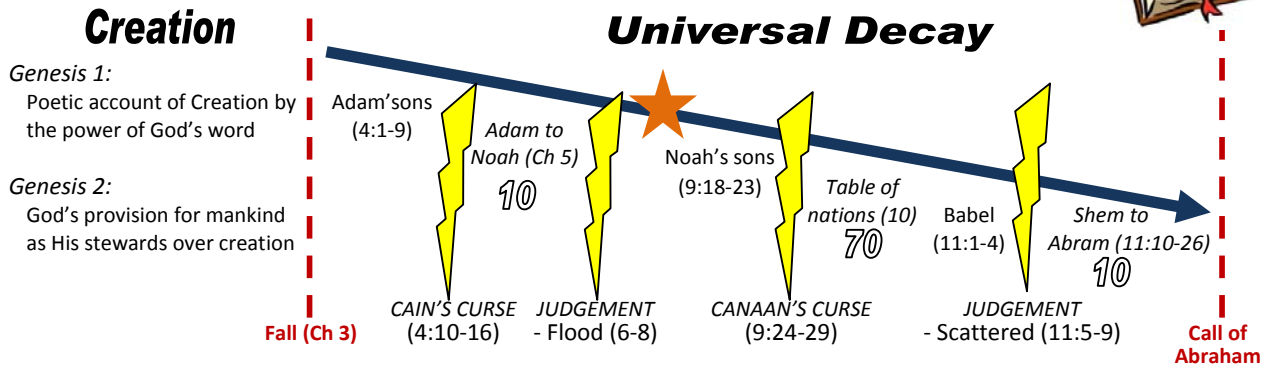


# GOD'S BIG PICTURE, Part 2

## Creation & Universal Decay



### CREATION (Genesis 1-2) – God's relationship with mankind established

These chapters are of foundational importance as they introduce us to God, the loving and powerful Creator, who created mankind in His image and likeness to enjoy relationship with Him as stewards over His creation under His rule. The Bible does not set out to justify the existence of God – it simply starts with the statement “In the beginning God...” This book is His Word and His story. The two records of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis are beautifully complementary:

#### Genesis 1:1-2:3 – God (Elohim) and His Creation

Chapter 1 is a poetical description of the creation. Much discussion has surrounded the question of whether or not the seven “days” are literal 24 hour periods. Perhaps this question is irrelevant as this section is a poem. It is not necessarily intended to present the literal order of creation or to say anything about the length of time God took, but is carefully structured to reveal some important principles:

- The person of God as the pre-existent One who creates order out of chaos (v1-2)
- The authority of God’s word, which underpins creation (10 times we read “God said” – v3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26,28,29)
- The beauty and perfection of the universe as originally created (7 times we read “it was good” – v4,10,12,18,21,25,31)
- The special dignity of mankind, both male and female, as the stewards of the King:
  - Uniquely created in God’s image as the pinnacle of His creation (v26-27 – 3 times the word “image)
  - Uniquely blessed by God to mankind including the right to rule, to multiply and to subdue the earth (v28-30). These blessings are sometimes called the “creation mandate” for mankind.
- The principle of Sabbath rest – the ultimate goal of creation is to enjoy the Creator (2:1-3)

There is also a parallel in the six days of creation. Day 7 is unpaired, and unique as the only day that God blesses.

Day 1 – Light is created	Day 4 – Sun, moon and stars created to regulate light
Day 2 – Waters and sky are created	Day 5 – Waters and sky filled with living creatures
Day 3 – Dry land and plants created	Day 6 – Land filled with living creatures

#### Genesis 2:4-25 – The LORD God (Yahweh Elohim) and Mankind

Chapter 2 complements the poetry of chapter 1. Whereas God is referred to throughout chapter 1 simply as “God” (Hebrew *Elohim*), in 2:4-25 He is consistently referred to as the LORD God (Hebrew *Yahweh Elohim*). The consistent use of God’s personal name in this chapter is unique in the Old Testament. Some scholars have argued that the two different names in the two chapters indicate different origins, but this misses the point of what the two chapters say. In chapter 1 the focus is on God’s relationship to Creation as Creator, whereas in Chapter 2 the emphasis is on His personal relationship with mankind. The name *Yahweh* is His relational name, and will become the covenant name through which He will be known to Israel.

Chapter 2 introduces some important themes:

- *God’s place* (2:4-14) – the beautiful garden God plants in Eden as a home for mankind is God’s place where His people can serve Him and meet with Him. This theme will continue through the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple. This garden is pictured as the source of life, with four rivers flowing out of the garden to water the earth. God is sustaining His Creation.
- *Human faith and responsibility* (2:15-17) – although they are to be stewards over creation and have been greatly blessed by God, human beings do not have unlimited freedom. They must live under the authority of God in faithful submission to Him. They are not permitted to eat from one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The universe is a moral one, and even before sin has entered the world faith will be necessary for life. Faith is taking God at His word and living accordingly.
- *Human society based on family life and the marriage relationship* (2:18-25) – marriage is the bedrock of human relationships as God creates the woman as an equal and complementary partner (the Hebrew translated “a helper suitable for him” in the NIV of Genesis 2:18 means literally “a power equal to him”) for the man.

So, at the end of Genesis chapter 2 we see human beings living in perfect harmony with their Creator, with one another and with the created world. This is the pattern for life as it should be, as God intended it to be.

## UNIVERSAL DECAY (Genesis 3-11) – *The need for a Redeemer; Hope through the Noahic Covenant*

This period of redemption history sets the scene for all that follows. We learn of the beginnings of human sin and its results, and four vital principles are introduced in response to human sin: judgement, grace, sacrifice and covenant.

### Human Sin – “the Fall” (Genesis 3)

The serpent appears in Genesis 3:1 as a “crafty” creature out of place in God’s perfect Garden. Revelation 12:9 reveals that he is Satan, the adversary of God. Genesis 3 does not explain where he came from or how he came to be in rebellion against God, but rather focuses on the failure of human beings. Humanity was created to rule over the animals, but here, in a perversion of the created order and an abdication of their dominion, they follow the lead of an animal, with disastrous results. The heart of the issue in Satan’s temptation of Eve is the authority of God’s word – he seeks to undermine her faith in God’s word and, through her, that of her husband:

- The serpent questions God’s word (“*Did God really say ...?*”)
- The woman adds to God’s word (“... *and you must not touch it ...*”)
- The serpent rejects God’s word (“*You will not surely die*”)

The serpent portrays God as the ultimate cosmic spoil-sport. Instead of the loving, generous Creator, He is presented as a cruel tyrant who is out to restrict the potential of human beings to develop to their full capacity. If they know good and evil they can be like God (3:5)! “*Knowing good and evil*” probably refers to the ability to judge what is good and evil – the right to set the rules.

Adam and Eve fall for this temptation, but discover that they lack the power to exercise the authority they have taken upon themselves. They are naked, ashamed and afraid (3:10). They want to hide from God, but cannot. **The essence of sin is a rejection of the truth of God’s word and a rebellion against Him motivated by a desire for independence.** Sin breaks the harmony:

- Between man and God – Adam is now afraid of God (v10). Trust is replaced with distrust and fear.
- Between man and woman – Adam blames Eve (v12). Innocence is replaced with selfishness, suspicion and rivalry.
- Between man and the earth – the ground is cursed because of Adam (3:17). Sin has truly cosmic consequences!

Despite this desperate situation, there is hope. This is the beginning of a perpetual struggle between man and Satan (3:15). Satan will not have unlimited power over mankind – all is not lost. The enigmatic reference to the woman’s seed crushing the serpent’s head even as he bites his heel has often been seen as the first promise of a coming Redeemer who will defeat Satan (the “proto-evangelium”).

In the next generation we learn the dreadful truth that sin is inherited by all descendents of Adam. Every human being finds, like Cain, that “*sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it*” (4:7). Cain succumbed to the sinful desire to murder his brother over the issue of religion! Instead of recognising his guilt before God and repenting, he compares himself with his brother and his jealousy takes control of him. Cain and Abel are the first example of two ways to live – the way of faith (seeking God) and the way of disobedience (seeking self). Throughout chapters 4 to 11 we will see other examples of these two ways to live (for example, compare the two men named Lamech, one the seventh from Cain and the other the seventh from Seth – 4:17-24 and 5:28-31).

### Judgement and Grace

Throughout this section we see a constant balance of God’s righteous judgement upon human sin and His gracious provision for mankind. God’s grace is seen in the fact that He takes the initiative in coming to Adam after the Fall (3:9) and the way He speaks to Cain after his failed sacrifice (4:6). It is first explicitly referred to in Genesis 6:8, “*But Noah found favour [grace] in the eyes of the LORD*”.

	Judgement	Grace
<b>Adam and Eve (3:14-24)</b>	Cut off from the Tree of Life, resulting in death The serpent and the ground are cursed	The goal is to stop man living forever in rebellion against God Humans are not cursed, but covered by the provision of skins
<b>Cain (4:9-16)</b>	A restless wanderer apart from God’s presence	The mark given to Cain is a warning not to kill him
<b>Flood (6-8)</b>	Life almost wiped out in a catastrophic event	God rescues righteous Noah and His family in the ark
<b>Babel (11:1-9)</b>	Scattering and confusion of languages	The goal is to limit the potential for humans to cause harm

### Sacrifice and Covenant (Genesis 8:20-9:17)

In Genesis 3:21, God makes garments from skin for Adam and Eve as a covering for them. This concept of a covering for sin grows into the principle of sacrifice. In Genesis 4, Cain and Abel make sacrifices to God, indicating that this was the way He expected to be worshipped, and after the Flood Noah sacrificed some clean animals and birds to God (8:20). Sacrifice becomes fully developed in the Law given through Moses, but from these stories we can already see that:

- Sacrifice expresses dependence on God and thankfulness to Him – it is expected from God and please Him (8:21)
- Sacrifice must be costly and perfect – clean animals without defect, and the best part of the animal (see 4:4 about Abel’s sacrifice)
- Sacrifice is a picture of a covering for sin – the idea is of the animal dying the death the person deserved for their sin

In the context of Noah’s sacrifice, God makes a covenant. **A covenant is a relationship between two parties based on promises and sealed with a sign that will remind the parties of the promises.** The covenants of Scripture are the means through which God extends His blessing to human beings and works out His plan of redemption. The Noahic covenant is different from subsequent covenants because it is universal (made with all living creatures). We may be most familiar with God’s promise not to destroy the world again in a flood, and with the rainbow as the sign, but the significance of this covenant is much greater. It is the bedrock for human existence:

- The continuation of this world and our lives in it is only because of God’s faithfulness in sustaining the universe (8:22)
- The creation mandate to multiply and be stewards of the world is repeated with the addition of freedom to eat meat (9:1-4,7)
- The sanctity of human life as created in God’s image is reiterated as a foundational principle for human law and ethics (9:4-6)

All future covenants will be built on the foundation of this covenant. Although the Noahic Covenant is not specifically about redemption, there could be no hope for redemption without it. God’s grace is available to people because of this covenant.