

THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

ACT 1: CREATION

“In the beginning, an empty space. A word breaks the silence, bespeaks a universe; the world dawns. More words; nondescript space acquires shape; becomes a place for forms emerging from the dust. The stage is set—ACTION!” Kevin Vanhoozer

“The universe is the work of immeasurable brilliance, crafted with love and grace, and inhabited by the presence of the Creator, whose Word made the world and whose world sings of his glory, from the smallest blade of grace to the aurora borealis. Creation was made out of the overflow of God’s own effusive and loving being, a reflection of the way the persons of the Trinity live in harmony, love, and community with one another. And we are invited to join him in his song.” Mike Cosper

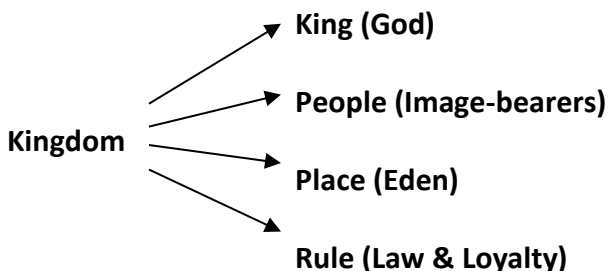
GENESIS 1–2 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who is the first character on the scene? Who is the second character(s) on the scene? What’s significant about who shows up in the story in what order?
- What are some of the main themes, images, and truths you notice in Genesis 1–2?
- If you had to summarize the author’s main point(s) in two sentences, what would it be?
- If Creation is part of humanity’s “origin story,” what adjectives would you use to describe human beings at this point (being)? What are some verbs of what we are called to do (doing)?
- What are some things you think the author wanted to really emphasize based on what is said and how it is said? What are some things the author doesn’t seem to answer that surprises you?

KINGS AND KINGDOMS (GEN. 1–2)

The story of the Bible is about a King (God) and his kingdom. The kingdom of God is where God’s people live in God’s place under God’s rule.

Genesis 1-2 is about the King (God) making a place (Eden) to dwell among His people (Adam & Eve), where they enjoy Him (worship & loyalty) and reflect Him together (image & mission).



- King—God: God’s Glory Goes Public (Genesis 1:1-2:5)
- People—Man: God’s Image-Bearer (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:4-25)
- Place—Eden: God’s Place with and for Man (Genesis 2:5-15)
- Rule (Kingdom Life): God’s Plans for His People (Genesis 2:15-25)
 - The King offers: Law. Protection. Blessing.
 - The King requires: Loyalty. Fruitfulness. Faithfulness.

1. The King (God): God's Glory Goes Public (Gen. 1:1–2:5)

“As soon as we acknowledge God to be the supreme Architect, who has erected the beautiful fabric of the universe, our minds must necessarily be ravished with wonder at his infinite goodness, wisdom, and power.” John Calvin

The opening chapters of the Bible (Gen. 1–2) introduce us to the main character and author of the Story. Though it's easy to read Genesis with a focus on what questions we want answered or what it tells us about humanity, the spotlight in Act 1: Creation is on God. It reveals a number of things about God, some of them are subtle or in seed form (such as the plural “our image”) while others are more straightforward (God makes all things). Here are a few things we notice, and there is much more.

- God exists independently of creation, is eternal, and all-powerful (1:1)
- God creates the universe out of nothing (ex nihilo); anything created is not God (1:1)
- God speaks and creates life through the authoritative power of His Word (1:3)
- God brings order into chaos, turns darkness into light, and brings life out of nothingness (1:1-23)
- God says everything made by Him was originally good (1:10, 31)
- God puts His glory, attributes, and character on display in creation (1:31), such as His wisdom, might, sovereignty, beauty, generosity, creativity, and orderliness.
- God dwells in fellowship among man as their King (3:8; 1:26-28)
- God shares or extends His dominion and care of His kingdom to mankind and directs and orders what is good, right, true, and beautiful for us (1:26-28; 2:15)
- God rests and delights in his creation (2:1-3)
- God is a personal, relational, triune being eternally existing in community (1:26; 3:8)
- God delights in beauty, diversity, pleasure, and goodness (Gen. 1:31; 2:9)
- God lovingly and generously fills the earth with good gifts for us and provides for all of our needs as a Father (Gen. 2:9, 16, 18)
- God possesses all authority and sovereignty as Maker, Designer, and King, having the right to command what we are to do, how to enjoy or use things properly, and what is right, good, and true (1:26-28; 2:15-16).

Bible Project video on Genesis 1: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/genesis-1/> (7 minutes)

2. Man (People): God's Image-Bearer (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:4-25)

"The glory of God is a human being fully alive; and to be alive consists in beholding God." Irenaeus

"Thus humans may be said to have a reflexive identity. In some sense they find meaning outside themselves by virtue of what they reflect." Richard Lints

A four-part simplified summary of what it means to be an "image-bearer."¹

- We are creatures.
 - Creatures depend on their Creator.
 - Creatures obey, submit to, and trust in their Creator.
 - Creatures glorify or worship their Creator.
- We are relational.
 - We're created to know, love, and be in communion with God.
 - We're created for communities where we belong and experience God through others.
 - We're created for healthy relationships of mutual serving and love so as to bring about one another's joy and good.
- We are ambassadors.
 - Ambassadors reflect the King and the kingdom wherever they go.
 - Ambassadors represent the values, character, beliefs, and priorities of their King.
 - Ambassadors work to expand the interests and glory of the King/kingdom.
- We are moral.
 - Moral persons reflect the attributes God has communicated to us (communicable attributes).
 - Moral persons can make decisions consistent with values rather than impulses.
 - Moral persons can understand the difference between right and wrong.

"Because you are made in God's image, you exist to reflect and represent Him on this earth. Because you are made in God's image, you are made to proclaim what He is like by doing what He does. Because you are made in God's image, you are made for glory." Hannah Anderson

The image of God and our role as relating to (knowing), reflecting (imaging), and representing (likeness) our King as we rule on his behalf in his kingdom.

"Man is the divine image. As servant king and son of God, mankind will mediate God's rule to the creation in the context of a covenant relationship with God on the one hand and the earth on the other. Hence the concept of the kingdom of God is found on the first page of Scripture." Stephen Wellum & Peter Gentry

If Genesis 1–2 is the beginning of a Story with "the kingdom of God" as one of the key threads, then right away we see these aspects of kingdom. God is the King. Mankind—men and women working together—are the mini kings and queens, or the ambassadors of the King. The kingdom begins in Eden, but it's meant to expand so the whole earth becomes a place where God's righteous and good kingdom expands and causes everything in it to flourish like it's designed (Gen. 1:26-28; Hab. 2:14). And the rule of the kingdom, the way of life in the kingdom, is meant to be a life lived under the authority of God with all our actions and attitudes reflecting the

¹ See "[What Does It Mean to be An Image-Bearer?](http://indycrowe.com/What-Does-It-Mean-to-be-An-Image-Bearer/)" at indycrowe.com

generosity, love, kindness, righteousness, justice, and goodness of the King. Sons and daughters act as stewards. We are God's royal representatives.

Some of what Act 1: Creation (Gen. 1–2) teaches us about humanity.

- God created Man originally good and without sin, shame, or guilt.
- God fashioned Adam (male) and Eve (female) in his likeness, or image.
- God commissioned Man to fill the earth, be fruitful, and exercise dominion that reflects him.
- God creates man for friendship and love, wanting to be our God and Father, with us being his people and sons and daughters.
- Man exists under God's authority and rule, which protects and serves Man rather than hindering Man.
- Man is a relational, communal being rather than an independent, self-sufficient one.
- Man can only find and experience the fullness of identity and purpose through the knowledge of God and by walking in the good and wise designs of God.
- Mankind is one race and come from two original parents despite all our differences.
- Men and women were designed to be unique, interdependent, equal in value, and complementary.
- God gave the covenant of marriage—between a man and woman—as a gift for humans.
- Man was made to be guardians & gardeners: protecting, cultivating, and nurturing creation.
- Mankind was designed to be a reflexive creature, reflecting what they revere most. This design is meant to make us fully alive as we reflect God.

Resources

- [“Image of God”](#) video from Bibleproject.com
- *Made for More* by Hannah Anderson
- *Imago Dei* study by Mike Cosper

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON GOD (KING) AND HUMANITY (PEOPLE)

1. What one attribute, act, or characteristic about God stands out to you most from Gen. 1-2?
2. What are some of the ways we see God's love, generosity, kindness, creativity, and even his desire for our joy through the way he designed the world with both provision and pleasure, including pleasures in things we taste, smell, see, touch, or hear?
3. If this passage helps us understand our fundamental identity as image-bearers of God, what does it teach you about who you are (identity) and why you exist (mission or purpose)? How do you live out this calling in life, whether in big or small ways?
4. What are some of your main roles, relationships, and assignments in life right now? What would it look like for you to better reflect God (his attributes, heart, character, and desires) and his kingdom through your life?
5. How does the *Imago Dei* (“image of God”) provide our biblical rationale for the value and equality of all human beings? How has or how might the doctrine of the Imago Dei affect how we view, value, and treat people? What are ways we can apply this today, both with “issues” related to care of people but also with others we interact with regularly?
6. What stands out to you about humanity from Genesis 1–2?

3. Eden: God's Place with and for Man (Genesis 2:5-15)

"The garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him. Many of the features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple. These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary." John Walton

If the kingdom of God is "God's people in God's place under God's rule, blessing, and presence" then the Garden of Eden is this place at Creation.

Eden is a garden, but it seems to picture a garden-city-temple-home.

- **Temple:** God dwells there among his people and they worship God.
- **City:** there is work to be done, civilization to be developed, resources to steward, humans living in communities, and a culture in existence.
- **Garden,** like a royal garden, it is a place of beauty, refreshment, reflection, joy, bounty, fellowship, and pleasure that we both cultivate and enjoy.
- **Home,** a refreshing place of joy and fellowship where lives together with his sons and daughters. It is a place of belonging, friendship, and rest.

1) God dwells in a place with his priestly people (Eden as temple & home)

"Genesis 2:8–17 portrays the first man as a kind of priest in the garden sanctuary. In terms of literary structure, 2:8a describes the creation of the garden and 2:8b the placing of the man there. In what follows, 2:9–15 elaborates on 2:8a [the place] and 2:16–17 elaborates on 2:8b [the priest]." Peter Gentry

Derek Rishmawy summarizes 9 reasons G. K. Beale gives for why Eden is the first temple.²

1. In the later OT the Temple was the place of God's special presence where he made himself known and felt to Israel. That is exactly how his walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden is depicted. (Gen. 3:8)
2. Adam is placed in the garden to "cultivate (*abad*)" and "keep (*samar*)" it (Gen 2:15). The same two words are translated elsewhere "serve" and "guard", and when they appear together, they are either referring to Israelites serving or obeying God's word, or more usually, to the job of the priest in guarding and keeping the Temple. (Num. 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 1 Chron. 23:32) Elsewhere Adam is portrayed dressed in the clothes of the high priest, functioning as a high priest. (Ezek 28:11-19; see Beale, pg. 618 on this for more argumentation.)
3. The tree of life served as a model for the lampstand, which was clearly shaped as a tree, in the Temple.
4. Israel's later Temple was made with wood carvings of flowers, palm trees, etc. meant to recall Eden's garden brilliance (1 Kings 6:18, 29, 32, 35); pomegranates were also placed at the bottom of the two stone pillars in the Temple. (7:18-20)
5. The entrance to the Temple was to the east, on a mountain facing Zion (Ex. 15:17), just as the end-time temple prophesied in Ezekiel is (40:2, 6; 43:12). Well, turns out the entrance to Eden was from the East (Gen. 3:24) and in some places pictured as being on a mountain. (Ezek. 28:14, 16)
6. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the ark of the covenant both were accessed or touched only on pain of death. Also, both were sources of wisdom.
7. Just as a river flowed out of Eden (Gen 2:10), so a river is supposed to flow out of the End-time Temple (Ezek 47:1-12; Rev. 21:1-2)
8. This one requires some serious argument so I suggest you consult Beale directly here (pg. 620-621), but just as there was a tripartite sacred structure to the Temple, Beale discerns a tripartite structure to creation with Eden standing at the center as a Holy of Holies. [Eden-garden-outer world // holy of holies-holy place-outer court]

² Derek Rishmawy, "[9 Reasons The Garden of Eden Was a Temple](#)" at [derekzrismawy.com](#), summarizing G. K. Beale in *New Testament Biblical Theology* (pages 617-621).

9. Ezekiel 28:13-14 refers the Eden as “the holy mountain of God” which everywhere else in the OT is Temple and Tabernacle language.

God creates Eden as a temple where he dwells among his people. His people act as priests, worshipping God and acting on God’s behalf, serving and keeping the temple. It is a place where God offers life, refreshment, and relationship. The royal priests are called to expand the temple as they go, multiply, and bear God’s image.

Resources on Eden as God’s temple of presence with his people (priests)

- See chapter 1 (“From sacred garden to holy city” in *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* by T. Desmond Alexander
- *God Dwells Among Us* by G. K. Beale
- “[Royal Priests of Eden](#)” at bibleproject.com
- “[The Garden of Eden: A Biblical-Theological Framework](#)” at davidschrock.com

2) God gives creation for purpose and pleasure. (Eden as royal garden)

“[Creation] is a speech from God to humanity... The creation, in its entirety, is eloquent; sin is the only dissonance in its song.” Herman Bavinck

“The universe ... is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God” Belgic Confession

“Outdoors we are confronted everywhere with wonders; we see that the miraculous is not extraordinary but the common mode of existence.” Wendell Berry

God gives creation to Man to provide for our needs and as a gift for our joy. Creation is a revelation of God, showing us his wonder, wisdom, power, glory, order, creativity, and kindness (Ps. 19). There are countless illustrations of God and of God’s will and design embedded into creation itself (Matt. 6:25-34). The resources and blessings of creation are how God acts as a good and loving King and Father who provides what we truly need but also fills our world with things that offer pleasure and joy (Gen. 2:9). Just as God sits back and finds rest, delight, and contentment in these good things on the seventh day, he intends for us to live as dependent children who receive all things from God, trust in him, and find joy and peace in his good gifts. God’s plan for us is not a “spiritual” (meaning non-physical or non-material) disembodied existence in heaven but a physical/bodily, existence on Earth.

“When the gospel of Jesus Christ frees us to see and savor the glory of God above all things, the way is opened for us to experience seamless joy in God and his gifts. We are able to see every gift as a beam from the sun of God’s glory. Every joy in the beam runs up to the fountain of light and ends there. No created thing becomes a rival but only a revelation of God.” John Piper

“We are a culture adrift in a ship of boredom. What’s tragic is that we are actually in this ship while we are floating in a sea of wonder...Boredom begets a loss of a sense of wonder. Our loss of a sense of wonder begets a loss of appreciation. And our loss of appreciation begets a loss of gratitude—quite a downward spiral....Embracing the doctrine of creation is the antidote to boredom. When we realize that God made us, that God made everything, life is set in a whole new light. How can we yawn at what God made? When we acknowledge God as Creator of all things, we regain our sense of wonder, we regain our sense of appreciation, and we regain our sense of gratitude. We say thank you. We stop yawning through life.” Stephen Nichols

Genesis 1–2 suggests at least these things when it comes to the role of Eden or Creation.

- Eden is a place where God dwells with his people, granting presence, protection, provision, and personal fellowship or friendship.
- Eden is where God’s rule is to be carried out, seen, and felt for the good of the kingdom.
- God creates physical people to live in a physical place and live a physical, earthy life. This is a reminder that creation, matter, and the things of Earth are good things (by design).
- God shows himself as a good Father who provides and blesses his children, not only for the basic needs they have but with additional good gifts.
- God creates the earth (the land, plants, and environment) and its inhabitants both for mankind’s enjoyment and use, but also puts Man in a position of caring for, enjoying, stewarding, and cultivating these things.
- God gives Man work to do before the Fall, helping us see work, vocation, the cultivation of material and culture, and even recreation as good things.
- God says Creation is good, and the Sabbath day taken by God on day seven is in part a time of taking delight in and resting in his handiwork.
- God creates life—human, animal, plant—in such a way as to display the beauty of diversity. God doesn’t create one gender but two, and he doesn’t create one kind of animal or plant but countless varieties that display his beauty and glory in unique ways.
- Eden—the place where God’s people dwell with God and are faithful to God—is a place of safety, protection, and peace.
- Creation reveals the Creator. The design, order, complexity, and beauty of creation points to a good, wise, and powerful creator. God has put big and small pointers to himself in Creation so we might better know him.

RESOURCES

- “Riot and the Dance” videos and resources
- Answers in Genesis
- *Turning of Days* by Hannah Anderson; *Things of Earth* by Joe Rigney; *Enjoy* by Trillia Newbell; *God of All Things* by Andrew Wilson; *Eyes Wide Open* by Steve DeWitt.
- [“Resources for Parents on Creation,”](#) [“Study Creation to Learn About God,”](#) and [“Study Guide of Psalm 104”](#) (on creation) at [indycrowe.com](#)
- See “Creation Series” of videos at [bibleproject.com](#)
- See Psalm 8; 19:1-6; 86:8-10, 15; 104; Rom. 1:18-20; Job 38-39; Matt. 6:25-34.
- Songs like “This is My Father’s World,” “I Sing the Might Power of God,” “All Things Bright and Beautiful,” “God of All Creation,” “How Great is Our God.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can Creation—whether it’s nature, people, the created order, design, or beauty—help you better see, understand, and know God?
2. Based on what we know already in Genesis 1–2 about God’s good creation, what are right and wrong ways to relate to creation and nature?
3. Why do you think God rested on the seventh day? How does this relate to later commands for His people to rest? How do you follow God’s example of resting in your own life?

4. If the Garden in Eden is a temple of God's presence and Adam was placed there as the original priest (working and keeping), what might we learn from this about Man's purpose and mission?

4. Kingdom Life—Rule: God's Plans for His People (Genesis 1:28-31; 2:15-25)

"Rule" refers to the way of life in the kingdom, the laws, customs, and way of life embodied, encouraged, or enforced among the people. Rule can be good or bad, depending on who is ruling and how they are ruling. God's rule, the rule of a Father-King, is always for our good and always done in complete righteousness, justice, wisdom, power, and love.

The King offers: Law. Protection. Blessing. Presence.

The King requires: Loyalty. Fruitfulness. Worship.

Among the "rule" or way of life in the kingdom of Eden, we notice at least these things:

- 1) **Provision:** God's rule includes providing for the needs of his people and generously blessing them with many good gifts (2:9-17). This includes not just what our bodies need for health, but also what our spirits and hearts need for wholeness, joy, peace, and rest. As long as God is their King, they will never go without or need the provision of another.
- 2) **Security:** God provides a place for and gives authority to Man to guard and protect it (2:15). There will be protection and safety if Man lives under God's rule and enforces God's rule. Because God is righteous, just, and wise, his laws serve the people and protect the kingdom.
- 3) **Worship:** God designs Man to glorify him through worship and enjoyment (1:26-28). God is God, and the image-bearers are not God. The intimacy of friendship should not lead to confusion of authority, glory, or roles. Before sin, there's never not a time in Eden that Man is not worshipping, trusting in, and delighting in God. All of Creation that Man enjoys points them to their Creator.
- 4) **Faithfulness:** God designs Man to obey God in loyalty and faithfulness (1:26-28; 2:16). Because God is Maker, Father, and King—who does all things out of wisdom and for their good—there is no one else or no other king or kingdom that should receive their allegiance and loyalty. God knows what rule or way of life will be good for his whole kingdom, and so he calls his citizens to walk in the rule of life that leads to their good and the good of the whole kingdom.
- 5) **Work:** God designs Man to reflect him in purposeful and fruitful work, cultivation, and stewardship of all of creation (1:28-30; 2:5-15). Work, cultivation, service, and the stewardship of the resources, life, and provision given by God on Earth is inherently good, and part of their culture and community making as they spread Creation—whether land, animals, or plants—flourishes as Man cares for, cultivates, and rules it.
- 6) **Mission:** God designs Man to represent God through expanding his kingdom (1:26-28; 2:15). There is no higher calling and privilege than to know, reflect, and represent the God at the center of the entire universe, and to bring his good and glorious kingdom to the whole earth, a kingdom which brings wisdom, blessing, wholeness, joy, and protection as it expands.
- 7) **Relationships:** God designs Man to reveal God in relational unity and love (2:15-25). Man is made to be in relationship with God, and out of the overflow of this relationship can live out his mission as God's representative. But no individual does this alone. God creates both men and women as fully equal heirs of the king who fulfill his good purposes. As Man obeys God's command to multiply and spread, communities of God-exalting and God-following citizens flourish together under God's rule. In this kingdom, there is mutual trust, service, and love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the blessings and benefits of life in God's kingdom in Eden? What are some of the responsibilities, assignments, and requirements?
2. Why is it better that God "rules" Man as opposed to leaving Man to rule himself?
3. As you think about the aspects of life under God's rule, how do these help you make sense of what life today can be or is supposed to look like for us if we are living with and following God?
4. There are only seven things listed as aspects of the "rule" or way life in the kingdom of Eden, so what is missing? What would you add from Gen. 1-2 as aspects of their way of life?