

CLASS 2: *The Beginnings: YHWH and His Plan for Earth (Genesis 1-11)*

Jax Church OT Survey Series Fall 2023

Twelve Words to Know in Genesis 1-11

beginning	ruakh	tov	tselem	Elohim	sabbath
Eden	adam	ezer kenegdo	toledot	Nephilim	covenant

Genesis 1:26a Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule...”

Overview

- **Title:** Genesis [Greek *geneseōs*; Hebrew *bereshit*] means “beginning” or “origins.”
- **Author:** traditionally Moses (1400 BC), starting as oral tradition, written by later inspired editors.
- **Genre/Literary Style:** Narrative, Hebrew poetry (e.g., chiasms, metaphors), and genealogies.
- **Purpose:** Introduces Yahweh’s character and aims. Sets the background for Israel’s story.
- **The start of:** the world, humanity, sin, death, marriage, violence, nations, divine covenants.
- **Recommended Reading:** “Origins” by Jacoby & Copan; “Flood and Fury” by Matthew J. Lynch.

11 Accounts (Hebrew: *toledot*)

“This is the account of...”

1.	2:4-4:26	Heavens and the earth
2.	5:1-6:8	Family of Adam
3.	6:9-9:29	Noah
4.	10:1-11:9	Shem, Ham, and Japheth
5.	11:10-26	Shem (ancestor of Israel)
6.	11:27-25:11	Terah, father of Abraham
7.	25:12-18	Ishmael
8.	25:19-35:29	Isaac
9.	36:1-8	Esau
10.	36:9-37:1	Esau, 2nd account
11.	37:2-50:26	Jacob

Table from *Genesis* by Tremper Longman III

“Genesis is a theological treatise, not a science book. It describes the why, not how of creation.” [Steve Kinnard]

Using a Literary & Cultural Lens: Contrasting the creation story with Ancient Near Eastern myths.

Example: The *Enuma Elish* tells a Mesopotamian creation story of divine battles. In one case, Marduk slayed the sea goddess Tiamat, tearing her corpse apart to form earth. Humans in this story are made to serve the gods’ lives of leisure. By contrast, Genesis displays a peaceful creation process and dignifies humans.

Literary Structure of The Creation Story Genesis 1:1-2:3

First God Creates, then God Fills...

God Created	God Filled
Day One: (1:1-5). Light and Darkness. Day and Night.	Day Four: (1:14-19). Sun and Moon Govern Day and Night; Stars, Seasons, and Days.
Day Two: (1:6-8). Sky and Sea.	Day Five: (1:20-23). Birds and Sea Life.
Day Three: (1:9-13). Land and Plant Life.	Day Six: (1:24-31). Animals and Humans.
Day Seven: (2:1-3). Conclusion—God Rested. Sabbath.	

Table adapted from *Origins* by Jacoby, Copan

Survey of Genesis 1-2

God’s “goal” for humanity and creation, His aims for cosmic goodness

- **“Formless & void”** describes an uninhabitable, chaotic space needing forming and filling (1:2a).
- **The Ruakh (Spirit, air, wind) of God** hovers over the empty expanse, ready to bring God’s word to being (1:2b).

Tov: “[it was] good”—God says seven times of creation.

- Waters teem with life; God blesses the creatures—growing abundance! (1:20-23)
- **Eden** means “delight” or “paradise” and produces a magnificent river (2:10-14).
- Access to the Tree of Life (2:9).
- (1:31) Following the creation and tasking of humanity, God calls it “*very good*.”
- **Sabbath**—God *rests* after His creating work, setting an example for the Israelites (see Exodus 20:8-11).

Humanity is “adam”, the Hebrew for “human.” *What is humanity in God’s “goal” for creation?*

- God had breathed life into *adamah* (“ground” in 2:7).
- **tselem (“image”)** God creates man in his own image (1:26-28). *What does this mean?*
In the Ancient Near East, tselem were statues of deities or kings set up to establish their dominion. With creation as God’s kingdom, humans are images that extend His reign, charged with ruling the garden. The verbs in 2:15 echo the duties of priests guarding and managing the sacred space of the Tabernacle.
- **Elohim**—“Let **us** make man in our image”—who is the “us”? The word Elohim is used as a plural here to indicate the “divine council”, an assembly of divine beings believed to assist God in governing the world and communicating with humanity. Elohim is used in Genesis 1, but from Genesis 2:4, through the remainder of chapter two, He is called the compound name Yahweh-Elohim [the LORD God].
- **Ezer kenegdo**—The woman is described as a “fit partner” or “suitable helper.”
Same word is used to describe God as a “help” (Dt. 33:29, Ps. 33:20).
Genesis 2:18 recognizes humans as communal and highlights the partnership of man and woman.
- **Naked & unashamed** (2:25) describes the innocence, vulnerability, and trust among humans before sin.

Survey of Genesis 3-11

Displays the “mess” creation cascades into, but sets the stage for the unfolding of God’s “plan”

- **Genesis 3.** The snake cunningly sows distrust in God’s character, enticing humans to become like God, deciding good and evil for themselves. “Seeing” and “taking” of the fruit has consequences for the snake, woman, man, and land, which are *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. Exile from Eden means death, as they lose access to the tree of life (3:22), but God extends a grace (3:21).
- **Genesis 4.** Where there was peace prior to sin, now violence escalates from Cain to Lamech.
- **Genesis 5.** The account (*toledot*) of humans (adam) from Seth to Noah; a genealogy seeking God.
- **Genesis 6-9.** Nephilim, flood, Noah, the bow in the sky, curse of Ham/Canaan
 - Nephilim come from “sons of God” (most likely referring to divine beings in God’s council) who rebel against God’s cosmic order by “seeing” and “taking” (link to Genesis 3) human women as wives, producing these giants.
 - The Great Flood is the tragic climax of creation corrupting violence (6:10), as God effectively resets the earth to start a “new creation” with Noah and the ark (compare Gen. 8-9 with Gen. 1).
 - Noah stands alone as one approved and chosen by God to be a partner for His purposes.
 - God sets a “bow” in the sky, pointed toward Himself as a sign of a **covenant** that establishes a committed relationship, in this case between God and the earth, creatures, Noah, and humanity.
 - Ham dishonors his father Noah at a vulnerable moment, resulting in a curse on his son Canaan.
- **Genesis 10.** Genealogy here focuses on nations’ origins. Ham’s line includes Egypt and Canaan.
- **Genesis 11:1-7.** The humans act out of pride, seeking to build a reputation by their own means as a monolithic city. God mixes the peoples’ language and scatters them, descriptive of a now diverse world.
- **Genesis 11:8-32.** Family lines of Abram backdrop God’s “plan” to reestablish his rule over creation through humanity for His glory.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does knowing humans, male and female, bear God’s image change our views of self and others?
2. What is “good” and who decides good vs. evil?
3. How does knowing sin impacts creation and the cosmos change our perspective on sin?