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Lesson 1

Before The Beginning: God, Our Enemy, and an Introduction to Biblical Themes

Daily Readings:

**John 1:1-5, 9-18 • Philippians 2:5-11 • Colossians 1:15-20
John 14:15-31 • John 17:1-19 • Ezekiel 28:11-19
Revelation 12**

WARM UP



Before the Beginning

In 1971, John Lennon released his *Imagine* album, and in the title track, he challenged his listeners to imagine life without Heaven, Hell, religions, or anything else “to live or die for.” Many people have spent their lives walking down this path, trying to act as if there is no God, no ultimate reason for us to be here, and no real ruler of the universe to whom we will be accountable for our few days upon this earth. They believe that man is alone, and if anyone wants a good life, it is up to him or her to create it for himself or herself. But people who spend their lives this way eventually learn that finding happiness through a passionless existence in a world without truth is something that can only happen in the imagination.

Scripture tells us of a real world much different than this, and in Genesis 1, it challenges us to imagine something quite different: Imagine the earth before there were people, or animals, or vegetation. Imagine a universe before there was the Earth. Imagine God before there was the beginning.

WORK OUT



Our Beginning

How do you picture God? As a glowing orb? As a bored old man sitting alone in the darkness? What exactly was He doing?

As we approach the story of God's workings in our world with mankind, we have to understand that while we are learning the story of *our* beginning, it is not the story of God's origin. Before the first beam of light was spoken into existence, God already existed eternally as Father, Son, and Spirit. When He created mankind, His desire was for us to be part of His perfect, loving community. He put us in a place where we would have the privilege of free will, and the ability to follow His truth or to chase after our enemy's lies. Satan has existed from at least the days of Adam and Eve, and as much as God has loved us, Satan has hated and opposed us.

We discover in Scripture that God is now, always has been, and always will be the same (Malachi 3:6). Though we encounter God in our own place and time, He was before us and before the Earth. Because God is unchanging, this means that all that Scripture teaches about Him was already true *before the world began*. If we embrace the biblical teaching of God as three in one, Father, Son, and Spirit, then

we must also embrace the truth that God has never been alone. He has always been Father, Son, and Spirit. Though this is taught much more explicitly in the New Testament after Jesus came to this earth, there is plural language used about God as early as Genesis 1:16 where God says, "Let us make man in our image."

Though God has not revealed to us all the intricate workings of the heavenly realms, He has told us some parts of them. We do not know how long angels have existed, nor do we know exactly when Satan went from being an angel of God to falling away from God (Luke 10:18). Whether he fell before the creation or shortly thereafter, Satan was present in the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). Though we may not fully comprehend Satan's origins, or exactly what he sought to accomplish in his rebellion against God, we can know with certainty that if we are friends of God, then Satan is our relentless enemy. He has no love or mercy in his heart, and only desires to see us fall away from God as he himself did (1 Peter 5:8).

God and Us

We all have plenty of questions we want to ask God about reality before there was the world as we know it. However, the things that we do know about God and Satan can give us good guidance for our lives.

First, we see the value of the community of God. God himself exists in a communal form, and though we do not know the specific origin of angels and other heavenly beings, God knew before He created the first man that it is not good for anyone to be all alone. In the song we referred to earlier, John Lennon shared a vision where the world would be peaceful and united. But in his vision there was no

ultimate purpose or meaning for anyone or anything.

When God created community, it was because He knew that in order for us to carry out His will and purpose in this world, each person needs a support system. We are all challenged to love God with our entire being and to follow the life of Christ as our example (Colossians 1:15-20). A life lived to the fullest is sure to encounter difficulties. In reflecting on the perfect unity of love, will, and purpose in the Father, Son, and Spirit, we see how vital it is for each of us to have a loving community through our connection to God's community. Faith is not meant to be a purely individual experience. What good are life's joys and sorrows if we have no one with whom to share them?

Second, we see God's great wisdom, both in content and in how He goes about sharing it with people. Even though God knew how He wanted mankind to live, as well as all the events of human history that would unfold over the centuries, He revealed his knowledge to us a little at a time. Can you imagine how unfruitful it would have been for God to have approached Adam in the Garden of Eden with a conversation about the Law of Moses, the Exile, or extensive details about the future Messiah? Adam had not even really learned yet what sin was. God began with simple instructions and simple lessons, and as we watch the story of Scripture unfold, we will see people coming to new understandings of God. Eventually they have their understandings refined powerfully by God's Son, Jesus of Nazareth.

Third, because we know that God is the powerful ruler of the universe, He is also able to conquer our adversary. Some people think of good and evil in the universe like a yin yang symbol, with the two in a constant battle, but with one never completely overcoming the other. This is not reality for true good and evil. Satan is described as a fallen angel. He is not a god, nor is he God's equal-but-opposite counterpart. Satan may be powerful, but he poses no real threat to

God. However, God has allowed him a period of time on this earth to try and convince men to turn away from doing right (Revelation 12:12). Our adversary is real and our war with him is real, but the victory is found in Jesus. We can endure the hardship of this world knowing that, if we are Christians, we are on the winning team.

COOL DOWN



As we contemplate God’s awesome creative power, we are overwhelmed by the delicate balances, the minute details, and the attention-grabbing colors of creation. When we push the boundaries of our imaginations, God has already done more.

The story of God’s people will unfold and show us our intimate connection with the creative source of power. We can pray with Paul “to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20). Our connection to God’s power is through His Son, Jesus Christ, who deserves all glory for all generations.

Points to Ponder

1. How does it make you feel to know that God has invited you to be part of his family?
2. Though the word “trinity” never occurs in Scripture, there are several passages that point to both the unity and the distinctness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Look at the following passages, then answer the questions below.

John 14:8-14

Matthew 3:16-17

Romans 8:26-27, 31-34

- a. What are the individual roles that the Father, Son, and Spirit play in these verses?
- b. Are there places where the unity of the different persons makes it difficult to distinguish between who is doing what?
- c. The God of Scripture is brilliant, artistic, passionate, and quite complex. Is the complexity of God something you believe strengthens your faith, or does it feel like an obstacle for you?
- d. Many people in the Western world do not even think of Satan as a real being. Can you think of any ways this might make us particularly susceptible to his wiles?