

Contents

Introduction	9
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PART ONE: KNOWING GOD THE FATHER

1. Creation	17
2. Curse	23
3. Promise	31
4. Pain	37
5. Covenant	43
6. Chaos	49
7. Kingdom	55
8. Conflict	61
9. Restoration	69

PART TWO: TRUSTING CHRIST THE SON

10. Born	81
11. Tempted	87
12. Sovereign	93
13. Opposed	101
14. Transfigured	109
15. Suffered	115
16. Crucified	123

17. Forsaken	129
18. Risen	135
19. Doubted	141
20. Ascended	147
21. Waiting	155

PART THREE: LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

22. Power	167
23. Weakness	173
24. Peace	181
25. Conflict	187
26. Joy	193
27. Suffering	199
28. Life	205
29. Death	211
30. Glory	217

An Invitation	223
Index of Scriptures	225
Study Guide	229

Chapter 1

creation

HOW COULD ANYONE possibly know how the world began? Nobody was there taking notes when it happened! And how could anyone know what was in the mind of God when He made the first man and woman? No one could know these things unless God Himself took the initiative to tell somebody. And that is precisely what He did.

We can reasonably assume that God spoke with Adam and Eve about His joy in creating the universe and that they passed these stories on to their children. But stories that are handed down from generation to generation in this way become distorted, and so it is important to realize that God revealed these things more directly.

Later in our journey, we will meet with Moses. God appeared to him visibly and spoke to him audibly (see Num. 12:8). This unique privilege of speaking with God face-to-face enabled Moses to write what God gave him to say in the first five books of the Bible.

THE CREATOR IS THE OWNER

The first thing God wants you to know is that He is your Creator: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). That’s important, because a creator always has the rights of ownership over anything that he or she has made. God wants you to know that He is the Creator and therefore the owner of everything, including you.

That tells you something magnificent, not only about God but also about you. You are not an accident of history whose existence is the result of certain atoms colliding by random chance. God made you on purpose, and you will discover that purpose as you come to know Him.

A BREATHTAKING INITIATIVE

Try to imagine the Creator at work. Day after day, God added new dimensions to His creation: light, sky, seas,

vegetation, the sun, the moon, stars, fish, birds, and animals. Each was conceived in the mind of God, and when He spoke, He called them into being. As each creative act was completed, God reviewed His work and announced that it was good.

It was at this point that God crowned His creation with a breathtaking initiative: “God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image.’” (Gen. 1:26)

God made you to reflect something of His own nature and glory so that as people look at you, they would see some reflection of God Himself. This is what gives unique dignity and value to every human life. All of the animals were made by God, but none of them were made like God.

ENJOYING THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Adam enjoyed life in a garden called Eden, which God had planted near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (Gen. 2:8–14). While we can't pinpoint its exact location, it was probably somewhere in the area of modern Iraq.

Life in Eden was awesome. It was so different from anything we have experienced that it is difficult for us to

grasp. But it is well worth using our imagination to try.

Adam enjoyed the privilege of working in direct partnership with God. His first task was to name the animals as God brought them to him (Gen. 2:19). Giving names may not sound like significant work, but actually this was the first scientific endeavor. Science, at its heart, is about observing, classifying, and describing, and that was the first work God gave Adam to do.

Everything Adam needed was provided in the garden. His work was fulfilling, he was protected from danger, and he enjoyed perfect health. It was heaven on earth.

The greatest joy of life in Eden was the immediate, visible presence of God. God is Spirit, and so He is invisible to us. But in the Garden of Eden, God took on a visible form so that Adam could know Him. We call this a theophany. God came and walked with Adam in the garden (Gen. 3:8).

A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

God saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone, and so the Lord made a woman and brought her to the man

(Gen. 2:18, 22). Imagine Adam's delight when God made the introduction!

God could have created Eve and left the two of them to find each other in the garden. But He didn't do that. God was actively involved in bringing the two of them together. Try to picture God joining their hands and giving His blessing on their shared life together.

The first couple would face their share of problems in the future, but they could never doubt that they had been joined together by God. That is true of every marriage, and that is why marriage is sacred.



A View from the First Mountain

Pause for a moment to take in this view of the world as God made it. Imagine what it must have been like to live in this perfect environment: sharing the joys of a loving and intimate marriage; growing in knowledge, experience, and skill through creative and fulfilling work; and most of all, cultivating a deep relationship with God, whose visits to the garden brought great delight.

Life as we know it is only a shadow of the mountaintop experience our first parents enjoyed in Eden. God wants you to know what their life was like and how you can recover what has been lost.

It's time to leave the first mountain of the Bible story. We move on reluctantly because the next stop on our journey is a deep valley.

We have made some wonderful discoveries here. God is the Creator of all things. He made everything good. He has created men and women in His own image, giving unique dignity and value to every life.

Some may believe that life is richer when God is at a distance, but the mountaintop experience of life in the Garden of Eden teaches us that life is never richer than when God is near.

Chapter 2

curse

IF LIFE WAS SO GOOD in the Garden of Eden, why is it so different today? The answer to that question lies in the first valley of the Bible story.

When God put Adam in the Garden of Eden, He said, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will certainly die” (Gen. 2:16–17).

Adam and Eve already knew about good. They had never experienced anything else, and God wanted to keep them from the knowledge of evil. In His loving command,

God was saying, “There is a power at work in the wider universe called evil. You don’t know anything about it, and I don’t want you ever to experience it. I want you to live in freedom from its terrible destructive power. Don’t touch evil. It will destroy you.”

WHERE DID EVIL COME FROM?

The Bible never gives us a full explanation of the origin of evil, but it does tell us where it began. Alongside the visible world that we know, God made an invisible creation in heaven and filled it with angels.

One of these angels came to be known as Satan (the name means “adversary”). He became inflated with pride and tried to usurp the position of God (see Isa. 14:12–14). Pride lies at the root of all evil.

The rebellion was unsuccessful and led to Satan being excluded from the presence of God and cast down to the earth. So right from the beginning of human history, there was already an enemy bent on destroying the work of God, and his first aim was to introduce the man and the woman to the knowledge of evil.

RECRUITING FOR THE REBELLION

Satan came into the Garden of Eden with the aim of recruiting the human race into his rebellion against God. He came in the form of an alluring serpent, presenting himself as a friend, and began to question God's command.

“God knows that when you eat of it [the tree] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,” he said (Gen. 3:5). “Eat from this tree,” Satan was essentially saying, “and you will have everything. You’ve got the knowledge of good, but if you want to be complete, you need the knowledge of evil.”

Adam and Eve decided that this was what they wanted. They broke God's command, and in that act of disobedience, they gained the knowledge of evil. We all have lived with it ever since. The knowledge of evil became a power that was passed on to every person in each generation and in every culture.

The knowledge of evil is the primary problem of the human race. You can't read a newspaper without being reminded that after all the advances of human history we still struggle with evil in all its ugly forms.

The struggle is not just around us, it is also inside us. Why is it that you would do something that made you miserable the last time you did it? There is a power at work in all of us that none of us can fully understand. We are all born to this struggle.

HOPE IN A CURSE

God will never allow evil to have the last word. He came to the garden and confronted Satan, announcing that his rebel kingdom would not stand. “Cursed are you,” God said (Gen. 3:14). When a person or thing is cursed, it is consigned to destruction. So when God cursed the serpent, He was announcing that evil would not stand. Then God spoke about a deliverer who would crush the serpent’s head (3:15). When Adam and Eve heard this, they must have been overjoyed.

Then God turned to Adam and again spoke that condemning word: “Cursed . . .” Adam must have felt that he would be caught up in Satan’s destruction. But instead of saying to Adam “cursed are you,” as the Lord did to the

serpent, God said, “Cursed is the ground because of you” (3:17).

God deflected the curse away from Adam so that it fell on the ground and not on him. In this way, God diverted His judgment away from Adam, creating room for a future reconciliation. On the day he sinned, Adam discovered the grace and mercy of God. The curse that should have been on him went to another place. That tells you one of the most important things you need to know about the God of the Bible—He is a God of mercy as well as justice.

EXCLUDED FROM THE GARDEN

There is no place for evil in the presence of God. Just as Satan’s rebellion led to his being cast out of heaven, so our first parents’ sin led to their being excluded from the garden where they had known the blessing and presence of God (Gen. 3:23).

Life became a daily struggle in a hostile place. Adam and Eve’s perfect marriage was strained, and their work was frustrated as thorns and thistles sprouted from the ground. And when evening came, they must have

wondered if God would come and walk with them, but He never did.

Over time, they would notice lines and wrinkles in their skin. They would experience pain and discover that the death God had spoken about was a terrible reality they could not avoid.

God placed cherubim—angels representing His judgment and holiness—at the entrance to the garden, along with “a flaming sword flashing back and forth,” barring the way to the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:24). Adam and Eve were alienated from God and left alone in a hostile world. Paradise was lost, and there seemed to be no way back.



Darkness in the First Valley

This is the Bible’s analysis of the human problem: we have the knowledge of evil, and we have been excluded from the place where God’s presence and blessing were known.

The curse is the first valley of the Bible story. The world became a dark place. The rest of the story is about what

God has done to shine His light into our darkness, to deliver us from evil, and to open the way back to paradise. So let's head for the second mountain.