

THE BIG JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation



The Orion nebula. A composite image that includes radiation beyond the visual spectrum. It's composed of images from the Hubble and the Spitzer Space Telescopes.
Image supplied by steveblackimages / Steve Black and created by NASA and the European Space Agency

two ► In the Beginning

Creation

Welcome to the first leg of our journey through the Bible! In this session we'll see how God created the Earth and the heavens.

The creation account in Genesis divides into three parts:

Genesis 1.1

The first verse of Genesis tells us that God created "*the heavens and the earth*". This phrase "*the heavens and the earth*" probably means 'the entire universe'. Perhaps it

also includes the invisible heavenly places. So it seems that God's first step is to create the Earth, the sun, moon and stars and, perhaps, the unseen heavenly realms, too.

Genesis 1.2-2.3

Our perspective changes. Now God 'zooms in' onto Earth. It's not yet finished. It's a dark lifeless world covered by water - "*formless and empty*" (NIV). Step by step, God transforms it into a world full of order and life and beauty.

He does this in six days, and rests on the seventh day.

Genesis 2.4-25

Our perspective changes again. God 'zooms in' even further to a specific region on Earth. He gives us an intimate and more detailed view of how He made mankind and the garden paradise which was their home.

Genesis – the seed-plot of the Bible

Genesis is the 'seed-plot' of the Bible. It's so called because the Bible's great themes begin in this book. Truths about creation, mankind, sin, and God's plan of salvation 'germinate' here in Genesis, develop through the Old and New Testaments and come to fruition in the Book of Revelation.

Genesis 1.1 – In the beginning

The first verse of the Bible tells us that God created "*the heavens and the earth*". This is the first step in God's creative process. As we said earlier, the phrase "*the heavens and the earth*" probably means 'the entire universe' – including the Earth, the sun, moon and stars. It may also include the invisible heavenly places.

We're not told how God created the universe, nor how long He took; we simply know that He did it, and that He did it from nothing.

The heavenly places

The universe we see around us is only part – probably a small part – of the whole creation. There are heavenly places that we can't see as well as those we can. In these invisible heavens God sits enthroned and surrounded by an innumerable company of angels and archangels. Christ sits in "*the heavenly places*", and we are seated there with Him (Ephesians 2.6). And entrenched somewhere in a heavenly realm are "*spiritual forces of evil*" (Ephesians 6.12), which wage war against God's people.

These heavenly places are every bit as real as the world around us, and closer to us than we may suspect. Tom Wright pictures heaven and earth as "the two dimensions of created reality" which "interlock and interact in a variety of ways . . .". Just sometimes, God draws aside the veil between us and these heavenly places. There's a wonderful story in 2 Kings 6 when God showed His heavenly host to comfort a very frightened man under siege. And at Jesus's birth, a great choir of the heavenly host astonished shepherds keeping watch near Bethlehem (Luke 2.8-14).

Genesis 1.2-2.3 – six days of creation

"Formless and empty"

God's Spirit hovered over the waters that covered the dark lifeless globe. Above this unending ocean, all was black as night. No stars or moon or sun pierced the darkness. These heavenly bodies were, it seems, already

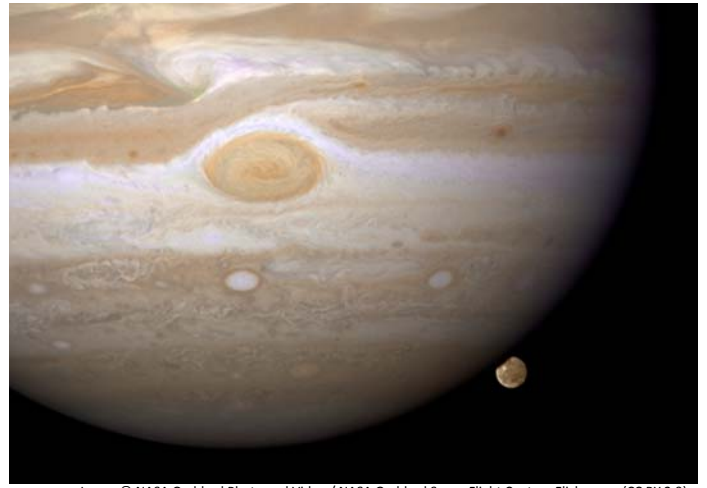


Image © NASA Goddard Photo and Video / NASA Goddard Space Flight Center : Flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)
An image of Jupiter and its largest moon Ganymede from the Hubble Space Telescope. The darker eye-shaped feature near the centre of the image is Jupiter's famous Great Red Spot.

in existence (the previous verse suggests that). If so, the Earth must have been shielded from their light, perhaps by a thick canopy of vapour. We're not told how long Earth was like this.

Why was Earth in this condition? We don't know for certain. The two Hebrew words for "*formless and empty*" (Genesis 1.2, NIV) appear together only twice more, in Isaiah 34.11 (a prophecy against Edom) and Jeremiah 4.23 (against Judah). Both instances describe the effects of God's judgment. The Earth was flooded with water, too – reminding us of Noah's flood, again a result of God's judgment. And Earth was shrouded in darkness, typically associated with evil and death in the Bible.

Some people therefore conclude that Earth's formless, empty condition was the result of some catastrophe connected to Satan's fall. We know that Satan sinned before Adam and Eve did. But before Satan fell, he seemed to have been privileged with unique status and authority. Just as Earth suffered a curse because of mankind's sin (as we shall see in Session 4), perhaps Earth suffered ruin because of the sin of Satan and his angels. But we can't be sure about this.

But it may well be that God simply created the Earth in this unformed and empty state first – a kind of 'blank canvas' that God the Master Artist then arranges and fills with life and beauty.

The three orders of creation

In the first chapter of Genesis, God uses two words for 'create' or 'make'. One of them is *bara'*. This word is used three times in Genesis 1 (verses 1, 21 and 27). The word as used here indicates that God is creating something quite new or different. The use of *bara'* thus points out the three distinct orders of God's creation - **(1) non-conscious things** – the heavenly bodies and the earth, with its vegetation; **(2) conscious life** – the animals; and **(3) self-conscious life** – mankind.

Genesis 1.1 Non-conscious things

Bara' is used in Genesis 1.1 for the creation of the heavens and Earth from nothing.

Genesis 1.21 Conscious life

Bara' is also used for the creation of the first animals in the water and sky. This tells us that God is 'going back to the drawing board' when He creates these creatures. Animals are distinctly different from anything He'd created before, including plants. This, in turn, suggests that plants and animals didn't evolve from the same primordial organisms.

Genesis 1.27 Self-conscious life

Finally, *bara'* is used for the creation of mankind. Again, God is 'going back to the drawing board'. Man is a different kind of being from animals. We may be similar to them in certain ways – our bodies share numerous design features with mammals, for example. But there's a fundamental difference between us and the animal kingdom. And this also indicates that humans don't share a common ancestor with animals.

God's creative week

Each of God's six creative days begins with Him speaking – "*And God said ...*". God's word is creative and powerful.

The Earth was "*formless*" (NIV); so God gives it **form**. And the Earth was "*empty*" (NIV); so He **fills** it:

- **Forming** On the first three days God brings order out of chaos. He divides and organises things, separating light from darkness, the waters from the sky, and the sea from the land.
- **Filling** Then from the third to the sixth day God fills the Earth - the land with vegetation, the sky with sun and moon and stars, the air with birds, and the seas and the land with all kinds of living creatures. Finally, on the sixth day, He makes man and commands him to colonise the whole Earth.

Notice how the six days are structured into two sets of three – each of the first three days corresponds with each of the last three, as this table shows:

<p>Day 1 Day Night</p>	<p>Day 4 Sun by day Moon and stars by night</p>
<p>Day 2 Sky Waters above and below sky</p>	<p>Day 5 Birds in sky Creatures in waters below sky</p>
<p>Day 3 Land from sea <i>bringing forth vegetation</i></p>	<p>Day 6 Land animals, man <i>eating land's vegetation</i></p>

God works step by step

God creates this world stage by stage, not all at once. This is typical of how God works through history, too. And He works step by step in our own lives, also. He wants to steadily transform us into the image of His Son as we walk with Him.

Day 1

From Genesis 1.1, we concluded that the sun, moon and stars seem to have existed before Day 1. If so, light already existed, too, and Earth was somehow shielded from its rays. Perhaps it was shrouded by a thick canopy of vapour. On earth's surface, all would have been like darkest night.

But now, at God's command, light penetrates the darkness, and floods it with light. Night and day can now be distinguished. Perhaps vapour still blankets the Earth. The sun, moon and stars are hidden from view, as they are on a cloudy day.

Day 2

Then God speaks the sky into existence. He creates an "*expanse*" in the midst of the waters. The waters above the expanse seem to be the clouds. The waters below become the sea on day 3. God calls the open expanse between them "*sky*" (NIV) or "*Heaven*" (ESV).

Day 3



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"And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.'" (Genesis 1.9).

Then God gathers the waters below the sky to form the sea, and the dry land appears. Perhaps at this point the water cycle – so essential to life – begins to operate. The waters below the sky (the seas) evaporate, replenishing the waters above the sky (the clouds). Rain falls back to the Earth's surface to complete the cycle. Now that the Earth is watered, God causes plants and trees to spring up out of the earth.

Day 4

God caused the light to shine on Day 1. But it's the sun that provides daylight for us. And the moon gives light at night. Yet the sun, moon and stars aren't "*made*" until day 4. How can we explain this?

Some people say that a source of light already illuminated the earth before the sun, moon and stars were made on Day 4.

But there may be another explanation. The Hebrew word for "*made*" in verse 16 is '*asah*'. This word is different from *bara'*. It has a wide range of meanings. It can (according to context) be translated in a variety of ways - for example, 'to make', 'to do', 'to prepare', or 'to provide'. It's translated "*make*" or "*made*" in Genesis 1.7,16,25,26



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Sunrise over a mist-bathed English landscape. *"And God made . . . the greater light to rule the day"* (Genesis 1.16).

and 31, and *"bearing"* in Genesis 1.11,12 with reference to trees bearing fruit. It can also be translated *"appointed"* (as it is in the ESV translation of 1 Kings 12.31,32, Job 14.5).

So when God made the sun, moon and stars on Day 4, it's feasible that He didn't create them from nothing at this point. He seems to have done so at the very beginning, before Day 1 (Genesis 1.1). But perhaps now God commands the waters above the sky (the clouds) to part. The sun can now be seen clearly by day, and the moon and stars by night. And so God has now 'appointed' them to rule the day and night respectively. The passage of the heavenly bodies through the sky can now be used – as verse 14 suggests - to track the days, seasons and years.

Day 5

God then fills the sea and sky with living creatures. This is the second time He uses the word *bara'*. These living creatures are distinctly different from the vegetative life He created on Day 3. They are *conscious* creatures.

Day 6

At God's command, the earth brings forth living creatures – both wild and domestic animals. The word *bara'* is not used again – these creatures are of the same order as the birds and sea creatures.

Then God creates mankind. Here, again, the word for 'create' is *bara'*. He is creating something new - not merely a conscious being, but a self-conscious being, a creature in His own image. We'll explore what it means to be in God's image in the next session.

After making the animals (Genesis 1.25), God pauses to speak. God breaks off from His work of creation for a moment. We 'overhear' God as He plans His final masterstroke: *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion . . ."*. God doesn't speak like this at any other point in creation - not even when He creates the heavens and earth. Mankind is unique and very special.

And after God blesses humanity, we read: *"And God said to them, . . ."*. God speaks to mankind. *He relates to them.*

The Trinity and Creation

All Three Persons of the Trinity took part in creation. **The Father** purposed and designed the universe (see 1 Corinthians 8.6). He created it through **the Son** (Hebrews 1.2, Colossians 1.16 and John 1.1-3). And He did it by the agency of **the Holy Spirit**, Whom we see here hovering over the waters. And when God says *"Let us make man in our image..."* we seem to be overhearing the Triune God deliberating with Himself before executing His creative masterpiece.

The Sabbath

So God finishes all His creative work. He pronounces it *"very good"*. On the seventh day, God rests.

God never tells us when the seventh day ended. Every other day ended with evening and morning, but not this day. This Sabbath day continues to the present.

► SABBATH AND JUBILEE ◀

Life in God's kingdom: liberty and rest

We said earlier that Genesis was a seed-plot, where many Bible themes begin. The Sabbath is one of these themes. It's far more than simply a day for us to rest. In Bernard Bell's words, the Sabbath "is a day of heaven on earth, a token of eternity". It's a foretaste of a perfect world, when all is exactly as God planned it to be, when all is in perfect harmony. It's a picture of the wonderful life that people in God's Kingdom enjoy.

Later on our journey (in session 7) we'll see that God also instituted a Sabbath year and a great Sabbath (called the Jubilee) that occurred every 50th year (Leviticus 25.1-22).

We'll follow this theme of the Sabbath and Jubilee as it occurs through the Bible.

God's rest – and ours

On the seventh day, God *"rested"* (Genesis 2.2, Exodus 20.11). What does this mean? God is not tired. It's simply that all is finished. God has ordered its chaos and filled its emptiness. All is now exactly as He wanted it to be. So now He (so to speak) 'moves in' and makes it His home.

God makes this Earth His dwelling place. That's corroborated by one of the two verses we've just mentioned. In Genesis 2.2 the Hebrew word for *"rested"* is *shābat* (the origin of our English word 'sabbath'). But in Exodus 20.11 it's *nuach*. And that's very significant.

Other Bible passages explain why. They show us that the place where God dwells – in other words, His Temple - is His 'resting place'. For example, Psalm 132.14 reads: *"For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, . . ."* (Psalm 132.13-14). The word for *"resting place"* is a *menûchâ*, a noun derived from our word *nuach*.

So when God *"rested"* after creating this world, it doesn't mean He stopped doing anything. It implies that He made Earth His 'resting place' – in other words, His Temple. God settled down here on Earth, made Himself 'at home', and ruled here. Of course, He still lived in Heaven – indeed, even heaven itself could not contain Him (see 1 Kings 8.27). But now He *also* made His home here with mankind.

And there's more. God *"took the man and put him in the garden of Eden"* (Genesis 2.15). The Hebrew word for *"put"* is a form of our word *nuach* again. In other words, God 'placed Adam at rest' in the Garden.

God made Earth His 'resting place' – His home. And Adam and Eve 'settled down' or 'rested' in the Garden with Him. They were at home there in God's presence.

God called them to fill the Earth and subdue it, and have dominion over its creatures. They were to fulfil that calling in a state of *rest* – confidently, without toil or stress.

At first, God and mankind lived together in Eden. But, as mankind filled the Earth, the Garden of Eden's boundaries would be extended until the whole Earth was His Temple – a global paradise where God lived with His people.

Walking with God

So we find God (as Genesis 3.8 suggests) walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. And as He walked with them, He would have surely have delighted with them in His creation's beauty and exuberant profusion of life. He would have shared with them nature's secrets. And doubtless He would have taught them how to fulfil their vocation - to subdue the Earth and have dominion over its creatures.

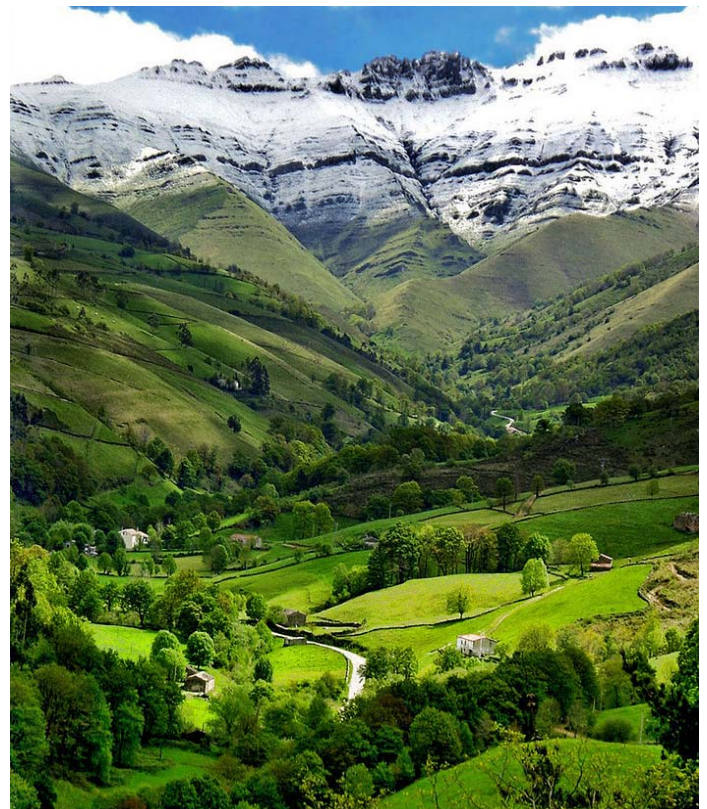


Image © lapidim / Mario Lapid : Flickr.com (CC BY-NC 2.0)
Valle del Pisueña in Cantabria, Spain. *"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."* (Genesis 1.31).

We, too, are new creations!

God's people, too, are new creations (2 Corinthians 5.17, Galatians 6.15). Our lives were in chaos - lifeless, empty and dark, just like the Earth of Genesis 1.2. But God's Spirit moved on us - just as He did over that dark and lifeless Earth. And as Paul explains, *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* (2 Corinthians 4.6).

The account of creation is a wonderful picture of how God gave us new life. And God uses the same two principles as He did when creating the world:

► **He separates** When God created this world, He separated things - light from darkness, waters from sky, and land from sea. And He separates us from the kingdom of darkness (see Colossians 1.13). He commands us to keep ourselves separate from darkness and unrighteousness (see 2 Corinthians 6.14-18 and compare 1 John 1.5-7).

► **He commands fruitfulness** God commanded the animals and humans to be fruitful and multiply. He makes His people fruitful - we come to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5.22-23). We yield fruit for God (Romans 7.4) - character, thoughts and acts that will bring glory to God.

And notice how God creates through His Spirit and His word. The Spirit of God *"was hovering over the face of the waters"* (Genesis 1.2). And God created through His word: (*"And God said . . ."*). We are *"born of the Spirit"* (John 3.8). And we are born again through His word: *"you have been born again, . . . through the living and abiding word of God"* (1 Peter 1.23). We are exhorted to be *"filled with the Spirit"* (Ephesians 5.18); and we are to let *"the word of Christ"* dwell in us richly (Colossians 3.16). God's Spirit and God's Word work together to bring life.

Genesis 2.4-25 - In God's Garden



A South American paradise – the Iguazu waterfalls.

Image © Martin St-Amant - Wikipedia (CC BY-SA 3.0)

In Genesis 2.4-25 our focus changes. We're now in the land of Eden itself. God gives us a closer, more intimate view of how He created mankind. He tells us, too, about the garden where He and mankind would live together. And He tells us how He created the first woman.

A well-watered paradise

In Genesis 2.5-6,8-14 God tells us about Eden. Eden is the name of the whole district - the garden itself was within Eden. It was undoubtedly somewhere in the Middle East. The names of two of its rivers are familiar to us (the Tigris and Euphrates).

Genesis 2.5-6 tells us: *"When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land,*

and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—". The small plants of the field probably represent crops that one day we would grow for food by (as God said to Adam) *"the sweat of your face"* (Genesis 3.19). The bushes of the field seem to be wild plants. These probably include the thorns and thistles that would one day hamper mankind's efforts to grow useful crops (Genesis 3.18). We are looking at a world before the Fall.

God waters this particular region of the world by a mist going up from the land. This word translated *"mist"* (ESV) or *"streams"* (NIV) may mean a raincloud. But it's more likely to mean streams that well up from underground supplies.

God then plants a garden in Eden with beautiful and

fruitful trees. We'll look in a later session at the two special trees in the centre.

The Names of God

Notice the change in God's name in Genesis 2.4. In Genesis 1.1-2.3, He is called "God" – the Hebrew here is 'Elohim, and expresses God's sovereign omnipotence. But in the remainder of chapter 2, He is called "the LORD God". The word "God" here is 'Elohim, as before. But now this name is combined with "LORD", which translates the Hebrew word *Yahweh* (sometimes Anglicised to 'Jehovah').

Yahweh is God's personal name. It reveals God as the personal God Who is present with His people and makes covenants with them.

This name change is highly significant. Now we see that the omnipotent sovereign Creator is also Adam and Eve's faithful covenant Partner.

We'll study God's names in more detail in session 6.

Where was the Garden of Eden?

We're told that a "river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers." (Genesis 2.10). What does this mean? These four rivers could be four tributaries of a river watering the garden. This would then place the garden downstream – and thus most likely in lower Mesopotamia, close to the head of the Persian Gulf.

A second view is that the river flows through the garden and divides into four channels. This would place Eden and the garden upstream of the rivers, and thus on higher ground. The garden would then perhaps be located somewhere in Armenia.

Opinion is divided, but the Biblical evidence points to the second view. Firstly, the plain reading of Genesis 2.10 suggests it.

But there's another piece of evidence. The garden was God's sanctuary, where He had fellowship with mankind. And through the Bible, we find God meeting with people on hills and mountains. For instance, God enjoys a meal with chosen representatives of His people Israel on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24.9-11). From that mountain, too, He gives Moses His Law (Exodus 24.12). Solomon builds God's Temple on a mountain - Mount Zion.

So it's likely that the garden was on high ground - in Bible language, a 'hill' or 'mountain' - God's 'holy mountain' where He meets with mankind. In fact, in his prophecy against the King of Tyre, Ezekiel seems to equate Eden with the holy mountain of God (Ezekiel 28.13-16). If the garden is indeed on higher ground, then the river flows down from the garden and then splits into four to water the whole land around.

This number 'four' here is significant. In the Bible the number four can be used to symbolise the idea of worldwide or universal extent. For example, Isaiah 11.12 and Revelation 7.1 both use the phrase "the four

corners of the earth" to mean the whole world.

These four rivers are real, of course. But they also seem to be highlighting that God's garden home in Eden was the source of fruitfulness and blessing to the whole world.



Map © Crossway. All rights reserved.
Map showing the two most likely locations of the Garden of Eden.

The Garden – the centre of the world

Whether the Garden was in lower Mesopotamia, or in Armenia, Eden was in the Middle East and so quite close to the geographical centre of Earth's land-masses. In effect, Eden was the centre of the world.

Formed from the dust

God gives us more detail about how He created man in Genesis 2.7-8,15-25. He forms Adam from the dust of the ground. Then He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2.7). God gave this man-shaped lump of clay 'the kiss of life'. As Adam awoke into consciousness he found God, so to speak, bending over him and lovingly kissing him into being. Adam's very first experience was intimacy with God. The Bible story is - at its heart - a love story. That love story began at the very moment of man's creation.

Mankind is linked with the ground. The first man's name Adam suggests this. It's first used in Genesis 1.26, where the ESV translates it "man"; the ESV first translates it by the proper name Adam in Genesis 2.20. The Hebrew word for 'ground' (Genesis 2.7) from which God formed Adam is 'adāmāh - very similar to 'Adam'.

But each person also has a spirit, and belongs to the heavenly spiritual world as well. We belong to two worlds - this physical world that we see around us, and the invisible heavenly realm. And this makes us different from every other creature - including angels.

Jesus – the Creator

Jesus healed a blind man by making mud from the ground (John 9.1-7). He seems to be pointing to Himself as the Creator by re-enacting God's creation of mankind in Genesis 2.

Husband and wife



Image © Georges Jansoone (Jolan) on Wikipedia (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Depiction of the creation of Eve. A marble relief on the left pier of the façade of Orvieto Cathedral, Italy. This was probably executed under the supervision of Lorenzo Maitani (c. 1275–1330).

In Genesis 1.27 we read: *“male and female he created them”*. In chapter 2 God tells us how He made the first woman.

In Genesis 2.18 God says: *“It is not good...”*. This startles us. Till now, He has pronounced everything to be good. Now something is not good. Adam is alone.

God brings animals and birds to Adam. It may well be that these are just those creatures that Adam would encounter on a day-to-day basis, some of which he would domesticate and use. It seems certain that all the animals in the garden (whether carnivorous or otherwise) were, by nature, tame before the Fall. They were not afraid of Adam and Eve, and Adam and Eve did not fear them.

Some of the animals that Adam named could indeed be his faithful companions and helpers – just as some animals are today to their owners. But Adam still needed a real helpmate – one with whom he could truly be united and share everything in his heart. So God created a woman from Adam's side.

We'll look more closely at man and woman in the next session. For now we'll leave Matthew Henry to share his perceptive and lovely insight with us: *“...the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”*

Naked and unashamed

Adam and Eve were both naked, and without shame. This means more than just that they wore nothing. Their relationship with each other, and with God, was open and transparent. They had nothing to hide from each other, or from God.

It has been suggested that unfallen Adam and Eve were, in fact, clothed – not with garments, but with glory. The radiance of Moses' face after His encounter with God (Exodus 34.29-35), and Jesus's transfiguration (Matthew 17.2 and parallels) as perfect Man suggest this may indeed have been the case. But that glory that was lost after they sinned.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

God's people in God's presence in God's paradise

On our journey we'll track key themes and ideas woven through the Bible. The one that underlies them all is **the Kingdom of God**. What is God's Kingdom? The simplest way to explain it is this: **God's people living in God's presence in God's paradise**. Here in Genesis 2 we see two people living in God's paradise – a garden where He Himself was present, *“walking”* there *“in the cool of the day”* (Genesis 3.8). Here, right at the beginning of history, is a foretaste of God's Kingdom.

God wanted Adam and Eve - and all their descendants - to live in His garden paradise with Him! The eternal, uncreated, holy God made us to live in His presence and enjoy fellowship with Him.

Mankind's mandate

God gave mankind a job to do. He put Adam in the garden *“to work it and keep it”*. The word *“keep”* can also be translated *“guard”*. The two words in Genesis 2.15 *“to work... and keep”* (ESV) or *“to work... and take care”* (NIV) are significant.

- The verb *“to work”* is used, among other things, for ordinary labour. But it, and the noun derived from it, are also used for the duties in the Tabernacle and Temple.
- The word *“keep”* is, among other things, applied to caretaking the Tabernacle.
- Both terms occur together in Numbers 3.7-8, 8.26 and 18.5-6 to describe the priests' and Levites' work in the Tabernacle.

All this suggests a link between the ministry in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and mankind's work in the garden. The Tabernacle and the Temple that superseded it were God's earthly home. So was the garden, thousands of years before it. Just as the priests and Levites cared for the Tabernacle and Temple and served Him there, so Adam and Eve were to care for God's garden home in Eden, and serve Him there.



A mountain panorama. "So God created man And God said to them, ". . . fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1.27-28).

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A key part of their work was to be *culture-builders*. God wanted Adam and Eve and their descendants to put Earth's diverse and bountiful resources to good use. Through science, technology and the arts, God wanted our race to build a rich and godly civilisation here on Earth. We were to make this planet a paradise – a paradise where God lived with us in perfect harmony. We'll look at this in more detail in our next session.

God called us, in fact, *to complete His work of creation*. During the six creation days God organised the Earth, bringing order out of chaos. Then He filled the Earth. Now God wanted mankind, under His guidance, to continue His 'world project' and finish it.

We were to go on 'forming' the Earth – arranging, ordering, beautifying, just as a gardener or town planner strives to create order and beauty from a wilderness. And we were to continue filling the Earth - colonising the planet. In Albert Wolters' words, "In a single word, the task ahead is *civilization*".

And in calling us to complete His 'world project', God called us to be His *partners*. Hugh Whelchel put it this way: "The mandate God gives Adam and Eve is to partner with him in his work. From the beginning, God is prepared to entrust the garden to man and for us to become his co-workers."

Adam and Eve began life in Eden, but as their family grew ever larger, they were to push the garden's boundaries out to the farthest corners of the Earth. Gregory Beale comments: "This meant the presence of God which was limited to Eden was to be extended throughout the whole earth." That's still God's goal. One day (as Habakkuk prophesied) ". . . the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2.14).

Subduing the Earth

And how was mankind to fulfil their mandate? God told Adam to 'subdue' the Earth (Genesis 1.28). 'Subdue' is *kabash* in Hebrew. The 'Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament' says: "In the Old Testament it means 'to make to serve, by force if necessary.' 'Kabash' assumes that the party being subdued is hostile to the subduer, necessitating some sort of coercion Therefore 'subdue' in Genesis 1.28 implies that creation will not do man's bidding gladly or easily and that man must now bring creation into submission by . . . strength."

Humanity's task was to make Earth a paradise. And this wouldn't happen immediately or without effort. It was to be brought under control by the exercise of power and

authority. Our task would challenge us. It would ‘stretch us’. It would engage all our physical, mental, imaginative, and creative powers to the utmost. But all this was to be

done in *rest*. We were to work, but not toil; we were to be ‘stretched’, but not stressed. It would be the most wonderful experience you could imagine.

“Behold, it was very good”



Water lily in stunning blue. Even kings and emperors in all their regal splendour are not arrayed like this exquisite bloom (compare Matthew 6.29). Image © naathas : Flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Why did God create?

Why did God create us? Was He lonely? Or did He want slaves to serve His every need? Absolutely not. God created *because it was in His nature to create*. He is self-giving, outgoing, life-giving, generous. That’s His nature. And so creating us is a deeply natural thing for our God to do.

God is a Father. Michael Reeves writes: “Think of God the Father: he is, by his very nature, life-giving. He is a father. for eternity he has been fruitful, potent, vitalizing. For such a God (and only for such a God) it seems very natural and entirely unsurprising that he should bring about more life and so create.”

A little further on, Dr Reeves writes “. . . since God the Father has eternally loved his Son, it is entirely characteristic of him to turn and create others that he might also love them. . . . Jesus Christ . . . is the one eternally loved by the Father; creation is about the extension of that love outwards so that it might be enjoyed by others. The fountain of love brimmed over.” *God is love* (1 John 4.8,16). Love lies at the very root of His divine nature. He

created us so He might shower His love on us!

In His love, God wanted to lavish on us all the countless and unspeakably wonderful blessings of life in His presence. As the Psalmist sang, *“in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”* (Psalm 16.11).

And there’s more. God wanted us to share *in His very own happiness and glory!* As Adrio König put it, God’s “act of creating is the overflowing of his love. he freely decided to make a reality distinct from himself and allow it to participate in his joy and splendour”. What astonishing grace is that!

What is creation like?

Creation is separate from God

Creation is separate and distinct from God. It isn’t, in Michael Lloyd’s words, “a bit of Him that has been let loose on its own”. That’s why we must not worship anything or anyone else. Only God is Divine, and worthy of worship.



Regal angelfish. *"And God said, 'Let the waters swarm with . . . living creatures . . .'"* (Genesis 1.20).
Image © vlad61_61 - Fotolia.com

Creation depends on God

Creation is, moment by moment, dependent on God. The Son of God upholds all things by His word (Hebrews 1.3); in Him all things hold together (Colossians 1.17).

Creation is very good

God declared His creation *"very good"* (Genesis 1.31). This material world and material things can occupy an unhealthy dominance in people's lives. And they can be used for evil purposes. But they are not *intrinsically* evil. On the contrary, they are intrinsically good.

This counters the idea that material things are intrinsically bad or evil, or at least second-best, and that we must aspire to a non-material world of 'pure spiritual existence'.

A highly influential example of this kind of thinking is Platonism, named after the famous Greek philosopher Plato. Tom Wright explains: *"For Plato, as for the Buddha, the present world of space, time and matter is a world of illusion, of flickering shadows . . . and the most appropriate human task is to get in touch with the true reality, which is beyond space, time and matter."* The Platonist and others who follow that line of thinking - together with the Buddhist and Hindu - think that we were made for a world of bodiless 'spiritual' existence.

Platonism has had a profound influence on Western thought. It also impacted Christian thinking, especially in the early centuries and the Middle Ages. Tim Keller writes: *"many in Western history have believed: 1) manual labour is demeaning, 2) sexual pleasure is intrinsically dirty or spiritually polluting, 3) salvation is obtained through denial of pleasures, 4) suffering is good in itself."*

And today, too, many Christians think of heaven as an immaterial world, a place where we shall be free from physical existence.

But the physical world and material things are God-created and good. Paul warns Timothy about heretics *"who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving . . ."* (1 Timothy 4.3). Paul continues: *"For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer"* (1 Timothy 4.4). Physical pleasures and the

enjoyment of God's creation is, within His guidelines, His gift to us. God *"richly provides us with everything to enjoy"* (1 Timothy 6.17).

Our own physical bodies are intrinsically good, too. We may use them to commit sin, but our bodies are not sinful in themselves. On the contrary, God calls our physical bodies His temple (1 Corinthians 6.19)!

And when our lives are over, we won't live in some insubstantial ethereal world. The eternal world will doubtless be very different from this world, but we can be sure it will be at least as tangible and solid and substantial as the one we inhabit now.

Jesus – our Man in Heaven

The goodness of physical, bodily existence was endorsed supremely by the fact that God Himself became a Man, with a physical body! And He didn't divest Himself of His physical body after His resurrection and ascension. In heaven, Jesus is still a Man with a glorified physical body (see Philippians 3.21)!

There's another false teaching that impacts the way Christians view the material world. Bernard Bell writes, *"Many Christians think that since the world is headed to hell in a handbasket, we ought to distance ourselves from the world. We ought not to waste time on culture or art or caring for the earth."* On the contrary, we're to explore God's creation, discover its secrets and put its abundant riches to good use. We're to paint and sculpt and write and make music to delight our God-given aesthetic senses, enrich our world and bring glory to God. We're to care for creation, too, and not spoil, abuse or neglect it.

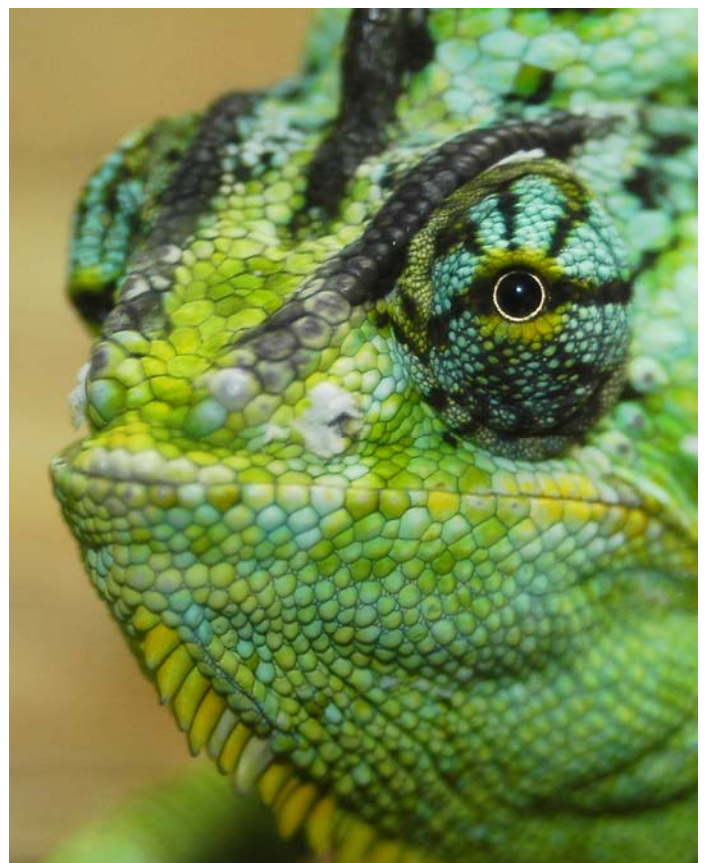


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 A chameleon – one of God's amazing creatures.



Image © JJ Harrison at commons.wikipedia.org (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Shall we dance? A pair of Australian Pelicans (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*), Claremont, Tasmania.

Creation reveals and glorifies God

The creation declares the glory of God (Psalm 19.1). Creation reveals God's eternal power and divine nature to us at every level (Romans 1.19-20) - just as artists reveal their insight, imagination and technical skill through their creative work. The telescope and microscope, and our naked eye discover exquisite beauty and order that can only come from the omnipotent God.

Creation is centred on the Earth

Earth may not be at the geographical centre of the universe, but it is certainly at the centre of God's purposes. God created the light and the sun, moon and stars for the sake of this small planet. They provide its light and warmth and energy on which all life depends.

Compared with the incomprehensible vastness of space, Earth is a fragile, insignificant speck. That was so tellingly portrayed by the famous photograph of planet Earth taken in 1990 by the *Voyager 1* spacecraft. That photograph, named *Pale Blue Dot*, was captured from a record distance of about 6 billion kilometers from Earth.

Our planet appears as a tiny dot against the vastness of space (see the photograph on the right). Yet it is on this tiny dot that the momentous battle between God and Satan is being played out. It was here that God created a being made in His image. It was here that God Himself became man, and lived and suffered and died and rose again. Here on our fragile and seemingly insignificant planet God altered for ever the destiny of the whole creation, both visible and invisible.

God makes His home in Creation

Finally, as we have already seen, God made Earth *to live here*. As soon as He had finished His work of creation,

God made the Garden of Eden His special home and walked with Adam and Eve there.

Millennia later He took up residence on Earth in the Tabernacle and then the Temple. Then He came to live on Earth among us in the incarnate Person of His Son, Jesus Christ (John 1.14). Now He lives in His redeemed people, the Church. And one day God will transform this Earth, fill it with His presence, and live with His people there for ever.



The 'Pale Blue Dot' image of Earth (see the text on the left). You can just see the Earth as a tiny dot caught in the ray of sunlight to the right (the ray is due to taking the image so close to the sun).

The Appliance of Science

How do we reconcile the findings of science and the Biblical account of creation? This is hotly debated. But there are things we can be certain about:

- **The Bible (in its original languages) is perfectly accurate and without error.** Every word - including its grammatical form - is God-breathed and significant. Christians who believe this, however, may still differ over how they *interpret* the text.
- **God created everything out of nothing.** The universe had a definite beginning. And creation is (as we've said earlier) distinct from God.
- **God created the universe progressively, stage by stage.**
- **God made the first human pair as the final and crowning act of His work of creation.** The Bible treats Adam and Eve as historical people in a number of places. In two of them (Romans 5.12-19 and 1 Corinthians 15.22,45,47) we read that Adam and Jesus correspond to each other. So Adam is every bit as historical as Jesus Himself. In fact, Paul's whole theological argument here depends on this. Adam is listed, too, as the founding father of the human race (Genesis 5.1-5, 1 Chronicles 1.1, Luke 3.38). If Adam were only a metaphor for mankind (and not an actual individual), Christ's genealogy becomes suspect - and that, too, has profound theological implications.

What can science tell us about how God created this universe? Two big issues are **(1) the age of the universe**, and of the Earth itself, and **(2) evolution**. We haven't nearly enough space to go into all the arguments. But here are some points to consider.

How old is the universe?

Kurt Wise, who argues for a young Earth only thousands of years old, wrote: "A face-value reading of the Bible indicates that the creation is thousands of years old. A face-value examination of the creation suggests it is millions or billions of years old. The reconciliation of these two observations is one of the most significant challenges to creation research."

There is indeed evidence pointing to an old universe. One relates to the speed of light. Almost all physicists and astronomers believe that its speed is constant (though a very few think it has slowed down over time). In 1987, astronomers observed a famous 'supernova' - a star exploding spectacularly in a blaze of light. This supernova (called SN 1987A) was about 168,000 light-years away. Assuming the speed of light is constant, this event must have occurred about 168,000 years ago, otherwise its light would not have reached us to allow us to see it happen.

The Earth, too, seems to have been in existence for far longer than a few thousand years. For example, sandstone (a common sedimentary rock) is most often laid down by erosion and deposition by water or wind. Erosion is a very slow process. The sheer quantity of



Image © Andrew Dunn (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Sea cliffs at Hunstanton, Norfolk, England. A superb example of different sedimentary rocks. There are three layers. The white layer on top is chalk; the bottom reddish-brown layer is Carstone, a sandstone. In between is a layer, about a metre thick, of 'Hunstanton red rock', a red coloured limestone.

sandstone deposits suggest that long periods of time have elapsed since they first began to form.

Other pointers to a very old Earth are fossils and biogenic deposits (deposits formed from living organisms). There are enormous numbers of fossil remains of ancient plants and animals. And there are unimaginably vast reserves of coal, oil, natural gas, tar sands and oil shales - almost certainly all or nearly all biogenic in origin. Most limestones, too, are ultimately biogenic in origin. Taken together, the fossils and biogenic deposits represent thousands of times more living organisms than the Earth could have reasonably supported at any one time. This again points to Earth being far older than a few thousand years.

However, fossilisation of larger plants and animals frequently involves rapid burial. Taken together, the evidence points to a combination of multiple catastrophic events (whether local or more widespread) combined with very slow processes taking place over enormous periods of time.

But some argue that God created the Universe - and the Earth - with the appearance of great age. He did this with Adam, of course - Adam was created as a fully-grown man, not an infant. But this 'appearance of age' argument becomes difficult to apply, for example, to the fossil deposits. They're doubtless what they appear to be - remains of creatures that were once alive.



Image © Mila (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Fossil shrimp found in Lebanon.

Have living creatures evolved?



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A wonderful portrait of a male orangutan called Major, resident of the Zoo la Boissière du Doré, France. Could he really be the product of evolution? And did we share a common ancestor with him?

The theory of evolution teaches that the first living organisms came into being from the chance interactions of simple chemicals; these organisms then gradually evolved into ever more complex life-forms, and ultimately mankind.

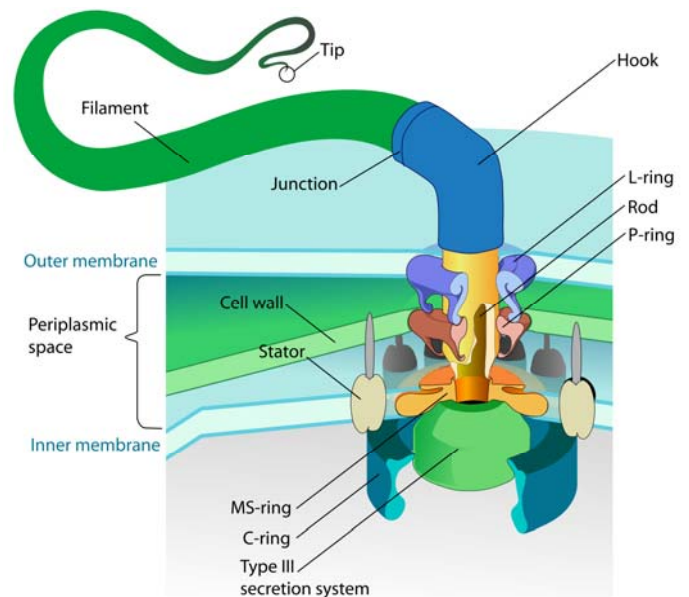
The theory is based on the fact that living organisms vary. Evolutionists explain that some variations reproduced more successfully than others (a process called 'natural selection'). So species gradually changed to become more like the successful variants. And, over millions of years, these changes gave rise to different and more sophisticated organisms. But there are some big scientific problems with this theory:

- ▶ **The beginning of life** How did simple chemicals interact to form complex substances like proteins, and then the first organisms? This has never been demonstrated – though, of course, that doesn't necessarily mean it never will.
- ▶ **Genetic stability** An organism's genetic code is designed to reproduce the parents' characteristics and maintain the species as it is. Species can change in small ways. But it doesn't seem possible for the genetic code to provide enough variation for a reptile (for example) to evolve into a bird. And anyway, 'natural selection' tends to *reduce* variation, not promote it – it selects only those variants that survive best.



A red-eyed tree frog. Could such a complex organ as this little creature's eye really have evolved?

- ▶ **Mutations** The ultimate source of genetic variation is mutation. Mutations are genetic errors. Most errors (as you'd expect) are disadvantageous. So, taken together, mutation tends to sabotage the species rather than help it to evolve into more complex organisms.
- ▶ **Biological complexity** Living things, and the cells and organs within them, are mind-bogglingly complex. Could such finely-calibrated and interdependent biological systems ever have evolved gradually? For example, how do we account for the development of the human eye or brain?
- ▶ **Human language** Humans have the amazing ability to speak. But could speech ever have evolved? One evolutionist asks "How could language have been invented when its invention (and teaching) would itself presuppose the existence of language prior to it?". Certainly, there is no evidence for the evolution of language. Even people with the seemingly least complex cultures have, as one writer put it: "highly sophisticated languages, with complex grammar, and large vocabularies capable of naming and discussing anything that occurs in the sphere occupied by their speakers." It seems that humanity had the ability to talk from the beginning. That, in turn, implies that the human race began with people created with the gift of speech.



A diagram of the flagellum of a Gram-negative bacterium. The flagellum is a long, slender projection from the cell body, whose function is to propel a unicellular or small multicellular organism. The depicted type of flagellum is found in bacteria such as *Escherichia coli* and *Salmonella*, and rotates like a propeller when the bacterium swims. Such complexity at the microscopic scale is astonishing. Could it possibly have arisen through evolutionary processes?

The above problems, taken together, are fatal to the theory of evolution. Some Christians do believe that God did use an evolutionary process to create living organisms. This is an idea called theistic evolution. But if we apply this view to mankind, we land ourselves in significant theological difficulties. If mankind evolved (even their evolution was orchestrated by God) who were Adam and Eve? And at what point did we acquire our moral and spiritual capacities that set us apart from

animals? And when did the Fall occur - through a gradual fall into sin by the whole race, or through a specific sin by one human pair?

The Creation Days

How do we interpret the six days of creation? There are a number of views; two key ones are outlined below.

The 24-hour-day view

Many Christians believe God created in six 24-hour days. They typically see the Earth as, at most, a few tens of thousands of years old. They believe the fossils and sedimentary rocks, as well as the mountain ranges came into existence within the last few thousand years, largely at the time of Noah's flood.



Image © oargi (CC BY-SA 2.0)

View from the summit of the Matterhorn. How did the mountains come into being? Are they thousands or multiple millions of years old? These are questions that are hotly debated by believers.

The 'day-age' view

This view explains the days as a series of long periods, perhaps millions of years each. This view is not necessarily a compromise with evolution. It can be held alongside belief in God's special creation, in Adam and Eve as historical figures, and their Fall as a historical event.

The 'restitution' theory

We mentioned earlier that the Earth already existed in an unfinished state - "*formless and empty*" (NIV) - before the six days of creation. Some people conclude that this dark chaos was the result of some catastrophe connected to Satan's fall. During the six creation days (however we understand these) God was restoring the Earth from this condition. So the sedimentary rocks and fossils could have formed during the period before the creation days.

This 'restitution' view only deals with what happened *before* the six creation days. So this view needs to be combined with one of the views about the creation days themselves - for example, the '24-hour-day' or 'day-age' view explained above.

"Very Good"

Finally, Christians differ over what creation was like before the Fall. God called it "*very good*". What does this mean? There are two ways that we can interpret this.

The 'flawless paradise' view

Many Christians think that Earth before the Fall was a perfect paradise. There were no deserts or ice fields. However, some regions may have been temperate, rather than tropical. Animals (at least higher animals that possess blood) did not die; so there could have been no carnivores like lions and meat-eating dinosaurs.

This view raises some questions. For example, how did carnivores (like lions or the fearsome Tyrannosaurus rex) suddenly emerge after the Fall? Were they once plant-eaters? If so, how did their bodies suddenly become so perfectly adapted to catching, eating and digesting prey? And how did some plants and animals suddenly adjust so brilliantly to life in the desert or the ice-fields? Did God build into plants and animals an enormous capacity to change? Could this, coupled with a natural selective process, have allowed them to adapt to new ways of life and new environments?

Another question is this: if animals (at least the 'higher' animals that possess blood) didn't die, what controlled their populations? That's more difficult to answer.

The 'fit for purpose' view

But some think "*very good*" relates primarily, not to the climate and ecology, but to the world's *function*. In this view, the Earth was the best possible place for God's purposes. To support this, it seems certain that the Hebrew phrase for "*very good*" in Genesis 1.31 doesn't mean 'ultimate perfection' - in other words, a flawless utopia. We could perhaps paraphrase it 'exactly as God wanted it, perfectly suitable for His purposes'.

In this view, all animals (but not humans) did die before the Fall - either naturally or through predation. The Bible does link sin to death (Romans 5.12, 1 Corinthians 15.21-22), but the context of these passages is specifically *human* death, rather than animal death. So these passages, by themselves, don't rule out animal death before the Fall. It's been suggested that Genesis 1.30



An NPS photo by Michael Quinn (CC BY 2.0)

Cacti in Grand Canyon Village on the South Rim of Grand Canyon National Park. Plants that are perfectly suited to an arid environment.



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A winter landscape in Northumberland, England. Was this Earth originally a perfect paradise? Or was it a world much like the one we know today, a world with cold winters and windswept wildernesses, as well as gentler and more hospitable landscapes?

might mean, not that all animals were vegetarian, but that plants are at the base of the food chain and provide food for all animals directly or indirectly.

There can be no doubt that mankind's sin impacted the physical world. But, according to this view, the world before the Fall was recognisably similar to the one we see today - except that there was no sin or moral evil.

Both views, however, see the world as the perfect arena for mankind to learn to love God and trust Him unconditionally, and to work obediently to subdue and rule this Earth under His Spirit's guidance.

And whatever view is taken, we know that God has an eternal paradise in store for us – this world gloriously transformed in ways that we can only dream of now. God never intended this world to be the end of the story.

► Next Session In God's Image

We humans are the crowning glory of God's creation; we're made in His image. What does this mean? How are we made and what makes us tick? And we'll look more fully into why God created us. We'll also look briefly at the angels.

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