



Created in God's Image

Genesis 1–3

By Daniel J. Denk

We believe in the value and dignity of all people: created in God's image to live in love and holiness, but alienated from God and each other because of our sin and guilt, and justly subject to God's wrath.

This is a familiar passage of Scripture to many. Read [Genesis 1–3](#) through as a unit, using several readers, to see the big picture and the flow of the story. This foundational account of our origins tells the story that we as humans were designed for good, but damaged by evil. Try to take a fresh look at it. Notice the progression of events.

1. Look again at Genesis 1:1-26. Notice the sequence in the creation account and observe God's wisdom and power. What can you say about the creation of the first humans (v. 26)? What is the significance of humans coming as the final act of creation?

Leader's note: Try not to get sidetracked on the question of evolution and creation. We are taking the Genesis account at face value to look for the essential teaching, not to make a judgment on whether God completed his creative work in six days or guided a long process.

2. Now look specifically at the creation of the man and the woman (Genesis 1:26-31).
 - The creation account clearly states that humans were uniquely made in God's image and likeness. Why do you think God made two genders?
 - Much has been written on what it means for humans to be made in the image of God, as intelligent, moral, creative beings. What clues from the immediate passage (1:26-31) help us with this question? Make a list of activities and characteristics of the first humans that might help us understand what it means to be created in God's image.
 - Look at vv. 26, 28. What do you think is implied by the responsibility to be "co-rulers" (vice-regents) with God? Many refer to this as the Creation Mandate, or Cultural Mandate. Since God is clearly still the great King, Creator and Owner of the whole creation, what does it mean to rule under his leadership?
 - How does this understanding of being made in the image of God affect our respect for the dignity and value of all humans?
3. In chapter 2, how does the second account of the creation complement the account in chapter 1?

Leader's note: Some critical scholars have argued that Genesis 1 and 2 are completely independent and alternative accounts of creation. Different names for God are used -- Elohim in Genesis 1, Yahweh in Genesis 2. However, we can easily see Genesis 2 as a complementary account giving more detail about the creation of the man and woman. It also adds important details about God's covenant relationship with them (Yahweh is the covenant name for God).

4. As you look at Genesis 2:4-6, what differences do you see about the details of the creation of life? About the creation of the first man? What is suggested by the verbs “formed” and “breathed?”
5. Read Genesis 2:4-17. Describe the Garden of Eden in your own words, based on the information provided by these verses.
 - What is Adam’s role, or job, in the Garden? How does this relate to the earlier mandate to “rule and subdue” the earth (Genesis 1:28)?
 - What is the significance of the one prohibition given to the man (Genesis 2:17)? What further dimension does this condition add to life in the garden?
6. Read Genesis 2:18-25. What is the significance of the man naming the animals? What is the relationship between humans and the rest of the animal kingdom?
 - There was one thing that was “not good” in the original creation. Among all the creatures God made, none was a suitable helper, or partner, for the man. The creation of Eve seems to provide the solution for what Adam was lacking. He declares, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” What does this suggest about the nature of their relationship?
7. Genesis 3:1-24 records the account of the Fall and the introduction of the Serpent (or Satan, the Devil in [Rev. 20:2](#).) Trace the progress of the temptation (vv. 3:1-7). What is the appeal used by the Tempter? What is at the heart of the choice made by the first couple?
 - Notice the disastrous results of this terrible choice in the relationships between the humans and God, and between the man and the woman (8-13). How are these relationships changed?
 - Describe how God’s judgment creates changes for the serpent, the ground, the man and the woman.
 - In Genesis 2:17, God had warned, “You will surely die.” The serpent said, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Did they die? In the Bible there is both physical death and spiritual death, meaning separation from God. In what sense did Adam and Eve die? What is suggested by being driven outside the Garden of God, east of Eden, away from the Tree of Life (vv.23-24)?

Consider again the tremendous loss in the Fall of the first humans. Compare the quality of life in chapter 2 with life under sin and death in chapter 3.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- God’s summary verdict on all he had made is that “it is very good” (Genesis 1:31). Why do you think this comment is included? How should we respond to this?
- What can we conclude about the nature of human beings from this account of their origins (Genesis 1-3)?
 - How is the image of God still seen in us?

- We also see plenty of evidence of the conflicts, pain, frustration, and alienation among people and between people and God, their Maker. As humans, we have a sense that this is not the way it's supposed to be—that something is terribly wrong with this world? How does the Genesis account offer an explanation for these realities?
- When you consider your own heart and mind, how does the Genesis account offer an explanation of your thoughts and motives, both good and bad?

GOING DEEPER

- Consider [Genesis 9:6](#). After the flood, God re-established his covenant with Noah. How is the teaching about the image of God applied in this case? What are the implications for our understanding of the sanctity of human life? Human life is of unique value and is not to be disposed of cheaply or treated with contempt.
- [Genesis 2:18-25](#) is usually understood as God's establishment of the marriage covenant. Jesus refers back to these foundational verses in his teaching about marriage in [Matthew 19:4-6](#). How would you define marriage based on this passage? Notice the term "one flesh." What is implied by this description of marriage?
- Look closely at [Genesis 3:15](#). As part of the curse upon the serpent, God declares war (enmity) between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. There is an important cryptic prophecy in this verse. In this war, the serpent's seed will bruise the heel (a wound) of the woman's seed, but the woman's seed will bruise the head (fatal blow) of the serpent's seed. Notice the singular pronouns, "he" and "you." What might be meant by the "seed of the woman" (see also [Genesis 4:25](#), [Galatians 3:16](#), [4:4](#); [Revelation 12](#))?

Note: This verse is sometimes called the "Proto-gospel" (*protoevangelium*), meaning the first promise of salvation as part of God's plan of rescuing people from the Fall by Christ conquering Satan and sin and death on the cross.

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

[In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis](#), by Henri Blocher, InterVarsity Press 1984. This is an excellent treatment of Genesis 1-3 covering issues of science, the image of God, and covenant.

[The Message of Genesis 1-11](#), by David Atkinson, InterVarsity Press 1990. Genesis shows us how and why we are. This valuable resource is part of [The Bible Speaks Today Series](#).

["Enter Sin and Death."](#) This audio recording by Bob Fyall provides an overview of Genesis 1-2, with some in-depth treatment of the Fall in Genesis 3.