Session 1: from Genesis to the Tower of Babel

Bible Study in Plain English

By Bill Huebsch

Two stories, one creation. The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible. It’s opening chapters contain two different accounts about the creation of the world and human life. They complement each other and together form one story. Open your Bible to this first book and scan through it briefly.

God’s word: “Let there be...”

In the first creation story God creates out of nothing. God merely speaks, “Let there be light,” “let us make humans in our image” and all creation comes into being. God repeatedly calls Creation good. God saw only good. There is no point in this story where God created something and called it bad. In short, this story leads you to believe that creation is God’s original blessing for all of God’s children.

Read it and see! How good does God think creation is? Read the section from Genesis 1:1 through 2:4 to find out. Then pause for a moment and go back over the passage to mark each of the good things God made. Make a list of them in the writing space. How many did you find? Pretty amazing, isn’t it?

Write some notes

List the things God thinks are good.
What is this story telling you about God’s creation? What does it say about you, as one of the people created by God?

**God’s breath!**
In the second creation story, God starts by forming a human figure from the dust of the earth. Here, God is like a potter who lovingly forms humans from the very soil on which everyone now lives. Then God blew the breath of life into humans! The story goes on to present God as a sort of gardener, tenderly providing for the new creation. And finally, God seems to be a sort of match-maker, helping the male to find a partner from among the rest of creation.

How well did God do as a match-maker? Read Genesis 2:18-24 to find out! In your Bible, underline the word, “partner.” How does that describe the relationship that should exist between spouses?

**Sacred pause**
Spend a moment reflecting on this by writing a love note to someone in your life who is your “partner.”

God put the humans in the Garden of Paradise to care for it. The Hebrew word used in the text suggests that humans are to be caretakers of the earth along with God, not to recklessly abuse the earth. As long as people do that, as long as people honor God’s will for human life and treat the earth and others with love, then all can still live in paradise. Paradise, we could say, is living in union with God and in harmony with other people.

Pause for a moment and talk about this: do you live in paradise now in your life today?

**Note this**
It’s important to remember that the story of creation is a faith story, not a fact story. It’s not a scientific explanation of the cellular and genetic development of the earth and all that lives on it. That explanation is still unfolding today. But what these stories in Genesis do convey is the truth that God is the source and creator of everything.
Describe what the Bible means by “paradise.” How would we live together if we could build paradise today?

The First Sin.
One very important biblical idea of sin means, literally, “missing the target.” This biblical idea for sin refers to an archer whose arrow is bent. A bent arrow cannot hit its target. Sometimes humans don’t follow the way of life God plans for them. Sometimes humans miss the target. The Book of Genesis tells the story of how Adam and Eve missed the target like this.

The setup.
One day the cunning serpent said to the woman: Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees of the garden? It was a crazy ploy on the serpent’s part, but it worked. Eve explained that, of course, they could eat the fruit of the trees, all except for the one in the middle of the garden. “If we eat the fruit of that one,” she said, “or even touch it, we will die.”

What did the serpent tell Eve to tempt her? Read Genesis 3:4-5 to find out! Repeat what the serpent said in your own words. Then write the actual words in the writing space.

What false promise did “the serpent” make? List some of them in this space.
The fall.
Could it be true? The fruit looked good to eat, and her curiosity was killing her! So Eve took a bite of the fruit and gave it to her husband. He ate some, too.

What happened next? Read Genesis 3:7 to find out! In the white space just below, write a one word response to this.

Too much knowledge.
Everything changed. They were supposed to understand good and evil. But this was confusing. Suddenly, they were ashamed of their nakedness, so they covered themselves. They were afraid of what God would say, so they hid. This was more than knowing about evil; this was the real thing!

How did God find them after they had sinned? Read Genesis 3:8-10 to find out!

What goes on in your own heart after you have violated someone’s trust? Who did Adam blame? Who did Eve blame? Who was really to blame? Write your answer in the writing space below:

Write some notes
Why do we humans wander away from being our own true selves and try to be someone or something else? Why do we often wish we could be something or someone we aren’t meant to be?
The outcome.
From then on, Adam and Eve had to work and sweat to get food from the soil. They would know pain. They would get sick. And, just as God had warned, they would die. The serpent had lied.

What is the main point of this story? How do you feel the effects of this story in your own life? How do you see its effects in today’s world? What can you do about it?

Ripples of Sin.
Adam and Eve had sinned, but God did not abandon them. God made garments to clothe the man and woman. Adam and Eve began to have children and to work for their food and shelter. But the main thing is that Adam and Eve lost their intimate closeness with God. Throughout history, humans of every race and tribe have experienced an inborn hunger for reunion with God.

What were the names of their first two children? Read Genesis 4:1-2 to find out! Write their names in the small white space just below.

Cain and Abel.
Cain, their firstborn, became jealous of his brother Abel. Both had made offerings to God. Cain offered grain from his field, while Abel offered one of the finest lambs of his flock. God accepted Abel’s offering but not Cain’s, because Cain’s heart was not completely committed to God. Cain resented this so much that he planned to murder Abel. God tried to change Cain’s mind: “Sin is lurking at the door,” God told him. “Its desire is for you, but you must master it.” (Genesis 4:7). God was trying to tell Cain he could reject the temptation. Cain had free will to do that.

What did Cain do? Read Genesis 4:8 to find out. Tell this story aloud, even if you’re all alone right now. Speak the words slowly and deliberately. Let them sink into your heart and mind.
More consequences.
As Adam and Eve had been banished from the garden, Cain was now banished from the soil. Nothing more would grow for him, so he became a restless wanderer on the earth.

When God asked Cain about his brother, what did Cain say? Read Genesis 4:9 to find out. Write down Cain’s answer in the white space below.

Sacred pause!
Think for a few minutes about the gift of free will. How is it a good thing? How is it also a terrible thing? Recall a time when you overcame temptation, when you were able to master the “demon lurking at the door.”

What does it mean for you to be your brother’s or sister’s “keeper?” How is this story reflected in the events of today’s world?

Flood Warning.
As the ripples of sin spread, they touched all of humanity. The situation became very serious. From Adam and Eve to Cain and Abel. From Cain to others. The world became a place of danger and sin. God saw this and was distressed. Sin had grown from a ripple to a flood! The text of Scripture presents us with a wonderful, often-told allegory about God’s sadness and disappointment with how humans behaved.
In the story, God decided to make a new start with humans. God found one good man on the earth. The man’s name was Noah. What did God tell Noah to do? Read Genesis 6:14-22 to find out!

**Too Much Water.**
As the story goes, Noah and his sons built a huge boat in their back yard. The neighbors thought that Noah was just a little bit crazy because there was no body of water for miles around. But God had told Noah to build this boat to save the creatures because a great flood was coming. No sooner was the boat finished when the rain began to fall.

What happened to the family and their backyard boat? The rest of the story is told in Genesis 6-9. Read it front to back when you have time.

**Covenant with Noah.**
When the time came, Noah, his family, and the animals entered the ark. Heavy rain poured down for forty days and forty nights, until the entire earth was flooded. After the rains stopped, Noah sent a dove out to see if land was anywhere to be found. When the dove did not return, Noah knew it had found land and that the earth was beginning to dry. When Noah left the ark, God made a promise to him.

What is the promise God made with Noah. Read Genesis 9:8-17 to find out. What was the sign God gave Noah as a reminder of this covenant?

**Note this**
To this day, the rainbow is a sign of peace. In describing the covenant God made with Noah, the writer of Genesis used the word *covenant* seven times. Seven indicates that this is a *perfect* covenant that promises peace and mercy to all humankind.

**Sacred pause!**
A covenant is a solemn agreement between human beings or between God and human beings involving commitments or promises. *Sin* is the condition of being separated from God and the community. It is a deliberate thought, word, or deed that opposes the goodness or Law of God and *breaks the covenant*. Pause for a moment to make a list of the
covenants or promises you live with in your life. In what ways are you faithful to them - or in what ways are you not? Write this list in the writing space for future reference.

**Write some notes**

What are the promises you keep in your life? What vows or commitments have you made? Write them down and then share them with your group.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5.

**Talk it over together**

What are the signs that God is with us today? Who or what are the signs around us that give us hope that there will be peace, compassion, food for the hungry, and love in today’s world?

**Say what?**

Here’s a curious story. At this time, everyone on earth spoke the same language and the people decided to build a huge tower to keep it that way. Some of the people began to believe they no longer needed God. They believed they could live without him. But God felt they were getting too big for their britches!

What did God do next? Read Genesis 11: 5-9 to learn the rest of the story. Take a moment to think about this story in light of what happened at Pentecost when all were able to understand the disciples of Jesus in their own tongue.

**Conclude your study.**

Take a moment to tell each other what new insights into faith you gained in this study. Then conclude with a brief prayer of thanksgiving.