

# Old Testament Core Seminar



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GENESIS 1-2

## Introduction

Welcome to the Old Testament Core Seminar course. This is one of the longest courses in the Core Seminar program. It is 26 weeks long. And were that not enough, it is actually only the first half of a two-part course. After you are done with the Old Testament, you are invited to participate in the New Testament Core Seminar course. That too will be 26 weeks long. So, together, what we really have here is 52 classes on the Bible. That is one year's worth of teaching!

Now, I tell you that not to intimidate you, or to run you off to another, shorter, Core Seminar course. Rather, I tell you that in the hopes of exciting you for what lies ahead. **Hebrews 4:12** tells us that "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." **Second Timothy 3:16-17** says "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." **Psalms 119:105** calls the Bible "a lamp unto [one's] feet, and a light unto [one's] path." The same psalm, in **verse 160**, says "The entirety of [God's] word is truth, and every one of [His] righteous judgments endures forever." And **Psalms 1, verses 1 and 2**, say that the blessed life is found by the man whose "delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night." So we are engaging here in the study of the very words of life!!! In **Deuteronomy 32:47** Moses said the words of the Bible "are not just idle words for you – they are your *life*."

We here at GRBC take that very seriously. The Bible is the place where we hear God speaking to us – about Himself, about us, about the world, about sin, about judgment, and about salvation. So whenever we can we want to listen to the Bible. And now we have before us the opportunity to slow down, take our time (an entire year), and dive a little deeper into God's word!

So we hope you'll join us for the whole thing. Let's make a commitment now; let's pace our selves; and let's study our way through the Bible over the next year. If you can't make it to every class, you'll still, nonetheless, benefit from the classes you do come to. That being said, the classes are designed to hang together, and fit together into one complete curriculum. I suppose it's like a wardrobe. Each individual piece is valuable in itself. But it is only when the outfit is entirely assembled that the pieces themselves take on their greatest value, and the sum is greater than the parts.

The individual classes in the courses are (by and large) overviews of the individual books of the Bible. Of course we can't cover everything in every book in the short time we'll have together each Sunday. Our goal, instead, is to give you the necessary information from each book – sort of the central organizing theses – to allow you to become familiar with the basic teachings of that book, and then to go home and read the book on your own with a little more guidance in what to look for and what to notice in the text – and hopefully you won't get lost, and you'll have a little more confidence, in the bigger and more overwhelming books of the

Bible. And, as just mentioned, in it all we want to see how the 66 individual books of the Bible fit together to ultimately make one book, with one message, by one Author.<sup>1</sup>

[PRAY]

### Why Study the Old Testament?

We start by asking the simple question: Why study the Old Testament? It is, after all, the *Old* Testament. Old is bad, and new is good. Right? Furthermore, we are Christians. We follow Jesus. Isn't the religion for the followers of Jesus laid out in the New Testament? The name "Jesus" doesn't occur even once in the Old Testament. So why is an entire half a year devoted to it? Why should we study the Old Testament?

[BRIEFLY TAKE SOME ANSWERS]

Well, there are *many* reasons to study the Old Testament. Let's consider just a few of them here:

1. It is the word of God just as much as the New Testament is. Through it we know much about God, us, and His plans to redeem a people for Himself.
2. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection don't make much sense without the teachings of the Old Testament. The events, people, and institutions of the Old Testament all occurred, under God's sovereignty, so that there would be a context into which Jesus could be born, and His words and actions would make sense. In the same way, we read of Jesus' words and actions, and we can only fully understand them when we understand them against the backdrop of God's work in the world before Jesus came. Let me give you an example. **John 7:37-39** says:  
On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.  
How can we really know what Jesus is saying here unless first we understand what Feast this is, what they are celebrating at it, what goes on in such a celebration, what does water or the Spirit have to do with any of it, how does John know that's what Jesus meant, and where in the Scriptures are we told of living water flowing from within and *what does that mean* in those Scriptures? Do you see how understanding the Old Testament will really open up the New Testament to us?
3. It has been found, by conservative estimates, that in the New Testament there are 295 separate references to the Old Testament. Then on top of those, there are over 600 clear allusions to the Old Testament. Mathematically speaking this means that over 10% of the New Testament is either a direct Old Testament quote

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<sup>1</sup> "It is, after all, composed of 66 separate books, from at least 30 different writers, scattered over a period of around 1,500 years, including many different genres of writing. The writers were quite diverse in place, time, temperament, talents, station in life. Some were Hebrew speakers and other Greek. . . . Most of the Old and New Testaments writers didn't even know of each other's writings, but they fit together strikingly well." B. B. Warfield, SSWI, 438-439.

or allusion. It's clear therefore, that the New Testament authors premised their theology on the theology of the Old Testament, and they expected their readers to have a familiarity with the Old Testament. So again, we are not going to understand the New Testament unless we first understand the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

4. Finally, more than just an aid for knowing the New Testament better, Jesus Himself says that the Old Testament teaches about *Him*. Turn in your Bibles to **Luke 24:25**. Two disciples were walking on a road, discussing Jesus' crucifixion, when suddenly the resurrected Christ comes along side of them, and look at what He says:

**Luke 24:25-27** "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

You see something similar down in **verse 44** as he's speaking to the disciples:

**Luke 24:44** "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

And again in **John 5:39** He says, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scripture that testify about me..."

What "Scriptures" is He talking about? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] The Old Testament, of course. So apparently Jesus believes that He is indeed in the Old Testament, even if His name, "Jesus," isn't.

And the rest of the New Testament authors agree as well. **Acts 3:18**, "What God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled." **I Corinthians 15:3-4**, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." **II Timothy 3:15**, "The holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

In all, we will have a richer, fuller, more robust understanding of Jesus and the gospel if we know the Old Testament better. And that is our goal is it not, to know the Lord Jesus Christ? Well the Old Testament can, and will, enrich our knowledge of, and relationship with, our Lord and Savior.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These statistics come from Roger Nicole, "The New Testament Use of the Old Testament," in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 135-51, reprinted in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text?*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Leeman devoted an entire class to these sort of introductory issues. He did a great job. I, however, have cut that material back (obviously). Nonetheless, we should keep it on the web for people to access it. The teacher of this class can direct people to it.

## [Take Questions]

Now to the Old Testament!

## GENESIS 1 & 2

We'll start, of course, with Genesis. We'll look today at Genesis 1 & 2. Normally we will, in each class, look at an entire book (sometimes two at once). But when it comes to Genesis, we are going to particularly slow down, because Genesis is so foundational to understanding the rest of the Bible. We are going to take chapters 1 and 2 together today because in these chapters we read of the created order and of mankind as they were supposed to be – before sin entered in and disturbed the perfect harmony of the universe and the perfect harmony in our relationships with God and each other. In chapter 3 we read of the first sin, and all the deleterious effects of it. The rest of the Bible then, from that moment on, is about God's plan to restore both us and the universe to that original pre-sin perfect state. So, looking at the way the universe was, before sin, we will better understand what God is doing throughout the rest of the Bible, because we'll see what it is God is trying to reestablish. To put it another way, understanding God's design in the beginning will help us understand God's plan of redemption today, and His goals for the future. Still, in other words, Genesis 1 and 2 set the context to understanding the rest of the Bible.<sup>4</sup>

### Context

This portion of the Bible was written by Moses. Of course he wasn't there to be an eyewitness to these events; rather this was revealed to him at some time during his time as prophet to the nation of Israel.

Just by way of a side note: There is much discussion, perhaps you've heard some of it, about whether or not Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. In fact, some even doubt that Moses ever even existed in the first place. I take the position that Moses was a real man, and that he did write these books. I'll be operating from that position for the rest of the class. However, it is not the aim of this introductory class to give an apologetical defense of that position. Nevertheless, the handout titled "Who wrote the Pentateuch and when?" is provided for you if you are interested in that debate.<sup>5</sup>

### Theme

The theme of the first two chapters is as follows:

*God is an eternal and self-sufficient God, who by sheer verbal fiat has sovereignly created the universe and all that is in it, in order to display His glory. The crown of His created order is mankind, the only creature created in God's image. Human beings are created in order to specifically display God's glory as they obediently govern the earth while enjoying loving fellowship with God and each other.*

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<sup>4</sup> Vaughn Roberts' *God's Big Picture*, Graham Goldsworthy's *Gospel and Kingdom*, and T. Desmond Alexander's *From Paradise to the Promise Land* should be promoted for the class to read during these 6 months.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Kaiser's *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable & Relevant* and Dillard and Longman's *An Introduction to the Old Testament* can be recommended for further reading on the subject.

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[This outline does not need to be gone over. The class only needs to be told that it is printed in their handouts so that they could have a little guide for their own study.]

### Outline w/ Pivotal Texts

- I. Genesis 1:1-2:3  
The telling of the seven days of Creation: Emphasis on God's word, sovereignty, lordship, and the order and goodness of the created order
- II. Genesis 2:4-25  
A retelling of the creation story: This time with emphasis on mankind's special relationship with God, the created order, and each other

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### Theme texts

Let's now go to the text and see where these things are taught.

#### 1:1-25

Let's read **Genesis 1:1-5**. [READ] The first thing that should be noticed here is that the subject of the first sentence is who? God. **The creation account is primarily about God.** Yes, the time it took to create, and what it was that God created are important. But we dare not miss the main objective of the creation account because we got lost in the details. The creation account is about God. It tells us a lot about who He is in nature and characteristics. In fact, we should remember this about the entire Bible. The entire Bible is about God. The stories in the Bible are not ends in themselves, nor are they intended to merely provide us with moral stories. Rather, first and foremost the stories in the Bible are means to tell us about God – who He is, what He's like, what He's doing. Then, derivative from that, we understand who we are. We can only understand who we are in light of who God is. So in this class, and I recommend this practice for your own study, we will always ask first, "What does this passage teach us about God?" Only then will we rightly understand what it tells us about ourselves as we consider who we are in reference to the Creator.

Well, the first thing we notice in this passage is that **God is eternal**. No one made God. Notice that **verse 1** does not begin with an explanation of where God came from. It doesn't even provide an apologetic for the existence of God. Rather, the text simply assumes the existence of God. He simply is, He always has been, and He always will be! I've taught Bible studies in juvenile prisons for a number of years now, and one question that continually comes up again and again is "Who made God? If God made everything here, who then made Him?" And the answer is staggering. The answer is "No one! No one made God." "When was He born; when did He start?" "Never! He never had a beginning. He is from everlasting." And the kids always have some kind of reaction to that: either amazement or disbelief. We, as time bound humans, find this hard to get our minds around. To us, everything has a beginning and everything has an end. Each day starts and ends. Seasons start and end. Seasons of our lives start and end. This class has started, and, sorry, but it too will end. Even our very lives had a beginning, and mortally speaking, we all know that *they* will have an end. So it's hard for us to

envision an eternal anything. But, that is one thing that makes God God: His eternity. No one and nothing else can claim that! It is one of the attributes of God that make Him completely distinct and unique from everyone and everything else. God is God, and there is none like Him.

**Psalm 90:2** says, “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

From this first point of God’s eternity, we see that **God is self-sufficient**. You’ll notice in **verse 1** that God is completely alone in this work. He does not need anyone or any thing’s assistance. This creation is what we call *ex-nihilo*, which means “out of nothing.” This creation is utterly different from the ancient pagan creation stories – like the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* or the Greek poem on origins by Hesiod, *Theogony*. Both of these ancient cosmogonies picture a ‘god’ working on some sort of already existing primeval ‘stuff.’ These are all variations of a ‘relative’ creation, not an ‘absolute’ creation. Therefore, in their religions the natural universe had a place of preeminence, either for good or evil, on a par or at least near to their ‘gods.’ Not so in Genesis and the rest of the Old Testament. Rather, in Genesis and the rest of the Old Testament, we see a God who is not on the same par with nature, or accountable to nature, or subservient to nature, but a God who is supreme and sovereign over nature. Therefore the created universe is not worshiped. The Creator alone deserves worship; created people and things do not.<sup>6</sup>

How, then, did God create the universe if He had no physical matter to work with? Again, the answer is staggering. **God created by the power of His word**. Look at **verse 3**. God simply spoke, and the light was born. Look at **verse 6**. He does the same thing in creating waters and sky. In **verse 9** the land is created the same way. And the list could go on. God’s word is so powerful that even *that which does not even exist yet* has to obey it!

**Isaiah 55:11** says, “[my word that goes out from my mouth] will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

This brings us right to the next point: **God is sovereign**. What we mean by that is that God has complete control of His universe. There is not a molecule anywhere that can frustrate God in His purposes. What He has determined, what He wills, happens. Did you notice that in **verse 3**? When God says, “Let there be light,” what happens? There is light! Moses is making a point with such curt wording: command and immediate result. Notice that after each verbal command in Genesis 1, the result is always “and it was so.” Look at the very end of verses 7, 9, 11, 15... The list could go on. What God determines, speaks, and it comes to pass.<sup>7</sup>

**Psalm 135:6-7** says, “I know that the LORD is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.”

Finally, before we move on to think about mankind, we also see in Genesis 1 that **God is good**. Seven times in Genesis 1 (verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31) God looks on what He has made and calls it good. The created universe is good. It’s not God, and not to be worshiped, but

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 33:6,9, Romans 4:17, and Hebrews 11:3 also confirm a creation *ex nihilo*.

<sup>7</sup> God’s sovereignty is also reflected in His rest on the seventh day. It says that He rested because He was done. His work was complete. The rest wasn’t because of exhaustion.

it is good. Therefore, everything from our bodies to Alaskan wildlife reserves have dignity in and of themselves and are to be respected and cared for as though they belong to the God who says they are good. And the implication from it all: God is a good God. He makes good things. He does good things. We have no cruel despot whose word is obeyed because he will lash out in anger if it is not. But we have a good God who does good things to and for His good creation and creatures.

### [Take Questions]

#### 1:26-28, 31

Let's read **Genesis 1:26-28**. [READ] Human beings are presented as the 'crowning act' or 'pinnacle' of God's creative activity. When He was done creating everything else, as His last act of creation, He made one creature that stood in special relationship to him, unlike every other creature, and fulfilled a unique role in the created order that no other creature could fulfill. Let's look at that special relationship and role.

Notice in **verse 26** that human beings are said to be **created in the image of God**. With respect to plants, fishes, birds, and beasts we read that God made them 'after their kind' (1:12, 21, 24, 25). Human beings were not created after the pattern of some other creature, but of God himself – in His "image," in His "likeness." God has reason, intelligence, memory, ethical norms, the capacity to love and have relationship with others, the ability to speak and communicate ideas, and so forth. That is what it means that we are created in His image. And so we have a distinct relationship to God, in that we have the ability to have a personal relationship with God – to know Him, to love Him, to interact with Him.

Yet notice: Humanity may be the pinnacle of creation, yet he is only the pinnacle of *creation*. He is not the pinnacle of *all*. The human being remains a referential and derivative creature. Our being made in God's 'image' stresses the radical nature of our dependence and subservience to God. He is Creator. We are creatures.

Secondly, being created in the image of God not only puts us in distinct relationship to God, but also carries with it a distinct role in the created order. To keep with the same language, we say that human beings are **created to image God**. We are to take these attributes of God, which He has instilled in us, and thereby shine His characteristics all over the earth. In doing so, we spread His glory throughout the world.

In this we get into God's motive for creating. It is true that God created the universe to display His glory and excellencies to that very created order and the angels looking on. **Revelation 4:11** says "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." And since mankind is the pinnacle of that creation, created in God's image, he can, and is called to, spread the glory of God in a very specific way that the rest of creation can not. That means that those characteristics of reason, intelligence, ethics, love, community, communication, and so forth, are to be exercised wherever mankind goes. He thereby spreads the glory of the God in whose image he is created. Jesus said it this way in **Matthew 5:16**: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

More specifically though, mankind is to spread the glorious image of God throughout the created order by exercising one particular attribute of God that I have not mentioned yet. It is

that of **lordship and care**. Do you see there in **verses 26 and 28** that man is called to have dominion over the various parts of the creation?

This does not mean that mankind is here given a plank check to do whatever he so desires with the plants, animals, and natural resources of the earth, as though the earth is now written over to him, out of the hands of God, to be his play ground without accountability. Rather, man's exercise of "dominion" is to image forth *the way* God exercises dominion. God's exercise of dominion is in an orderly, caring, nurturing way. We read about that in Genesis 1. Therefore, man's dominion is to be exercised in a way that brings the creation to be more easily inhabited by understanding it and using it, all the while in a way that cares for and protects the creation.<sup>8</sup> In this way, **man acts as a king over, and a priest for creation.**

### [Take Questions]

#### 2:1-3

At the beginning of **chapter two** we read of God resting from His work. This is because, as it says in **verse 2**, that God was finished all His work, not because He was exhausted. I point out this rest because created man also enjoyed this rest. While man certainly had work to do – subdue the earth and exercise dominion as we just read, and “work and keep” the land as it says in 2:15 – he nonetheless did so without toil or pain or sweat from the brow. **The world God created was a place of rest and peace.**

#### 2:18-25

That **rest and peace** existed on every level: between God and man, between man and earth, and **between man and woman**. Time escapes us right now to flesh out all the implications of this first marriage in **Genesis 2:18-25**, for there is a wealth of information there. But suffice it for now to say that these two created human beings had perfect harmony of thought, emotion, love, communication, cooperation, understanding, trust, and peace. Married couples, give *that* some thought.

#### 2:15-17

All of this sounds wonderful doesn't it? Imagine: the Lord God exercising complete sovereignty and caring for His pristine and peaceful creation, as people live there in perfect fellowship with God and each other, exercising their stewardship of the earth as kings and priests, displaying God's glory! Well, what happened? Why don't we experience such today? I don't see a pristine environment and people living in love of God and each other. I see class 5 hurricanes and people hating God and killing each other. What happened?

All that these chapters describe is a world – a very *real* world as it was – before the entrance of sin into it. This is all before mankind's rebellion against this good and loving God.

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen Dempster writes that “being made in the image of God signifies humans exercising dominion *as God's vicegerents of creation*.” Behind all this, it is helpful to observe that ancient near-Eastern kings would often build statues (images) of themselves, and place those statues strategically throughout their kingdom in order to proclaim their dominion over that portion of land. In the same way, God placed man in the garden as his vice-regent to proclaim God's dominion over the earth. In the image of God, man rules on behalf of God. Man displays God's kingly image to all creation as he fills and subdues the earth. Thus, as we act and rule on the earth, so we teach the world what God is like in heaven.

We'll read about that mutiny and high treason next week. I mention it now simply to point out the obvious: this kingdom that we are reading about here needs to be restored. And, in fact, that is what the rest of the Bible is all about. It is the story of God's plan to restore this perfect paradise world. And the themes we've talked about today – the sovereignty and lordship of God, the pristine earth as a place to have fellowship with God and others, kings and priests of the earth, rest and peace, glorifying God – will be the threads that hold this story together. So if you liked what you heard today...stay tuned – for the entire year!

### **[Take Questions]**

### **Application**

Before we conclude though, a brief word on application. We will do this at the end of every class. The reason is because application should *always* be made when human beings come into contact with the speaking God. **James 1:22** tells us to be *doers* of the word, *not only hearers*. We deceive only ourselves if we are not doers of what we hear.

So, what are some ramifications of Genesis 1 & 2 on our lives, individually and as a corporate church body?

### **[TAKE ANSWERS/LEAD BRIEF DISCUSSION]**

### **[PRAY]**