

# Session 1

## God, creation and the first sin

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God reveals himself to us in the Bible. In this chapter we will look at what he says about himself: his mercy, love, holiness and judgement. We will look at what he says about his creation. Finally we shall consider the sad story of how sin came into the world.

### 1.1 God's character

God shows different characteristics at different times, just as we do. At times he shows his power, at other times his gentleness. In the flood he showed his punishment and in sending his son, his love. He deals with mankind in many different ways and describes himself to us because he loves us and wants us all to love him. The Bible shows that God is kind and merciful, but that he demands obedience and punishes rebellion.

#### Exodus 34: What is God like?

In Exodus 34, God described himself to Moses as having all of the following characteristics:

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How do we know which characteristics of God we should copy and which are to be left for him alone to exercise?

God is also holy. Holiness is being separated from evil. God wants us to be holy (1 Peter 1:15–16) as he is holy. He sent Jesus to show us what that meant; what being God-like meant in human life. Jesus shows the character of God as it should be seen in our lives.

**Question:** In the Lord's prayer Jesus tells us to call God our father. What similarities (and differences) are there between the character of God and the character shown by a human father?

God never changes (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). He is still the same today as he showed himself to be in the Bible. Some people have suggested that the God of the New Testament is different from the God of the Old Testament. But as the table below shows, each of the attributes of God is found in the Old and the New Testament.

The Bible also reveals that God is everywhere by his Spirit, that he is actively at work in the world and in our lives, and all our actions, words and thoughts are known to him.

A few characteristics of God		
Characteristic	Old Testament	New Testament
creator and sustainer	Genesis 1; Psalm 104:5–31	Acts 17:24–28
father	Deuteronomy 32:6	1 Corinthians 8:6
holy	Exodus 15:11	1 Peter 1:15–16
loving	Exodus 34:6	John 3:16
sinless	Deuteronomy 32:4	James 1:13
lawgiver and judge	Isaiah 33:22	James 4:12; Hebrews 12:23
supreme	Isaiah 43:10	1 Timothy 2:5
eternal	Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 40:28	1 Timothy 6:15–16
angered by sin	2 Chronicles 24:18	Romans 1:18
forgiving/justifying	Exodus 34:7; Isaiah 43:25	Romans 8:33
jealous	Exodus 20:5	1 Corinthians 10:21–22
all knowing	Isaiah 44:6–8; 46:10	1 John 3:20
present everywhere	Psalm 139:7–12	Acts 17:24–28
hears prayer	Psalm 65:2	Matthew 6:6
gives and keeps promises	Joshua 21:45; 23:15–16	Acts 13:32–33
all powerful	Isaiah 45:24–28; Jeremiah 27:5; 32:17,27	Luke 1:37

## 1.2 God is one

In opposition to the polytheistic nations around them, the Israelites expressed their belief in the unity of God. God's word explains that he is the Father of all.

... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.  
(Ephesians 4:5–6)

Jesus is described as the mediator between God and man, specifically referring to Jesus as a man.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men,  
the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

The Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God, is his invisible power or energy. It is by this spirit that heaven and earth have been made and preserved. God and his Spirit cannot be separated.

### 1.3 God's purpose

God's purpose is expressed in its simplest form:

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of  
the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14)

This means the world filled with people reflecting God's character. This will happen during the kingdom of God on earth.

God is calling men and women now for this purpose—to reflect his character. Later we shall see how Jesus' purpose on earth was to reflect God's character and by doing this, set an example for people to follow.

### 1.4 The creation

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

With these majestic words, Genesis begins the account of the creation. We are told in simple language that God created the universe and all kinds of plants and animals in an orderly way, with the last of his creations being human beings.

#### Genesis 1: six days of creation

Read Genesis 1. Then, without using your Bibles, answer the following questions.

1. What was the earth like before the first day of creation?
2. Is it said concerning every day that "God saw that it was good"?
3. What is the earth said to have first brought forth?
4. How could the sun, moon and stars be created on the fourth day, yet there be evenings and mornings from the first day?
5. Is Eve mentioned?
6. What food was assigned to man?
7. Over what part of creation did man have dominion?

Check the answers in your Bibles.

**Some passages supporting creation**

Genesis	1:1,7,16,21,25, 27,31; 2:1-4,9, 22; 3:1; 5:1-2; 6:7; 7:4; 9:6	Proverbs	104:2,30; 136:5; 148:5 3:19; 8:27	Mark	13:19
Exodus	20:11; 31:17	Ecclesiastes	3:11	John	1:3,10
Deuteronomy	4:32	Isaiah	40:26; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1,7; 45:8,12,18; 48:13; 65:17	Acts	4:24
2 Kings	19:15	Jeremiah	10:12	Romans	1:20,25
1 Chronicles	16:26	Jonah	1:9	1 Corinthians	11:9
2 Chronicles	2:12	Malachi	2:10	Ephesians	3:9
Nehemiah	9:6	Matthew	19:4	Colossians	1:16
Job	9:8; 26:13			1 Timothy	4:3
Psalms	8:3; 33:6; 96:5; 102:25;			Hebrews	1:2,10
				2 Peter	3:5
				Revelation	4:11; 10:6

**What about evolution?**

The current scientific explanation for the various forms of life is gradual evolution through random mutations and natural selection. In contrast, the Bible reveals that God created each kind of animal and plant—he did not just let them happen through natural processes which he had set in place.

There are not only biblical objections to evolution—there are also many scientific objections to the theory.

- Many parts of living things are so complex, they could not have come about through a process of gradual change. They must have been designed to function as they do. The eye is an example of something which could not work without all of its parts interacting with each other. In his wisdom, God has designed a marvellous organ by which we can see.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.  
(Psalm 139:14)
- If evolution was true, there would have been many intermediate species, whereas the fossil record shows no such gradual changes between species. In other words, there are many “missing links”.

These scientific objections have led some scientists to reject evolution and believe the Bible account. However, many stick to a belief in evolution because the alternative of creation is unacceptable to them. British scientist Sir Arthur Keith said:

“Evolution is unproved and unprovable. We believe it only because the only alternative is special creation and that is unthinkable.”

### What Jesus believed

Jesus believed that Old Testament events actually happened and that they were not myths or folk tales.

- God made Adam and Eve. Matthew 19:3–4; Mark 13:19
- Adam was a literal man, not a myth. Luke 3:38
- Noah and the flood. Matthew 24:37–39
- The first murder (Cain murdered Abel). Matthew 23:35
- Lot and his wife. Luke 17:28–29
- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Luke 17:32
- Marriage was a God given institution which started in Eden. Matthew 19:5

### The witness of creation

God's creation is magnificent. We only have to look at some of the natural beauty in the world to see his handiwork.

How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small. (Psalm 104:24–25)

The heavens are described as “speaking” to us of God's glory:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (Psalm 19:1–4)

God's power is so clearly seen in his creation, that Paul described it as sufficient evidence for people to believe in him:

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

### When did creation occur?

When God said “In the beginning...”, he did not tell us when this beginning was, nor are we told what there was before this beginning. However, there is sufficient information in the rest of Scripture for us to calculate (very approximately) the date Adam was created. Using the genealogies listed in Genesis chapters 5 and 11, we can work out how many years there were between Adam and Abraham—approximately 2000. Abraham is normally dated at

about 2000 BC, which places Adam at about 4000 BC.

On the other hand, scientists looking at the age of the earth and the fossils it contains believe the earth is about 4.5 billion years old and that life in some form has existed on the earth for several hundred million years. One of the difficulties we have in understanding Genesis 1 is the need to reconcile these ages with the time the Bible suggests Adam was created (see the box below).

### Interpreting Genesis 1

There have been many attempts to reconcile Genesis 1 with scientific evidence for life on earth for millions of years. Some of the explanations are listed below.

- 1. Scientists are wrong.**  
Those who hold this view argue that scientists incorrectly interpret the evidence for an old earth. Instead, they say that the universe is only about 6000 years old.
- 2. Days covered a long period of time**  
This view is that the days were longer than 24 hours or were interspersed with long periods of time.
- 3. The appearance of age**  
It is sometimes argued that, just as Adam was created a mature man, the universe was made to look old when it was formed.
- 4. A recreation**  
It is suggested that the universe was created long ago (Gen 1:1), but that God wiped the slate clean so the earth was "without form and void" (Gen 1:2) and began afresh with the creation described in Gen 1:3–31.
- 5. Days of revelation**  
This interpretation holds that Genesis 1 describes a seven day vision seen by Moses or some earlier prophet and that creation itself took place over a much longer period.
- 6. Days of divine command**  
The days, according to this interpretation, are literal consecutive days on which God said what would be created. Then, over the ensuing hundreds of millions of years, what God had decreed was slowly created.
- 7. A drama**  
Some people hold that Genesis 1 is a dramatic presentation of what actually took place. Genesis takes a complex series of events and presents them as a drama in the compressed time period of six days.

### The Seventh Day

God completed his work of creating in six days and on the seventh day he "rested". The Hebrew word translated *rested* is *shabat*, from which the word "Sabbath" comes. God set apart the seventh day and blessed it.

## 1.5 Adam and Eve

### Genesis 2–3: The Garden of Eden

Read Genesis 2:4–3:24.

1. Can you identify the location of Eden from the details given?
2. What does “the knowledge of good and evil” mean?
3. What steps led to the first sin? Do our own temptations follow a similar pattern?
4. Why do you think God gave the rule to Adam? Do any verses support your answer?
5. Was there only one rule given to Adam and Eve?
6. Did God forgive Adam and Eve? Do any verses tell us?
7. God said that Adam and Eve would die when they ate the fruit (2:17). Yet they didn't die until many years later. How can you explain this?

God made Adam of the “dust of the ground” and he made Eve from a rib he took out of Adam. There are several points worth noting about this creation of Adam and Eve:

Genesis 2:7

Genesis 2:21–22

1. Adam was made from the earth. Because of his later sin, he was condemned to die, and in death, returned to the ground.
2. God breathed into Adam the “breath of life”. It is this breath of life which keeps us all alive, including animals and birds..
3. Eve was made from Adam, not from the earth, and she was presented by God to Adam as a companion and wife.

Genesis 3:19

Genesis 2:7

e.g., Job 33:4, Genesis 7:15,22, Psalm 104:29

Genesis 2:23

### The Garden of Eden and God's law

God creates people, he provides for them, he blesses them, he guides them—just as we do for our own children. But there is one thing he will not do, and that is to force people to love and obey him. He gives every man and woman the freedom of choice to obey him, or not to obey him.

Adam and Eve were the first to experience this freedom of choice. God wanted to see how they would respond to that choice and told them,

You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die. (Genesis 2:16–17).

The choice was theirs—to obey God or not. They chose to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thus disobeying

God, and, as God had warned them, the penalty was death. From the day of their sin, they became dying persons. This event of disobedience and its consequences is given in detail in Genesis 3:1–24.

It should be noted that Eve was tempted by a snake, who spoke to her and told her she would not die if she ate of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:1–5). Eve believed the snake and ate of the fruit of the tree. She went further. She gave some to Adam, and he ate (Genesis 3:6). So Adam also sinned. Both, therefore, disobeyed God when they were tempted.

**Question:** Was the serpent a normal snake? Did it sin?

The moment they had eaten, they knew they were different. For the first time, they were conscious of their nakedness. They tried to overcome their feelings of guilt by sewing leaves together to cover up their nakedness (Genesis 3:7).

God found them hiding from him in the garden and he asked them what they had done, and they confessed that they had eaten of the forbidden fruit. God had warned them that if they chose to eat of the fruit they would be punished. Adam and Eve and the snake were all punished.

## 1.6 Judgement, punishment and hope

The snake was cursed “above all the livestock and all the wild animals” and sentenced to crawl on its belly and eat dust for the rest of its life.

Genesis 3:14

Eve was punished: “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

Genesis 3:16

Adam was punished: “Cursed is the ground because of you “. He was told that he must work and toil for the rest of his life to produce food for his family. God told him he would work and eat bread “until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Genesis 3:17–19

### A new covering

God provided “garments of skins” to clothe Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). To do this, animals had to be killed to obtain the skins. Sin therefore resulted in innocent animals being put to death so their skins could be used to cover man’s nakedness, born of sin. This foreshadowed the death of Jesus as “the slain lamb” (Revelation 13:8) to provide a covering for all men and women.



### **The effects of the first sin**

Adam was sent out of the Garden of Eden, to “till the ground” from which he was taken (Genesis 3:23). He and Eve were to struggle with suffering and toil for the rest of their lives and much trouble for their family lay ahead.

The sin of Adam and Eve has had direct and far reaching repercussions right up to today. Four thousand years after Adam, the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to Rome:

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. . . (Romans 5:12).

### **The promise of hope**

God did not leave Adam and Eve without hope of ever escaping the position they had put themselves into. He made a remarkable promise concerning the snake and Eve:

And I will put enmity between you [the snake] and the woman [Eve], and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

The antagonism between people and snakes is used to symbolise the struggle between Jesus and sin. This verse is a prophecy of Jesus Christ who was to be the seed of a woman (Mary) and his victory against sin (represented by the snake). He delivered a fatal blow to sin when he died, but he had his own “heel” bruised.

### **Homework**

1. The basis of God’s purpose is his promise to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory. What does this mean?
2. How can God be both “severe” and “merciful”?
3. Adam and Eve became conscious of something immediately after they had eaten of the forbidden fruit? What was it and what did they do about this new awareness?
4. Who was “the seed of the woman”? (Genesis 3:15)
5. What was the punishment of Adam and Eve because of their sin?
6. What was the difference between coverings of leaves and covering of skins for Adam and Eve?
7. How does a covering of skins point forward to Jesus?