

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Telling the Old Testament
Story of God



SESSION 4

Primeval History and Patriarchs/Matriarchs

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Primeval History and Patriarchs/Matriarchs

SESSION OVERVIEW

Israel's Primeval History

Patriarchal/Matriarchal History

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- describe the significance of the literary patterns and thematic emphases that appear in Gen. 1 and 2.
- identify the unique features that distinguish Gen. 1 and 2.
- understand how the first two covenants in the Pentateuch reflect God's desire to reach and bless all humanity.
- trace the theme of the promise of land and descendants through the patriarchal/matriarchal narrative.

INTRODUCTION

Following the introduction to the Pentateuch in the previous session, this session takes a closer look at the primeval history and the patriarchal/matriarchal history contained in Genesis.

ISRAEL'S PRIMEVAL HISTORY



NOTES

THE ACCOUNT OF CREATION

Genesis 1. Notice the pattern that appears in Gen. 1. As God calls things into existence, the phrase that appears in the text is “Let there be . . .” Note the phrase is passive and impersonal (third person speech). The phrase (or some related form of the phrase) appears in the first chapter, at verses 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, and 24.

This repeated phrase gives the impression of a powerful God who simply calls the universe and everything in it, into existence in an impersonal and passive manner. Notice how the pattern is suddenly and dramatically broken at verse 26. By now, the reader is used to seeing the phrase “Let there be . . .” and is suddenly awakened by the new phrase in verse 26: “Let us make . . .” This new phrase is no longer passive and impersonal (third person speech), but rather it is active and personal (second person speech).

Through the break in the pattern, verse 26 is set apart from the previous verses (3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24). The item created in verse 26 is highlighted. This item is not just called into existence; this item is personally made (fashioned, built, formed) in a personal way, as if by the hand of God himself. This unique and important item is humanity.

Another pattern in Gen. 1 conveys a similar message. Notice the phrase “after their kind.” This phrase appears in verses 11, 12, 21, 24, and 25. “After their kind” communicates that the items of creation (such as trees, plants, animals) are all called into being in accordance with “their own kind.”

As the reader recognizes this pattern, he or she expects the same to be true for humans. However, once again, there is a surprising break in the pattern, when the reader sees the new phrase “in our image, after our likeness.” This new phrase appears in verse 26. The dramatic change in wording, once again, highlights this particular item of creation as different, honored, and most important. This item is not simply “after its own kind,” but rather, this creature is created “in the image and likeness of God.” Once again, the reader discovers this unique creature is humanity.

The impact of these two literary patterns is a powerful message that humanity is the most important part of God’s creation.


NOTES

Parallelism. Parallelism is a method of poetry found throughout the Old Testament in which a theme or words are repeated. The parallelism in Gen. 1:27 makes it clear the creature made in God's image includes both male and female. Both men and women are fashioned personally by God and made in the image and likeness of God.

And **God created** *the human* IN HIS IMAGE,
 IN THE IMAGE OF GOD **He created it.**
 MALE AND FEMALE **He created them.**
 (paraphrased)

In each line, the subject of the sentence is expressed as follows: God created, He created, and He created. Each subject is in parallel and refers to the same thing (i.e., God). In each line the object of the sentence is expressed as follows: the human, it, and them. Each object is in parallel and refers to the same thing (i.e., the human).

Note, however, the parallelism expresses an important feature of the human. That is, the human God created is actually plural (them). Thus, there is more than one human God created.

In each line a modifying phrase is expressed as follows: "in his image," "in the image of God," and "male and female." Each modifying phrase is in parallel and refers to the same thing (i.e., the image of God). Note, however, the parallelism expresses an important feature of the image of God. That is, the image of God includes both male and female. Thus, despite the bias of a patriarchal society, a society in which men rule and women are made subject, God's Word communicates that both men and women were created in the image of God.

Genesis 2. Chapter 2 of Genesis creates an interesting contrast with chapter 1. Remember that in chapter 1, everything functioned very smoothly according to the will and power of God. Notice in chapter 1 the repetition of the phrase "and it was good" (verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; in fact in verse 31, things are very good).

This is contrasted in Genesis 2. Now, there is a lack or need within the creation. Chapter 2:5 states there is no shrub, no plant, no rain, and no human. In verse 18, God comes right out and says that "it is not good" (in contrast to how good everything was in chapter 1) in response to the lack of a partner for the human. Of course, God meets all of these needs and fills all of the lack.

In verses 8-9, God plants a garden, including trees, for food. By verse 10, there is a river flowing to water the garden. In verses 7 and 15, we see God has made a human to cultivate the garden. In verses 21-25, God fashions a partner for the human.


NOTES

Notice the theme of interdependence in chapter 2. God creates everything in such a way that each item depends on the other. The garden needs water to grow, the human needs the garden for food, the garden needs the human to cultivate it, the human needs a partner to avoid loneliness, etc.

Also, notice the theme of God's provision. God fills in all of the lack and provides for all of the need. God is the great Provider of the universe.

The message in chapter 1 depicts God as all-powerful Creator of the universe. Chapter 1 also brings the message that humans are the most valuable and important aspect of God's creation.

Chapter 2 communicates the message that God is our great Provider. The world was created to function with a peaceful harmony in which we all depend on each other, under God.

FLOOD AND COVENANT

In Genesis 3, sin is introduced into the world. By 6:5-6, 11-12, the picture of sin has increased to the point that it is unacceptable. In response to sin, God determines to destroy the earth by flood. Instead of destroying everyone, however, God saves a remnant through Noah and his family. Notice God's choice of Noah appears to be based on the description of Noah as righteous and blameless (6:9). After the Flood, God starts over with Noah and his family.

God's new beginning with Noah is grounded in the first covenant. This covenant is eternal and universal. God promises never to destroy the earth by flood again (8:21-22; 9:9-17). The following message is clear:

- God despises evil and sin
- God favors righteousness and blamelessness
- God determines to begin anew, with an eternal promise not to give up on humanity again.

God does not simply leave this new start with the descendants of Noah to develop on its own power. God eventually enacts a second covenant and sets out on a plan to reach the whole world with His blessing.

God calls Abraham into the second covenant. In this second covenant, God promises to bless all the families of the earth through one family (Abraham and Sarah's; 12:3, 17:16-19). At this point, the Bible introduces the theme of God's promise of land to Abraham and Sarah's descendants (Gen. 12:1-2, 7).

**NOTES**

The promise of land and a multitude of descendants becomes an important part of God's fulfillment of the covenant. The rest of the Pentateuch pursues this promise of land and its fulfillment. This pursuit begins in the narratives of the patriarchs and matriarchs.

PATRIARCHAL/MATRIARCHAL HISTORY



NOTES

Abraham is told to go “to the land which I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). This creates the anticipation of discovering where the land is. As you read through the stories in Gen. 12-50, notice how much the patriarchs move around and how difficult it appears to get them to settle in the place God chooses.

When Abram reaches Shechem, God appears and says, “to your descendants I will give this land” (Gen. 12:4-7). It would seem God’s appearance and words should be enough to confirm that Abram is the place. However, Abram moves farther south.

At Bethel, Abram builds an altar and calls upon the name of the Lord, but God does not respond (Gen. 12:8). Perhaps that is an indication that Abram should go back up to Shechem where God did appear to him. Instead, however, Abram moves farther south, into the Negev.

At this point a famine hits (Gen. 12:9-10). It seems pretty clear Abram is not where he is supposed to be. However, rather than moving back up North, near Shechem, Abram runs to Egypt. Throughout, the rest of Genesis, there seems to be a pattern in the movements of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph).

God repeatedly appears to them and repeats the promise of land and descendants. These appearances from God usually occur when the patriarchs are near the areas of Shechem, or Bethel, or even Beersheba (God seems to tolerate their movements and repeats the promise in areas south of Shechem).

However, when they run off to Egypt or over to Philistine country or far north to Haran, events head south. They often get into trouble with the inhabitants of those places and end up being pressed back toward the area of promise. On three occasions, a famine hits. In each instance, the famine hits when a patriarch is out of place. The first was when Abraham is in the Negev; the second, when Isaac is in the Negev; and the third, when Joseph is sold and ends up all the way in Egypt. It almost appears as though God uses those famines as attention-getters to let the patriarchs know they are out of place.

In the midst of all the moving around, there are some very significant texts in which God repeats the promise of land and descendants:

- Original call and promise—12:1-7
- Promise repeated to Abraham—13:14-17

 **NOTES**

- Promise repeated to Abraham—22:17-18
- Promise repeated to Isaac—26:1-6
- Promise repeated to Isaac—26:23-25
- Promise repeated to Jacob—28:10-17
- Promise repeated to Jacob—35:9-15

By the end of Genesis, ironically, the descendants of Jacob all move to Egypt. When Exodus begins, the children of the promise are all enslaved in Egypt.

In all of this, a few messages emerge:

- God demonstrates steadfast love and commitment despite the wanderings and questionings of His people
- God calls for His people to trust His promises and remain faithfully obedient
- despite negative odds God will accomplish His purposes

The patriarchal/matriarchal history begins with the great promise from God and ends with His people enslaved in Egypt. The story does not end there, however. God's steadfast love and His power are demonstrated as He delivers His people and takes them through the wilderness to the land of promise.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Look at the learner objectives for this session. Can you:
 - describe the significance of the literary patterns and thematic emphases that appear in Genesis 1 and 2?
 - identify the uniqueness of each creation account, Genesis 1 and 2?
 - understand how the first two covenants (with Noah and Abraham) in the Pentateuch reflect God's desire to reach and bless all humanity?
 - trace the theme of the promise of land and descendants through the patriarchal/matriarchal narrative?
2. Read Gen. 1-2:4 and do the following:
 - List the items created on each day. Identify any pattern you see with regard to the order of creation in this chapter.
 - List any phrases repeated within the chapter, and make note of anytime a repeated phrase appears to be significantly changed in its wording.
 - Read Gen. 2:4-25 and list each item in the order in which it is created.
 - Compare the order of creation in chapter 2 with the order of creation in chapter 1. How would you explain any differences?
3. Read Gen. 12. Make a list of the places included in Abraham's journey as described in this chapter. According to this chapter, where would you identify the location of the Promised Land (the land God intends to show Abraham, Gen. 12:1)?
4. Journal your reflections and insights from this session and from your reading and study. Include a discussion on this question: How can the dramatic stories of the patriarchs/matriarchs be used to illustrate truth in contemporary time?

EXAM



NOTES

1. God appears impassionate and impersonal when creating human beings in Genesis 1.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. Human beings are said to be created “after their kind” in Genesis.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. In Genesis 2, unlike Genesis 1 _____.
 - A. There is a lack or need within the creation
 - B. Creation is very good
 - C. A river does not run through the garden
 - D. None of the above
4. There is a theme of interdependence (i.e., everything is created in such a way that each item depends on the other) in Genesis 2.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. The underlying theme/message in Genesis chapter 1 depicts God as _____.
 - A. Our great Provider
 - B. All-powerful Creator of the universe
 - C. The commander of a great angelic army
 - D. None of the above
6. The underlying message/theme in Genesis chapter 2 depicts God as _____.
 - A. Our great Provider
 - B. All-powerful Creator of the universe
 - C. The commander of a great angelic army
 - D. None of the above
7. God’s new beginning with Noah is grounded in the first covenant. This covenant is eternal and universal.
 - A. True
 - B. False

 **NOTES**

8. The promise of land and a multitude of descendants becomes an important part of God's fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. When Abram reaches Shechem, God appears and says_____.
 - A. "Tell Pharaoh to let my people go."
 - B. "If you eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will surely die."
 - C. "To your descendants I will give this land."
 - D. "This place will be a memorial of my passion for you and your people."

10. When the patriarchs move away from the Promised Land, bad things seem to happen.
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. God demonstrates steadfast love and commitment despite the wanderings and questionings of His people.
 - A. True
 - B. False

12. By the end of Genesis, the descendants of Jacob all move to_____.
 - A. Ethiopia
 - B. Shechem
 - C. Egypt
 - D. Bethel

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Tell the story of Genesis chapters 12-50. What are the significant themes that run through this narrative?
2. What is the significance of property/land in the patriarchal/matriarchal narrative?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2? What might account for the differences?
4. What is the goal of God's covenant with Noah? What is the goal of God's covenant with Abram? What do the two have in common? How are each of them fulfilled in Christ?
5. Talk about the travels of the patriarchs. What did their travel have to do with blessing/punishment from God?