

Understanding God in the Old Testament

Man Cannot Live Without God

Genesis 1-9

Introduction

This morning I want to begin a series entitled “Understanding God in the Old Testament”. Many times we neglect the Old Testament simply because we think it is outdated or inapplicable to us because we are no longer under the old agreement or old covenant, which is true. But I do not believe that we can fully understand the incredible and gracious new agreement that we have with God through Jesus Christ, until we can see our condition as human beings and the patience and involvement of God with his people before the coming of Jesus Christ.

As in the words of a Bible teacher that I greatly respect, he puts it this way, **“The Old Testament has fulfilled its role of awakening us to the full and deep meaning of life and the work of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It has prepared us to understand Him in richer and more incomparably profound ways than reading the New Testament narrative alone would have done.”**

With in the words of the Old Testament we find the beginnings of man, the human condition, and as we gain understanding of our God, we gain an understanding of ourselves. **It doesn’t take long for us to read the stories of the Old Testament and find a little bit of ourselves in there.**

Yet, despite all of our flaws we find that God’s focus is on us. His heart reaches out to us, his grace is made available to us, his wanted to be with us is his hearts delight. And even though people see an angry God in this first half of the Bible, we can see how he tries to work with a people who are arrogant, self-centered, and selfish. His heart is that we do turn to him. And He is waiting for us to come back to where we belong – walking alongside him in life.

Creation

Obviously, the first place we begin our study is in the book of Genesis. Someone has said that his book contains the first reference to baseball – in the Big Inning. Yet, can I say in this inning we as a human race don’t do so well. First we come to the creation of the universe. God not only created everything but even today he is the sustaining force of our world. This is our first lesson about God – **Our God Created and Sustains our Universe.**

The one with whom we have access to as a child has to his father, is the one who not only created everything that we see, but he continues to sustain it. We live on a planet shared with millions of other human beings like ourselves. Our planet is part of a solar system. This earth sits on an axis of 23.5 degrees, that if this planet changed its axis it will destroy this planet. This earth spins at the rate of a 1000 miles per hour circling around a

prearranged path around the sun moving right on schedule. **When we study creation, we are actually studying God.** In **Romans 1:20** we read:

20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

Nature is not to be our focus of worship, but the Creator is. Take time to look at the wonders of God, take time to admire his handy work, and learn from his creation so that you can see that he is a God who is creative, and a God of order. The universe didn't just happen, but it is clear that it was created with order and continues to function as such.

We find in the first chapter of the book of Genesis the creation of the world. A very systematic approach, each day building upon the next. God creates the heaven's and the earth, then the sky, dry land, seed-bearing plants, fruit trees and green plants, then the Sun, moon and stars, then the birds of the air and marine life.

Then on the sixth day he creates the land animals and then most importantly of all (he saves the best for last) he creates man.

Adam and Eve

Man holds a special place in the eyes of God however, and **(a)we find the first divine consultation of the trinity** mentioned in **Genesis 1:26-27**:

26 Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground." 27 So God created human beings* in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

We find the plural "us" when God is speaking in verse 26. We also find that **(b)God gave man a responsibility** – to rule over the animals. God wanted mankind to experience not only a close relationship with God, but a sense of value and worship towards God as well. I think there is something within all of us that longs to be valuable to God, that wants to be involved in His plans. **Revelation 4:11** tells us:

You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist, and were created.

I hope within all of us that the greatest calling on our lives is to live in such a way that God is pleased by what he sees and hears. And when God gives us something to do, a responsibility, that we do it with a sense of worship and value.

But in addition to the Trinitarian involvement and the sense of responsibility given, there is also another unique part of the human race and we find it in **Genesis 2:7**:

7 Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

God breathes his breath into man and doesn't do it for any other part of his creation. **(c)God imparts his spirit and life into man.** And mankind today wanders around from one thing to the next looking for something to satisfy the soul, trying to connect his spirit to whatever he can to find a sense of worth or a place to belong, never finding it until they come to find Jesus Christ as their restorer back to God, connect that part of them that was placed there by God.

The Garden of Eden

We then find ourselves at the story of Adam and Eve. We read of how God places Adam and Eve in a garden full of trees, two special trees worth mentioning – The Tree of Life and the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life held eternal life and eternal fellowship with God while the other tree made man aware of sin and demonic influence. Of course, which tree does man pick? You ever heard the term, “curiosity killed the cat?”

Clear direction was given about the tree of good and evil, but with the influence and temptation of Satan himself he manages to steer mankind into thinking just like him. Just as Satan tried to take the place of God in heaven, he manages to get Adam and Eve to put themselves before God as well. We find the **tactics of the enemy: 1. He implants distrust in God's love. 2. He denies the warnings of God. 3. He presents distorted truth.**

With Eve we find the arousal of her emotions, and the disregard of Eve and the disobedience of Adam. Eve was deceived and tricked but Adam outright disobeyed God. Immediately we find **how man responds to sin. 1. They become self-conscious. They both realize that they are naked and they try to cover up. 2. They both hide because of their guilt. 3. They blamed and made excuses.** Look at Adam's words in **Genesis 3:12:**

12 The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”

You would think that as the God of the universe, he would wipe them off the face of the earth and create two more people, but instead he gives them consequences for their actions. He also gives the first prediction of the coming of Jesus Christ in **Genesis 3:15.** He says to the serpent:

15 “And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Clearly the One who will crush Satan is Jesus Christ, who will defuse the power of sin and death once and for all. I am reminded in the movie, “The Passion” when Jesus is

praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, the picture of Jesus stepping on the head of a snake referring to this very scripture.

Before banishing Adam and Eve from the Garden we read that God provides the skins of animals to clothe them. And in order to obtain the skin of animals something had to be killed, blood had to be spilled, and God provides them with a solution from their self-consciousness and sin. And we read of the first demonstration of God's mercy and grace.

We serve a God of Mercy and Grace. Even when we sin, he is there to help us. It is no wonder why God continues to give us chance after chance, to help us in our state of sin and despair, it has always been a part of His nature. It is God himself who bears and carries the pain, the hurt, and the agony of our sins.

The way to the tree of life is then guarded by angels and a sword, and today we find that our tree of life is found in Jesus Christ. He is now the way into the eternal presence of God.

Cain and Abel

Genesis then moves to the Story of Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel. We read of how they both offer sacrifices to God. This is the first mention of worship in the scripture. **We serve a God who desires our worship.** Abel's sacrifice is accepted and Cain's isn't. As in any form of rejection, Cain becomes jealous and envious. God warns Cain in **Genesis 4:7**:

7 You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master."

Anyone ever felt like this? You let your emotions or your thoughts run out of control and you know it is going to lead to you doing something you are going to regret? Cain's jealousy led to him killing his brother. The human emotions can get so out of control and we need God to remind us to be careful. God comes to Cain, asking what happened, knowing full well what happened and then gives Cain consequences for his actions. Again does it lead to his death? No, God who is full of mercy not only banishes him from where he was living, but then promised to protect him from others. Look at **Genesis 4:13-17**:

13 Cain replied to the Lord, "My punishment is too great for me to bear! 14 You have banished me from the land and from your presence; you have made me a homeless wanderer. Anyone who finds me will kill me!" 15 The Lord replied, "No, for I will give a sevenfold punishment to anyone who kills you." Then the Lord put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who might try to kill him.*

Cain fears for his life and yet again God shows grace by protecting Cain from others.

Enoch

We continue to read in Genesis that Cain has a child by the name of Enoch who grows up to be a man who had a close relationship with God throughout his life. Even though some may think that the God of the Old Testament was merciless we find many references of people who had a close relationship with him. **The God we serve is a God of Relationship.**

I have heard people ridicule the Church for using the phrase, “It’s not about religion, it’s about relationship.” As if we are trying to use this as a means of manipulation into Christianity. But I have to say, even as early as the book of Genesis we find that God was one who loved to be with people, who talked with them, and spent time with them. And even today, we serve a God who wants us to get to know him, and who wants to get to know us. I am reminded of Jesus words in **Matthew 7:21-23**:

21 “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. 22 On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ 23 But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’

Are we spending enough time with God that we know each other? Clearly, we serve a God who desires relationship. We read on of how Enoch’s lineage leads to the life of Noah.

Noah

At the time of Noah the earth had become so full of sin and wickedness. **Genesis 6:5** tells us:

5 The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. 6 So the Lord was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart.

I think at times we think of God as heartless. **But we serve a God who is moved by our disobedience.** Although we have been given the incredible gift of forgiveness and restoration, I think we all have a tendency of allow sin in our lives without any consideration of how it effects our relationship with God.

Noah is the only blameless man living on the earth. The scriptures tell us that he followed God’s will and enjoyed close relationship with Him. We all know the story of how Noah builds a boat, God destroys mankind and the animals, and saves Noah, his family, and pairs of all animals so that the earth would be repopulated again. Here we find that **we serve a God of Covenants** (Agreements).

On the day that Noah walks off the boat we find that God makes two covenants. The first, that He will never again kill all living things. Look at **Genesis 8:21**:

21 And the Lord was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, "I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things.

God promises that even though we are people who are sinful and even at times selfish, he will hold back his wrath on the earth. You and I today are living in a time of great mercy. In our world where people are living for themselves, full of sin, making fun of sin, without any sense of regard or responsibility to God, God chooses to hold back. **2 Peter 3:9** tells us:

9 The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief.

We serve a God of extreme patience.

And finally this morning we find that we serve a God of justice. In Genesis 9:5 we read of how God implements capital punishment. The exchange of a life for a life. Why? Because remember that man is special to God. **We serve a God who values people.** How we treat others is important to God. This morning we have taken a rapid look through the first nine chapters of the book of Genesis. We find so much about our God that so often get's overlooked.

We have learned in our time that we serve a God who created and sustains our universe, we serve a God of Mercy and Grace, we serve a God who desires our worship, we serve a God of relationship, we serve a God who is moved by our disobedience, and we serve a God of covenants, and we serve a God who values people.

It is so clear that we cannot live in this world without God. We need him both physically and spiritually. He is not a God who is vengeful, angry or unfair, as many would think as they read the Old Testament, but we can see how Jesus truly did fulfill the scriptures and the character of God in his life. Never forget who you serve today. He has shown himself in the Old Testament and the New and he is the same today and will always be the same in the future. Let's pray.