



# What's This I Hear about Different Creation Stories?

## Session 1

Genesis 1:1–2:4a; Genesis 2:4b–24;  
Psalm 8; Proverbs 8:22–31



### Session Objective

This session introduces participants to four creation accounts in the Bible: the familiar stories from Genesis, as well as passages from Psalms and Proverbs that we may not typically think of as creation accounts. In exploring the different approaches that the biblical authors take to the subject of creation, we aim not to reconcile them with one another as much as to draw out their shared affirmations: God creates, creation is a mystery, and the proper human response is one of humility and reverence.

### Faith Statement

In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community.

—A Brief Statement of Faith (10.3)



### Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What do you already know about the creation stories in the Bible? How many creation accounts are in the Bible? How are they similar and how do they differ?
- For you, is creation most about God's act of creating the universe long ago, God's ongoing creative activity, evolution, or all of the above? And why?
- Is it important to you to be sure that God created everything exactly as it is described in the Bible? If it's important, how much do you struggle with reconciling the multiple biblical accounts of creation?



### Explore

Read Genesis 1:1–2:4a, Genesis 2:4b–24, Psalm 8, and Proverbs 8:22–31 together and explore these questions:

- What are the similarities and differences in these creation accounts?
- Is it important to you that the details of these passages match up? Why or why not?
- Taking the similarities you found between the passages, what lesson can we learn from them?



### Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned.

- What does it mean to you to say that God creates?
- What does it mean *today* to say that God creates?
- Consider Psalm 8:6: "You have given human beings dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet." Many of the natural resources that we depend on to sustain our lives and to make our lives easier are literally under our feet. If the psalmist had known about coal mining and oil drilling, etc., do you think he or she would have considered such activities an aspect of human beings' rightful dominion over creation? Why or why not?
- What is (or should be) our role in caring for and sustaining creation, if any?



### Exit

Close your time together in prayer, giving each participant an opportunity to thank God for something specific in God's creation.





# Why Does God Seem So High-Strung in the Old Testament?



## Session Objective

This session aims to point participants in the direction of an important truth: that the Bible's main concern is with the relationship between God and human beings. Relationships can be stormy, and the occasional storminess of God's relationship with people in the Old Testament reflects the reality of life in a time and place when life was almost never easy.

## Faith Statement

The Old Testament bears witness to God's faithfulness in God's covenant with Israel and points the way to the fulfillment of God's purpose in Christ.

—Confession of 1967 (9.28)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and begin a conversation based on the following questions:

- What are some different ways that God is described in the Old Testament?
- In the Old Testament, why do you think that God is portrayed as seemingly kind and loving one minute and vengeful and violent the next?



## Explore

Read Hosea 11:1–9 and the Faith Statement, then explore these questions:

- Who is the speaker in this Scripture passage?
- How does the speaker seem to feel toward Israel (also called Ephraim in this passage)?
- What changes the speaker's mind concerning Israel's fate (beginning in verse 8)?
- What surprises you about this passage?
- In what ways does the Faith Statement for this session reflect or not reflect the Scripture passage?
- God does seem unpredictable in this passage, wavering back and forth between tenderness and anger. Why does God act this way?
- Think about some of your own relationships, either with family, friends, or a significant other. In what ways can you identify with God's feelings in Hosea 11:1–9?



## Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned.

- Does your relationship with God fit together as part of your human relationships, or is it something separate? How do you know?
- How do you think God feels about God's relationship with you? Is your relationship with God volatile or steady?
- The question for this session has to do with God's apparent capriciousness in the Old Testament: seemingly kind and loving one minute, vengeful and violent the next. Could this be the result of God's frustration with God's relationships with human beings? Why or why not?
- How has your understanding of God in the Old Testament changed after studying Hosea 11:1–9?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Why does God seem so high-strung in the Old Testament?"



## Exit

Close the session in prayer, thanking God for the important relationships in your life and praying for the health and strength of those relationships.





## Session Objective

This session presents a selection of “boring” passages from the Old Testament and challenges us to explore these questions: Why do we find these passages boring? Why bother reading them? What do we do with them? How can we hear God’s voice in them? How can we learn and grow in our faith by reading them?

## Faith Statement

The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless words of human beings, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding.

—Confession of 1967 (9.29),  
Inclusive Language Text



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What parts of the Bible do you find especially interesting and relevant? What makes these parts of the Bible interesting and relevant?
- What parts of the Bible do you find especially boring and irrelevant? What makes these parts of the Bible boring and irrelevant?
- Why do you think some of the parts of the Bible are boring?



## Explore

Explore these questions for each of the following passages: Genesis 5:1–8 and 21–32; Leviticus 11:1–8, 29–38, and 41–45; and the Faith Statement.

- Without consulting any background resources, what seems to be the purpose(s) of this passage?
- Does part of the passage state why the writer has written it?
- Do you find this passage boring? (Be honest!) If not, what about it interests you?
- Can you imagine being in a situation in which such a Scripture passage would be important and interesting to you? Describe.
- How does the Faith Statement for this session suggest that we handle such biblical passages?



## Express

Use the following discussion points to help the participants express what they’ve learned.

- We’ve looked at a couple of texts today that might qualify for the list of the Most Boring Passages in the Bible. But we know that they’re there because they dealt with topics that were important to their authors and original hearers. If the Bible were written today, what are the “boring” parts that we would find important to include?
- What are some of the things that matter to you that would seem boring to someone else? If someone else read your diary or journal, would they find it boring?
- Think about all those purity laws in Leviticus. What are some aspects of your life that would be much easier if you had detailed instructions?
- How has your understanding of the Bible changed as a result of this discussion?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, “Why are parts of the Bible so boring?”



## Exit

Close the session in prayer, giving each participant an opportunity to pray for the person on his or her right.





# Why Should a Book Like Judges Be Important to My Faith?



## Session Objective

Some people may find some parts of the Bible boring, but the stories in the book of Judges are decidedly not—they're almost always some combination of suspenseful, humorous, violent, disgusting, and graphic in ways that we don't expect to find in the Bible. But they raise some questions for modern-day readers: What's the point? How can we learn and grow in our faith by reading these twisted stories? This session explores one such story from Judges, with the aim of helping the participants listen for the voice of God amid words of grotesque violence.

## Faith Statement

In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.

—A Brief Statement of Faith (10.3)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Do you consider your Christian faith to be more of a personal, private matter or more of something to be lived out in the public square? Why?
- Regarding your answer to the previous question, can you appreciate the perspective of those who approach their faith differently from you?
- To what extent do you feel that God is involved directly in your personal life? In the life of the nation or world?
- There's a lot of violence, bloodshed, and brutality in some parts of the Old Testament. The book of Judges is a good example. What difference does a book like Judges make to your personal faith?



## Explore

Read Judges 3:12–30 and explore these questions:

- In verses 12–13, we learn that, in order to punish Israel for its evil ways, God strengthens Israel's enemy and permits the Moabites to defeat Israel. Do you believe that God punishes individuals, families, and/or nations in this way? Why or why not?
- What changes God's mind (after eighteen years!) and leads God to rescue Israel?
- Verses 20–22 describe Ehud's assassination of Eglon in gory detail. This sort of detail is unusual in the Bible. Why do you think the writer chose to tell the story in this way?
- Having killed Eglon and tricked Eglon's servants into not discovering this act for some time, Ehud

escapes and raises an Israelite army that defeats the Moabites (see v. 29). Since it was God who originally empowered the Moabites to punish Israel's evil, does this mean that God allowed ten thousand Moabites to die in order to make a point? Or is there another interpretation?

- What surprises you about this story?



## Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned.

- Put yourself in the place of an average Israelite in ancient times. How would you feel as the events in Judges 3:12–14 unfolded? How would your faith react?
- Do you believe that God is involved in modern-day affairs of state? If so, how?
- Has your understanding of the Old Testament changed after talking about today's Scripture passage? If so, how?
- The main question for this session is "Why should a book like Judges be important to my faith?" If you had to boil the Scripture passage down to its most important point, what would it be? Is there a timeless lesson in this story that has meaning for you?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Why should a book like Judges be important to my faith?"



## Exit

Close the session in prayer, giving each participant an opportunity to say "thank you" to God for something.



## Session Objective

The two versions of David's census present an interesting mystery. The aim of this session is to explore these questions of theology and biblical scholarship and, in so doing, to help youth gain an appreciation of the difficulties and rewards of biblical interpretation.

## Faith Statement

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

— Westminster Confession of Faith (6.009)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- When faced with a big decision, how do you make up your mind?
- Do you ever wonder what God would have you do in a difficult situation? Do you ever have a hard time figuring out what God's guidance would be?
- What role does the Bible play in guiding your daily life? Can you recall an instance in which the Bible gave conflicting advice?



## Explore

Read 2 Samuel 24:1-17 and explore these questions:

- The reason for God's anger in verse 1 is never given. This suggests that God is using David to "pick a fight" with the people. Would you expect God to act in this way? Why or why not?
- It has been suggested that "the anger of the LORD" is somehow separate from the person of the Lord in this passage—and that this would explain why God seems to encourage David to do something (take a census) that is later shown to displease God. Do you buy this explanation? Why or why not?
- What do you think could have been wrong with taking a census? (*It has been suggested that the census, whose purpose was to determine how many men were available for military service, would displease God because it would suggest a reliance on human strength rather than on God alone.*)
- Why do you think David chooses "three days' pestilence" when he's allowed to choose his punishment?

Read 1 Chronicles 21:1-17 and explore these questions:

- In the 2 Samuel version, the Lord causes David to take a census and in the 1 Chronicles version, Satan causes

David to take the census. How do you make sense of these discrepancies?

- In 2 Samuel 24:10, David recognizes his sin and takes responsibility. In 1 Chronicles 21:7, God is angered by David's actions and begins to punish the people before David confesses. What difference does this detail make? In what way does this difference affect your views of David and God?
- In 2 Samuel 24:14 and 1 Chronicles 21:13, David asks to "fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is very great." What evidence does David have that God's mercy will be "very great"?
- Assuming that the author of 1 Chronicles was using the account from 2 Samuel as his or her source, what might have been this author's purpose in making the changes that we've been exploring?
- Does it matter to you that these accounts of David's census are different from each other? Does this discrepancy affect the trustworthiness of the Bible? Why or why not?



## Express

Use the following discussion points to help the participants express what they've learned.

- In 2 Samuel 24:17, David intercedes on behalf of the people. This seems to be a particularly gracious gesture on David's part, considering that he ordered the census at God's prodding. How would you have responded in this situation?
- How do you respond when you feel unfairly blamed or placed in a position where you have to take responsibility for something that isn't your fault?
- What faith lesson can you take from this story and apply to your own life?



## Exit

Close the session in prayer, thanking God for the time that you've had together to explore God's holy Word.



# Why Should Christians Pay Attention to the Old Testament?



## Session Objective

Christians sometimes tend to think that the Old Testament is somehow subordinate to the New, or that, with Jesus' coming, it is no longer relevant. The New Testament itself, however, argues against the subordination of the Old, as the Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus, himself a Jew. In this session, participants will explore the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, discovering for themselves why the Old Testament matters to Christians.

## Faith Statement

The Old Testament bears witness to God's faithfulness in God's covenant with Israel and points the way to the fulfillment of God's purpose in Christ. The Old Testament is indispensable to understanding the New, and is not itself fully understood without the New.

—Confession of 1967 (9.28)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- When you hear "Old Testament," what do you think?
- Does the Old Testament matter to Christians? Should the Old Testament matter to Christians? Why or why not?
- What religion did Jesus of Nazareth observe? If what we call the Old Testament mattered to Jesus, should it matter to us? Why or why not?
- What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "prophecy fulfilled"?



## Explore

Read Luke 4:14-21 and the Faith Statement, then explore these questions:

- What do we learn about Jesus in the introductory verses (vv. 14-16a)?
- Why do you think Jesus chose the particular piece of Scripture that he reads in Luke 4:18-19?
- Read Jesus' words in Luke 4:21. What does he mean? How would you feel if you'd been worshiping in that synagogue when Jesus said those words?
- Why do you think it matters that Jesus chose to begin his ministry by saying that Scripture (our Old Testament) had been fulfilled with his coming? Couldn't he have ignored the old prophecies and done his own thing?
- In what ways does the Faith Statement reflect the events that take place in the Scripture passage?



## Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned.

- The Faith Statement says that we can't understand either the Old Testament or the New without the other. Do you buy this? Why or why not?
- And if the New Testament indeed tells of "the fulfillment of God's purpose in Christ," does that mean that there are no more poor, captive, blind, or oppressed people in the world? If not, what does this reality suggest that our role is as part of the body of Christ?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Why should Christians pay attention to the Old Testament?"



## Exit

Give each participant an opportunity to share a prayer request and then close the session in a prayer that includes the requests that were shared.

