

The Biblical Metanarrative #1: Creation and Rebellion

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is a brief overview of the great story of God and his purpose for humanity, also known as the biblical metanarrative. This story consists primarily of four major elements:

- God’s creation of the world and humanity
- Humanity’s rebellion against God
- God’s unfolding plan of redemption to restore his creation
- God’s consummation of his redemptive plan

The more we understand God’s great story, the biblical metanarrative, the more we are able to attach real meaning to our own lives. God’s story frames our own stories.

IMAGE OF GOD

1. Humans were created in the image of God.

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...”
So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26–27, ESV)*

2. The Hebrew word translated “image” is usually translated “idol,” as in the statues set up in pagan temples to represent various deities; (see Nu 33:52; 2 Kg 11:18; 2 Ch 23:17; Ez 7:20; 16:17; Am 5:26).
- When this word was used in Genesis 1 to describe the creation of humans, it necessarily would have been understood by the Israelites in their context. Its meaning in the ancient Near East (ANE) involved concepts already associated with the images of deities.
 - Divine images in the ANE were believed to be:
 - A manifestation of the divine presence and glory
 - Capable of mediating the divine mind and will
 - An embodiment of the divine life
 - Animated by the divine breath or spirit
 - Not the actual deity itself

3. According to Genesis 1-2, humanity was given an exalted role and status.
 - In the ANE, only kings were sometimes understood as being images of the gods. The rest of humanity was viewed as slaves of the gods.
 - The gods were believed to be responsible for the work of governing and maintaining the creation, but they had grown weary of doing such. Instead, they foisted this duty upon humans, who were obligated as slaves to do this necessary work.
 - Genesis, however, presents us with the view that humans were intended by the sole Creator to be his kings and priests of his creation here on earth.
4. Genesis 1-2 also teaches us that all of creation is good and holy (set apart for God's glory).

CREATION MANDATE

1. God placed the first humans in the Garden of Eden, a place that he himself had cultivated.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Genesis 2:8, ESV)

- Eden is translated from a Hebrew word that means delight, pleasure, or luxury; i.e., anything delightful to the senses.
 - The garden was an intersection of heaven and earth. It was an initial manifestation of God's kingdom on earth expressed through his living image. It was here that the first humans were intended to grow in their relationship with their Creator, with one another, and with the surrounding good creation.
2. God first tasked humans with responsibility in the Garden of Eden.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Genesis 2:15, ESV)

- Humans were to work God’s garden and keep it, meaning that they were to cultivate it and care for it.
 - The Hebrew words translated “work” and “keep” are etymologically related to the words meaning “worship” and “obey.” It is reasonable to understand this duty to cultivate and care for the garden as an act of worship and obedience to God.
3. God also blessed the humans with the mandate to fill and govern the entire earth.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:28, ESV)

- The earth is understood to be wild, but good. Humans were to take what they had learned in the Garden of Eden and launch from there out into the far reaches of the earth.
- Their God-given mandated activity can be understood to involve the following:
 - Exploration: learning about God, one another, and the creation
 - Cultivation: developing varied expressions of human culture
 - Expansion: going from Eden to the ends of the earth
- God’s desire was to fill the earth with his glory through his living image.
 - Remember that humans were designed to manifest God’s presence and glory, to mediate his mind and will, to embody his life here on earth, and to be animated by his Spirit. Their fulfillment of the creation mandate would have been as God’s living images.

HUMAN REBELLION

1. The story is told of two important trees located “in the middle of the garden” (Gn 2:9).

- The Tree of Life speaks of God’s gracious offer of contingent immortality to humanity. Ultimately, God himself was the source of immortal life that was readily available to the first humans.
 - Eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil, which was forbidden upon pain of death, has been primarily understood as follows:
 - It represented the independent acquisition of moral knowledge apart from God on the part of the first humans. To eat of it was to seek moral autonomy.
 - Some also think that God would have eventually allowed them to acquire the knowledge of good and evil, but that the first humans were immature and would need to spiritually grow in order to be able to responsibly handle such knowledge. Eating of the tree with God’s permission would not have been sin.
 - Nevertheless, the first humans did eat and their action was overt rebellion against God, who had blessed them and ennobled them in every way.
2. The Serpent, who represents Satan, is revealed in Scripture as God’s adversary.
- His hatred of God is directed toward God’s living image.
 - He tempted the humans, saying, “you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” His temptation was a subtle accusation against God, questioning his authority, truthfulness, and goodness.
3. The consequences for humanity and the creation were catastrophic.
- Humans experienced spiritual death and lost access to God’s gift of immortality.
 - Humans experienced relational dysfunction with God, one another, and the creation.
 - Humans experienced physical death and faced the prospect of eternal death.

- The creation was still fundamentally good, but its purpose was now frustrated, unable to become what God intended for it due to the rebellion of its steward (Ro 8:18-25).
- The creation mandate would move forward, but sin permeated all of humanity's activities so that everything was in some way corrupted (Gn 4-11).
 - For example, cultural development takes place (Gen 4), but the account of it is sandwiched by accounts of murder, indicating the sinister nature of human activity.
 - By the time of Noah, the Scripture says that every inclination of the hearts of humans was evil and that the earth was full of violence (Gn 6:5-7, 11).

4. Nevertheless, hints of hope appear just as soon as sin itself appeared.

- God spoke cryptically to the Serpent concerning the future work of Christ: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"* (Gn 3:15, NIV).
- God clothed Adam & Eve, rejecting their fig leaf attempt to cover up their nakedness, which was likely the evidence of their sin, since they likely experienced the departure of God's Spirit who had likely "clothed" them.

Instead, God clothed them with "garments of skin" (Gn 3:21), which likely involved the blood sacrifice of an innocent animal. This foreshadowed both the sacrificial system of the Mosaic Covenant and more importantly the atoning work of Christ.