describes the time when immortal human souls fell from the world of the forms (true reality) to be imprisoned and encased in mortal bodies. Thus, death frees the immortal souls to return to the world of forms. In Plato, it is the place we are meant to be, our true home.

of magic but, instead, is about faithfulness, trust, kindness, and more that is *freely* given. Even God cannot force or bribe someone to love genuinely.

So, when the curtain falls at the end of Act 2, a deep darkness has fallen across the story. Not only are the humans separated from God, they have fallen into murder, envy, hatred, and all that plagues us still. To make matters worse, as Paul writes, all creation groans in labor pains – all creation awaits redemption.

Genesis 12 to Revelation is one story . . . the story of God's new way to put things right. God will come next to one man and one woman, Abram and Sarai, through whom God's work of salvation and redemption will move forward. Act 3 begins with their story and will take us all the way to Jesus!

### Dominion and Stewardship

In Genesis 1:26, God gives the humans "dominion" (in the NRSV) over all the creatures of the planet. The Hebrew word here, *radah*, is most often translated "rule," as in to rule over. It is the authority held by kings. So the question then is this: What sort of rulers are we to be over this planet? And the answer to that question is straightforward. We are to exercise this dominion as Jesus, the King of Kings, rules. Jesus is to be our model of what it means to "rule" over the creatures of the earth.

That is why Eugene Peterson gets it just right in his paraphrase of 1:26, when he uses the words "responsibility for" to render the Hebrew *radah*. As our king, Jesus has taken responsibility for us, as a shepherd for his sheep. Jesus showers us with care and with love. These are the images that ought to guide us as we exercise our responsibility for God's creation.

Stewardship is a word often used to convey this God-given responsibility for all that God has given us. In the NT, the image of humans being overseers or stewards of God's house is used ten times. But Leonard Sweet suggests that "steward" is probably not the best way to think about this. After all, he notes, who really uses "steward" anymore, other than to refer to someone you might meet on a cruise ship!

Instead, Sweet suggests that "trustee" is more meaningful for us and would be a better translation of the Greek. Many of us have some experience with trusts and the responsibilities held by trustees, even if it is simply some sort of family estate. When we think of ourselves as God's trustees, the message of the Bible becomes a little clearer. We are given dominion over God's creation, not so we can rule as a tough or selfish taskmaster, but so we can be effective trustees of God's wealth, managing it wisely, helping it to grow and flourish. God's creation is not ours, we don't own it; rather, we hold it in trust.

Likewise, we hold the Christian faith in trust and we are charged with guarding what has been entrusted to us (1 Tim. 6:20). God's people, the body of Christ, have received a treasure, a trust, given by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 1:14). This treasure is the truth about God and the proclamation that Jesus is Lord!

### Wednesday Night Bible Study with Scott Engle 6:45pm in Piro Hall

*Frogs, Freedom, and Faith: the story of the Exodus*

May 19: God gives the Law and comes to dwell with his people

=====

### *A Case for the Crusades?*

The current series in Scott's 11:00 class

Is it even possible that a case could be made *for* the crusades?

May 19: The Monks of War – the true story of the Knights Templar

=====

Also: every Tuesday, a lunchtime brownbag in-depth Bible study with Scott Engle from 11:45 – 1:00, Room 127. Just drop in!