

Lesson Two

THE EARLY WORLD



Genesis 1-11

MEMORY VERSE

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

—Genesis 1:27

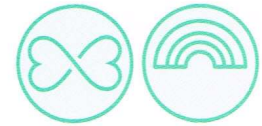
This might not seem like a “landmark” verse, but in this simple sentence there are profound truths. First, God created us in his image. That means that our bodies are physical signs of God. Creation points back to the Creator. We are the visible images of the invisible God. In a way, we “reveal” God to the world.

Second, God created and fashioned each of us as either male or female. Neither is superior; they are complementary, meaning that we each recognize our identity only in light of the other. We are made for the other and for one another, not to be used but as a gift. These are deep truths to pray about and ponder. Why did God make you male or female? What are his desires for you, for your vocation, and for your life? We are called to reflect his image and his glory to everyone we encounter and in all we do. Do you do that?

OPENING PRAYER



God our Father, send us your Spirit as we begin this study of your Sacred Word. Open our eyes to the beauty of your creation. May we see your love and your life in every sunset, every flower, every drop of water ... and every person. Help us to look beyond ourselves, to live for others and for you. Open our hearts to realize how blessed we are, and help us never to take those blessings for granted. We beg you now, Lord, to be with us and stay with us, opening our minds to the truths you want to impart to us this day. Amen.



TIME PERIOD OVERVIEW

EARLY WORLD

Every story has a beginning—and when it comes to Scripture, the book of **Genesis** gives it to us. The word *genesis* is Hebrew for “beginning,” but to be clear, this is the story of the beginning of creation, not the beginning of God. God has no beginning. He has always been. So in Genesis, we hear about when God, the Creator, created *everything*.

It is important to understand that this time period is not exact or precise. In the lessons that follow, we can actually put calendar dates and centuries to the events, but in this first period of the **Early World**, we are looking way back to millions of years ago.

Most people are surprised to learn that the Big Bang theory was first put forward in 1931 by a Catholic priest, Georges Lemaître, who was a Belgian cosmologist. For those who think that science discounts faith, nothing could be further from the truth. But it is vital to understand that the first eleven chapters of Genesis, which we will be discussing in this lesson, are not meant to be read through a scientific lens. These early chapters of Genesis are not a science textbook but rather a love story. The writers of Genesis are not as concerned with explaining *how* the solar system and the earth and animals and humans came to be but with *why* they were created.

In this lesson, we will look at God’s original plan, the problem of original sin, God’s desire to be in relationship with us, and our response to his plan (which does not often end well). We will see characters at both their best and their worst.

Not much has changed since the beginning.

It is important to note that, while the writing style in Genesis 1–11 makes use of **ALLEGORY**, it is still truthful. What this means is that the style conveys truth even if the writing is nuanced or symbolic. The key points are that we all came from one Creator (over time) and that, through pride and selfishness, sin entered into our perfect existence. We also learn that original sin has been passed down to us and that our only hope for redemption and the restoration of our relationship with God comes through the promised Redeemer, whom we know (now) as Jesus.

But before we get ahead of ourselves, let us get back to the beginning of the story.

Video Notes »



Check Your Understanding

1. The story of creation in Genesis _____.

- a) conveys truths in a symbolic or allegorical way
- b) tells us “how” God created the world
- c) can be disregarded as a myth from ancient cultures
- d) teaches that we own the world and can do whatever we want

2. When Adam and Eve sinned, _____.

- a) God promised a redeemer
- b) they lost the perfect holiness and justice in which they were created
- c) the consequences of their sin were inherited by their descendants
- d) a, b, and c

3. God was teaching Adam and Eve that love requires _____.

- a) warm, fuzzy feelings
- b) sacrifice
- c) expensive presents
- d) finding your soulmate

4. In the story of _____, God made a new covenant with his people.

- a) Cain and Abel
- b) Noah and the ark
- c) the Tower of Babel
- d) b and c

5. In the story of the Tower of Babel, God _____.

- a) flooded the earth, destroying all but the tower
- b) sent an earthquake that destroyed the tower
- c) confused the people’s tongues
- d) made a new covenant with his faithful people

DIVE IN

Every good story has a beginning, and in this lesson we are going to look at the very beginning of our story, as God creates everything out of nothing. God says, “Let there be light,” and behold, there is light (Genesis 1:3). Creation has begun. In the first two chapters of Genesis, we see God create the heavens and the earth—the sun, the moon, the stars, the land, the sea, the animals, and finally man and woman. God gives man dominion over all of creation, and he enters a covenantal relationship with Adam and Eve. This is God’s first **COVENANT**, but not his last.

We will see the word *covenant* being used throughout this study, so it is important to understand what a covenant is in the Bible. A covenant is not the same as a contract, which is an exchange of goods and services. In a covenant, God gives us all of himself, and we give all of ourselves back to him. In this first covenant, God gives Adam and Eve everything—all of creation. In return, all that he asks is that Adam and Eve not eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

When Adam and Eve disobey God and eat of the tree, they are actually choosing themselves over God out of the sin of pride. God then allows them to suffer by banishing them from the garden. This punishment is not because God does not love them but because he is trying to teach them what love requires—sacrifice. It is important to notice that God does not abandon them in their sin. In what is referred to as the **PROTOEVANGELIUM** (the “first gospel”), God promises them a savior who will one day defeat sin and death, redeem them from their sins, and heal their broken relationship with himself.

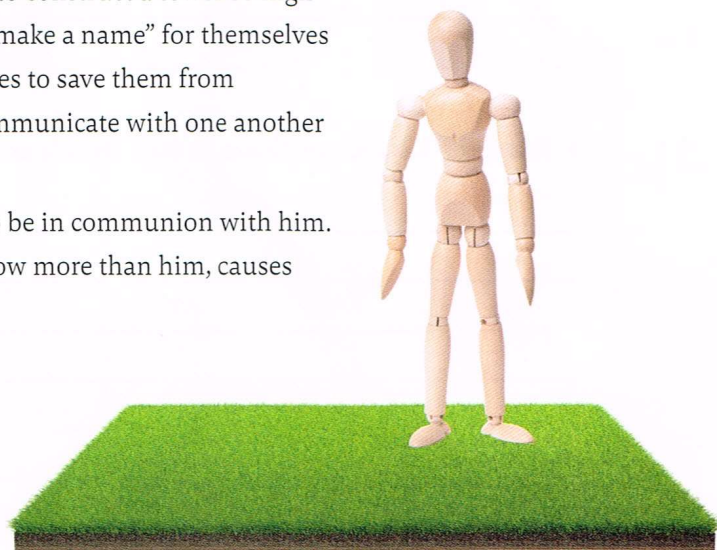
Unfortunately, as the story continues, sin multiplies within the human family and then within all human society. We see the first sibling rivalry between Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve—a quick story with a painful ending.

A few generations later, the earth is filled with so much sin that God regrets having created man and resolves to destroy the earth in a great flood. God chooses Noah, whom Scripture describes as a “righteous man” (Genesis 6:9), and gives him the plans for an ark, the world’s first houseboat. The ark saves Noah, his family, and the animals from destruction so that God can begin creation anew. Following the Flood, God forms a new covenant with Noah and his descendants, but it is not long before that covenant too is broken.

Many years later, many people settle in Babel, where they plan to construct a tower so high that it will reach the heavens (see Genesis 11). Their goal is to “make a name” for themselves (Genesis 11:4). They are so filled with pride that the Lord decides to save them from themselves. He confuses their language so that they cannot communicate with one another and so cannot complete the tower.

God loves us, and he has a plan for our lives, but he wants us to be in communion with him. The sin of pride, thinking we are better than God or that we know more than him, causes that relationship to falter.

As we close Genesis 11 and this second part of the “Early World,” we see up close what happens when we are prideful, when we choose sin and self and fail to hold up our end of the covenant with God.



TOUGH QUESTIONS

VIDEO 2.2

- If we believe the story of Adam and Eve, where did the rest of the people come from?

- Do we really have to believe that the world was created in six days or that Noah built an ark?

- Did people really live to be so old back then?

- How do we know which things to take literally and which things to take symbolically?

HOW TO READ GENESIS

The first eleven chapters of Genesis, which contain some of the best-known stories of the Bible, were written in symbolic or allegorical language. They were not intended to explain the origins of the world scientifically but rather to explain the deeper truths about *why* God created the world and about the role of man in creation.

The first three chapters of Genesis ... express in their solemn language the truths of creation—its origin and its end in God, its order and goodness, the vocation of man, and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation. Read in the light of Christ, within the unity of Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the Church, these texts remain the principal source for catechesis on the mysteries of the “beginning”: creation, fall, and promise of salvation. (CCC 289)

As the *Catechism* tells us, these chapters are not simply ancient myths that can be dismissed out of hand; they convey eternal truths about God, the created world, the vocation of man, sin, and salvation. In these chapters, we learn that we are created in the image and likeness of God, which means that we have a body and an eternal soul as well as an intellect and free will. We learn about temptation, the misuse of free will, and the fall of man as well as the consequences of original sin, in which we are all conceived. But most importantly, we learn that God loves us and wants to reconcile with us. For this reason, in the protoevangelium, he promised our first parents a redeemer who would defeat sin and death—a promise that was fulfilled when he sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins so that we could enjoy eternal life with him in heaven.

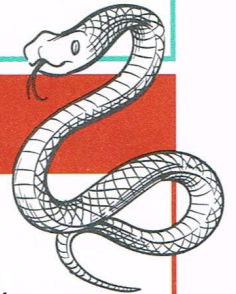
THE FALL AND ORIGINAL SIN

Adam and Eve were created in a state of original holiness and justice. Original holiness means that they were filled with sanctifying grace, which is the divine life of God in the soul. Original justice means that they were at harmony with themselves, with each other, and with the created world.

However, beginning in Genesis 3, we see how, tempted by Satan, they failed to trust God and disobeyed, eating from the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They lost the original holiness and justice in which they had been created, not only for themselves but for all their descendants. Because of this, every human person (except the Blessed Virgin Mary) is conceived with original sin.

Original holiness means that we were created “to share in ... divine life” (CCC 375), while original justice refers to “the inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, and finally the harmony between the first couple and all creation” (CCC 376). This means that we were created to love God and enjoy him forever and to live at peace with ourselves, with others, and with creation, without pain, suffering, or death. Original sin is our loss of that, of what we were created for. It is not a sin we commit but the fallen state that we have all inherited from Adam and Eve. While Baptism forgives original sin, restoring sanctifying grace (or the divine life of God) in our souls, our human nature remains flawed, that is, our intellect is darkened, and our will is weakened so that we have a tendency to sin. This inclination to sin is called **CONCUPISCENCE**.

While the sacrament of Baptism reconciles us with God, restoring his divine life in our soul (this is called “sanctifying grace” or being in a “state of grace”) and cleansing us of all sin, our wounded nature remains. Therefore, we must cooperate with the graces that God provides through the sacraments and prayer to resist temptation and to grow in our relationship with him.



TO THE HEART



Trust is the result of knowing that you are loved.



Read that sentence again. Now read it again. OK, one more time.

What transpired in the Garden of Eden, with the Fall and original sin, was really, at its core, not about fruit or temptation—it was about trusting God. Yes, the fruit was visually pleasing and a “delight to the eyes” (Genesis 3:6), but make no mistake: The serpent was not tempting them with good food but rather with the belief that God was withholding something from them and therefore could not be trusted.

Adam and Eve were not only tempted; they were duped and intimidated. The serpent played on their selfishness and their fear, planting a seed of mistrust in the God who had literally given them paradise. And the devil still uses this tactic with all of us every day.

Do you trust God? Do you *really* trust God?

Do you trust God with your future and your vocation and your ultimate happiness? Do you trust him even in the face of sufferings that will come in your life? People will get sick. Loved ones will die. Divorces will happen. Jobs will be lost. People will move away. These are realities of life, not because you are bad but because we live in a fallen world where sin exists and, sadly, selfishness often prevails.

That does not mean that God does not love you. God does not tempt us; the devil does. God allows trials in our lives but only to help us grow in holiness and virtue and to help us depend on him more and on ourselves less.

So ask yourself, How much do I trust God, really? Maybe rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 10.

In what areas do you like to control your life? Perhaps when it comes to your future job or your vocation? Maybe you want to keep God out of your dating life, your sexuality, or your chastity. It is possible that you want God close when times are bad but not when things are good.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Are you open to a life of poverty (if God calls you to serve as a missionary) if it means that you will be truly happy?
- Are you open to the priesthood or religious life, or is that a door your heart refuses to open?
- Are you willing to speak out and share the truth of your Catholic beliefs even if no one else is willing to do so?
- Are you OK with being unpopular if that is the result of sticking to your morals and living a virtuous life?
- Are you willing to try harder in your prayer life—praying daily, reading Scripture, never missing Mass, getting involved at Church—or are you satisfied with doing the minimum?

These are some of the questions that you need to think about and pray about. Be honest with yourself. If your answer to any of them is no, then ask yourself why? Is it because you doubt God’s existence, his presence, his love, or his goodness? Or is it because you ultimately do not really know or trust God?

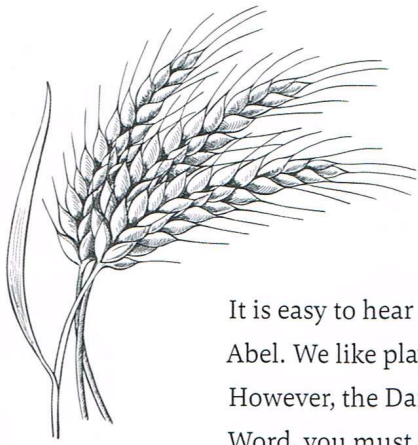
Remember, trust is the result of knowing that you are loved. If you do not trust God, ask yourself if you really know him or believe that he loves you even in spite of your sins.

If you really want your relationship with God to become stronger, begin with where you are the weakest.

Your Thoughts

Reflect on the questions on the previous page,
and write your thoughts in the journaling space below.

A large area of the page is filled with horizontal dotted lines, providing a space for journaling.



BIBLICAL CHARACTER PROFILE

Cain and Abel

It is easy to hear the story of Cain and Abel and immediately associate ourselves with Abel. We like playing the victim, and no one really wants to be seen as the villain. However, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard wrote that when you read God's Word, you must constantly say to yourself, It is talking to me, and it is talking about me.²

What he meant was that when we read the Bible, we don't just read about other people. When we see and hear how characters act, we must also strive to see ourselves—for better or worse—in the characters on the page. We all want to be seen like Abel, giving our best to God, when in reality many of us are, at times, like Cain, giving God less than our best, a half-hearted effort out of obligation.

This is not to say that we are murderous and vengeful like Cain, but have you ever felt rage or anger toward another person who really did not do anything wrong? Have you ever felt envy or jealousy toward another because they were liked more or praised more or preferred to you? Have you ever sinned and thought you could just hide it from God? Cain only appears briefly in Scripture, but we can learn a lot from him.



2. Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves! and Three Discourses*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944), 68, Google Books.

Exercise 1: Read **Genesis 4:2-7**. Notice the different approaches Cain and Abel take to offering God their sacrifices. Both do what is asked, but the attitudes and postures of their hearts are different. See how God notices. What is his response to each brother?

When it comes to your life and your relationship with God, which brother are you more like, honestly?

Exercise 2: Read **Genesis 4:8-12**. What does Cain's response to God in Genesis 4:9 show us about Cain? What does God's reply to him teach us about God's mindset and how we are to interact with our fellow man?

God's punishment teaches us that every act has consequences. He desired to teach Cain a lesson not because he did not love him but rather because he did love him. When have your parents done the same with or for you? When has God?

Video Notes >>



Check Your Understanding

1. Cain _____, while Abel _____.

- a) was a carpenter / was a blacksmith
- b) tilled the ground / kept sheep
- c) was the older brother / was the younger brother
- d) b and c

2. Cain offered God a sacrifice of _____, while Abel offered _____.

- a) grain / the best of his flock
- b) bread / wine
- c) an unblemished lamb / manna from heaven
- d) fasting / prayer

3. When God found his sacrifice unacceptable, Cain was _____ Abel.

- a) still happy because he loved
- b) understanding and sought forgiveness from
- c) angry and killed
- d) disappointed but still helped



Noah's Ark Mosaic

THE FLOOD AS A PREFIGURATION FOR BAPTISM

Many of the events in the Old Testament can be seen as **PREFIGURATIONS**, or foreshadowings, that give us a preview or point us to later events that are fulfilled by Christ in the New Testament. One of the Old Testament events that points to Christ is the Flood, which foreshadows or prefigures Baptism. “The flood and Noah’s ark prefigured salvation by Baptism” (CCC 1094). St. Peter speaks of this when he refers to

the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:20-21)

Just as the waters of the Flood cleansed the world of sin so that creation could begin anew, Baptism cleanses us of sin and makes us a new creation in Christ. Additionally, the ark that saved Noah and his family from the Flood is a prefiguration of the Church, which is sometimes referred to as the barque (ship) of Christ, for it is within the Church that we receive all the graces necessary for salvation.

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

1) **Pride**

2) **Greed**

3) **Wrath**

4) **Envy**

5) **Lust**

6) **Gluttony**

7) **Sloth**

WORDPLAY

allegory – From the Greek words *allos*, which means “other,” and *agoria*, which means “speaking.” An allegory is a story (or poem) that communicates and reveals truth through hidden or sometimes symbolic imagery.

concupiscence – The desire to commit sin, or an inclination to sin (see CCC 405).

covenant - From the Latin term meaning “to agree upon,” a covenant is an exchange of self, an agreement that brings about a relationship between God and his people.

prefiguration – From the Latin term meaning “(re)present beforehand,” *prefiguration* signifies a foreshadowing or preview of events to come.

protoevangelium – A combination of two Greek words, *protos* meaning “first” and *evangelion* meaning “good news” (gospel). It refers to the “first good news,” when God promises Adam and Eve (and all of us) a coming savior (see Genesis 3:15).

GOING DEEPER

Read Genesis 2:3

So God set the seventh day (the Sabbath, which we now call Sunday) apart from the other days. What was God trying to reveal to us by doing that?

Read Genesis 2:21-23

Notice where Eve comes from. Why is it significant that she came from there and not from Adam’s head or foot? What does this symbolize and teach us about men and women?

Read Genesis 3:8

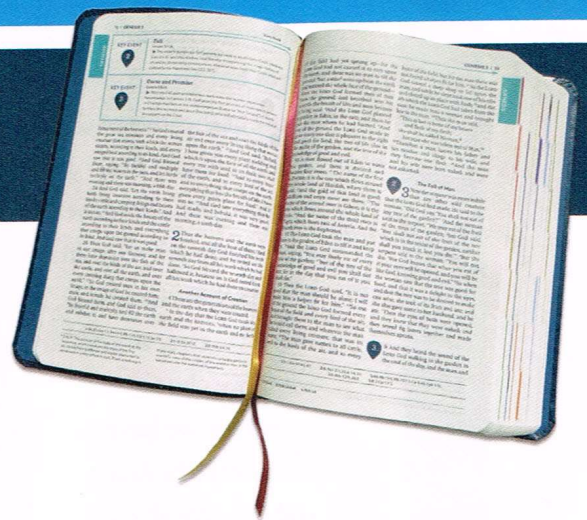
Notice where God is in this verse. Is he far away and inaccessible, or is he near? What does this teach us about God’s desire for us? How do Adam and Eve respond? How are we like them when we sin?

Read Genesis 4:9

What does Cain’s response to God reveal about his heart and mind? What can we learn from Cain’s response and from what the Lord asks him? Are we meant to think of others or focus on self?

Read Genesis 9:12-15

When God creates a new covenant with his people, what does he give them as a visible sign of the covenant? What is this sign supposed to remind us of?



CONCLUSION

Even though we sin, God does not give up on us. Immediately after Adam and Eve sin, what does God do? He promises them (and us) a redeemer. He was already working out our salvation. He cares more about our lives and our ultimate eternity than we do!

It all goes back to the covenant. When God enters into a covenant with his people, he gives us all that he is and holds nothing back. Think about your life. Do you put limits on God? Do you hold things back? Think about Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah and his family, the people who built the Tower of Babel ... what do they all have in common? They did not fully trust God. They all found it difficult to give God everything and not hold anything back.

These stories from the early world are meant not only to teach us how perfectly God loves but also to give us insight into how imperfectly we return that love. We all fall short of the love of God. We all struggle to trust. Your difficulty in giving God your whole life and heart and fully trusting him does not make you horrible; it makes you human. In each of these stories, we see portraits of ourselves. In a way, when we choose selfishly, when we choose ourselves, we have moments like Adam and Eve. We all have moments when we give in to jealousy and rage and selfishness like Cain. We have moments when we are heroic like Noah, but then we make a bad decision. Like the people of Babel, we all want to be seen and known and have “likes” and “comments” and “follows,” forgetting that the glory belongs to God and God alone.

As we move forward, we are going to see how God’s family grows and how God makes and forms new covenants with his people ... and we will see what happens when the people fail to live up to their end of the covenant.



When God enters into a covenant with his people, he gives us all that he is and holds nothing back.



LIVING IT OUT

Try to make it to confession in the coming week. If you are not sure when it is available, check your parish bulletin or website or ask your youth minister or teacher. If you cannot drive yet and are embarrassed to ask your parents to take you, tell them that the teens in your Bible study have *all been asked* to go to the sacrament as part of the lesson follow-up. That should alleviate any awkwardness about “Why is my kid wanting to go to confession?”

Be sure to take time to do a proper examination of conscience, where you walk through the Ten Commandments and review your life (since your last confession), acknowledging where you have fallen short and sinned. If you need help with this, there is a brief examination of conscience in this workbook on page 154.

At the end of your confession, the priest will probably ask you to recite the Act of Contrition (also included on page 158). It is a powerful and invaluable prayer to know. If you have never learned it or have a hard time remembering it, do not get stressed. Screenshot it with your phone, and you can read it in the confessional if you need to. Then in the coming days, before the next lesson (and your next confession), try to memorize it.

Finally, if confession freaks you out, know that it is challenging for everyone to admit our failures and sins to another person. Remember that you are going to Christ, your Savior, with your sins, not “just” Father. Christ is working *through* the priest in the confessional. Be humble. Be honest. Do not hold anything back. There is nothing you can say that the priest has not heard before. He is not there to judge or condemn you but rather to free you. Confession is one of God’s greatest gifts to us—one that can radically change your life for the better if you let it.



CLOSING PRAYER



God our Father, thank you for loving us despite all our sins and weaknesses. Thank you for looking past our selfishness and seeing the good in us. Help us to be strong in the face of temptation this day and this week. Help us to choose you and your will and not ourselves. Place a desire in our hearts to live in relationship with you, to recognize temptations, avoid sin, and give our lives and hearts fully to you. Amen.