

The Story Series
Week 1: Creation
The Beginning of Life As We Know It
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Today we begin a new series called *The Story*. Over the next 21 weeks we will make our way through the Old Testament to see what we can discover about God and what God's will is for our lives.

So let's start at the very beginning – literally – with the opening chapters of Genesis. I was recently watching an interview with some of the great filmmakers of our time and the question was asked, "What distinguishes a good movie from a great movie?" and one of the directors said that you have to start BIG. You have to hook the audience from the opening scene, he said, so much so that no one would dare step out to get drinks and popcorn, because you know if you do, you're gonna miss something important in the storyline.

That's the way it is with the beginning of God's Story in the opening chapters of Genesis. The story of creation begins with a BIG BANG... if you will. But this BIG BANG is not an accident. God is behind it. The opening words of God's Story are "In the beginning... GOD. The main character of *The Story* is introduced to us in the first four words. The main character is God. What we will discover as we make our way through *The Story* of the Bible is that the whole story unfolds and centers around this main character whose name is GOD.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." We're just 10 words into the story and there is already lots of action going on. God is creating, like a great artist who brings to life a magnificent painting from a large blank canvas.

The sequence or pattern of creation is carefully orchestrated. For six days God creates, and on the seventh day God takes a siesta. Did you notice that the six days of creation are really divided into two parts. On days one through three, God creates or paints the **places** of his creation. Day 1, God separates the light from the darkness. Day 2, God creates the places for the water and the sky. On Day 3 God creates the land or the places of creation.

Then if you look at Days 4 -6, you see a parallel. On Day 4, God puts the objects of the sun, moon, and stars in the places of light and darkness that he created on the first day. Day 5, God creates fish for the water and birds of the sky of Day 2. Finally, on Day 6, God places the animals on the land that he created on Day 3. And with the end of each day of creation, God makes a declaration. God steps back and looks at what he has done and says, "This is good!"

Although this is all pretty impressive, the creation is not God's main purpose. The creation is not the point. The pride and joy of God's handiwork is yet to come. At

the end of Genesis Chapter 1, *The Story* says, “Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our own image, to be like us, so that they can rule over all of creation.’ So God created human beings in his own image, male and female he created them.” God’s Passion, the main purpose of God’s creation, is us! You and me. As beautiful and magnificent as God’s entire creation is, you and I are the apple of God’s eye. After God created human beings, he steps back and says not just “This is good!” but instead, “This is very good!”

If you ever question whether or not God loves you or cares about you, remember these words from Genesis 1: “You are very good.” I don’t know about you, but many mornings I wake up and look in the mirror and I say to myself, “This isn’t good!” But when God looks at us, he says, “Looking at you is better than a sunset over the ocean.” Looking at you is more beautiful than a herd of animals darting across the Serengeti.”

Do you need a boost of self-esteem today? Hear God speak these words to you: “You are very good. With you I am well-pleased.”

The Story continues in Genesis chapter 3 by God placing the first man and woman in a Garden called the Garden of Eden. Scholars believe that the most likely location of the Garden of Eden was between the Tigris and Euphrates River, in modern-day Iraq. (see map on last page.) We’ll be having geography lessons throughout *The Story*, so keep that map handy.

The Garden of Eden is a beautiful place – heaven on earth. And we are told that God is walking in the Garden. So what we find in the opening of *The Story* is not God way up in the heavens somewhere, but God walking around in the Garden of Eden. He is with, among, present with Adam and Eve in the Garden. It was God’s plan, God’s desire to spend time with Adam and Eve so that a strong, lasting relationship could develop.

This is the BIG IDEA that I want us to get today: God’s grand vision, God’s greatest passion, the point of *The Story* is that God want to be with us. God wants to walk with us. God desires a relationship with us, and desires to extend to us great blessings as part of that relationship. God wants to dwell with us, to come down from heaven and to be with us.

God is not some angry cosmic force way up there, watching our every move, waiting for us to make a mistake so that he can zap us. No, God walks by our side, as friend, as confidant, as provider. The other view of God we sometimes have is that God is the one who got everything rolling but then told us, “You’re on your own. Give it your best shot!” As we make our way through *The Story*, we will discover again and again that God is with us, walking with us through life, desiring a personal relationship with us. That is the point of the Bible story. God with us.

But something went terribly wrong. You see, God doesn't force us to be in relationship with him. We have a choice. In religious lingo, it's called "free will." In any relationship of love, it can't be forced upon someone otherwise it's not love. Love is a choice. God doesn't hold a gun to Adam and Eve's head and say, "Love me or else!" God gives them a choice. Adam and Eve have the freedom to choose God's vision for life or their own vision.

That choice comes in the form of two trees in the Garden. In Genesis 2, God plants trees in the Garden – among them, the Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Tree of Life bore fruit, and God told Adam and Eve that if they would eat from the Tree of Life, it would sustain them forever. God also created the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and told Adam and Eve that if they ate the fruit from that tree that it would declare their clear choice of not embracing the same vision God had of being in a relationship with him as their God. If you eat of this fruit, God tells them, not only will you die, but the vision I have of us being together will also die.

Tragically, in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve choose, out of the freedom of their own will, to eat from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And the vision that God has for the world is ruined. The relationship that God so longed for is broken.

So God kicks Adam and Eve out of the Garden. Sounds like a mean thing to do, doesn't it? It sounds like God is saying, "If you don't want to play by my rules, then you need to get out of my garden!" What about forgiveness? What about second chances? But here is what *The Story* says. God becomes concerned about Adam and Eve's well-being. God asks, "What if they now reach out, take fruit from the Tree of Life, and eat it?" Remember, the fruit from the Tree of Life sustains life forever. And the life that Adam and Eve were now living because of their rebellious choice was one of brokenness with God.

God was keeping Adam and Eve from the Garden so that they would not have access to the Tree that would forever sustain their life in their current state of sin. So in reality, God kicking Adam and Eve out of the Garden was an act of grace, an act of love. God did what was necessary in order that Adam and Eve would have a second chance.

God tells Adam and Eve, "You might not understand what I am doing now, but please understand: This is not the Grand Vision I had in mind. I love you too much to risk you sustaining your life forever in your current state of brokenness." And so out of grace, God did what was necessary to prevent us from sustaining our existence in a sin-cursed world. The Grand Vision of God – to live life with us without sin and death – was wrecked because of our desire to live life by our own ways rather than by the ways of God. And it broke the heart of God.

In these beginning chapters of the Bible, we discover the true vision of God – of God creating us out of love and desiring to walk with us through life in a Father-child kind of relationship. But because of our rebellious choice of choosing our own way, that vision of God was lost. That’s the bad news. The Good News is that as we continue on with *The Story* we will discover that God is going to make a commitment, God is going to do whatever is necessary to get us back.

The rest of the story of the Bible – both the Old Testament and New Testament – tells the story of how God gets us back. It’s going to come at an extreme price, but God is willing. God will stop at nothing to fulfill his Grand Vision for his creation.

So beginning in the 4th chapter of Genesis, we learn that Adam and Eve begin to have children. Their names are Cain and Abel. Out of jealousy, Cain takes the life of his brother, Abel. It becomes clear that the sin nature of Adam and Eve was passed on to their children.

In reality, every human being has inherited a sin nature. It’s often times referred to as original sin. Our sinful nature constantly makes us choose our own way, look out only for ourselves, disregard the ways of God.

As *The Story* continues, it becomes quite obvious that as the population of the world increases, so does the evil in people’s hearts. When we come to Genesis chapter 6, this is the report that God makes: “I have observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and I have seen that everything people have thought or imagined has been consistently and totally evil. I have reached the point,” God says, “that I regret ever making you and putting you on this earth.” And that thought broke God’s heart.

The thought that God’s heart was broken breaks my heart. If the story would end here, one would assume that God is just going to give up on us. But as we continue on, what we discover is God is not about to give up on us. God is going to continue on with his Grand Vision – to pursue us, to find a way to get us back.

So how is God going to undo all of this? What is God’s plan? He’s going to start all over. God is going to pick the best guy he’s got, the guy who, even though he’s got a sin nature, still wants and pursues a relationship with God. That guy’s name is Noah. His story can be found in Genesis 6. God decides to wipe from the face of the earth the entire human race that God has created. And God does this flooding the entire earth. But the fact that God has found favor with Noah and his family, God instructs Noah to build a gigantic boat – a football field and a half long. That enormous boat will provide safe shelter for Noah and his family, and all of the animals, during the great flood.

It begins to rain, and it rains, and it rains, and it rains. For 40 straight days and nights it rains until the whole earth is covered with water. The flood wipes out every living thing that is not on the ark. After 150 days of being on the ark, the

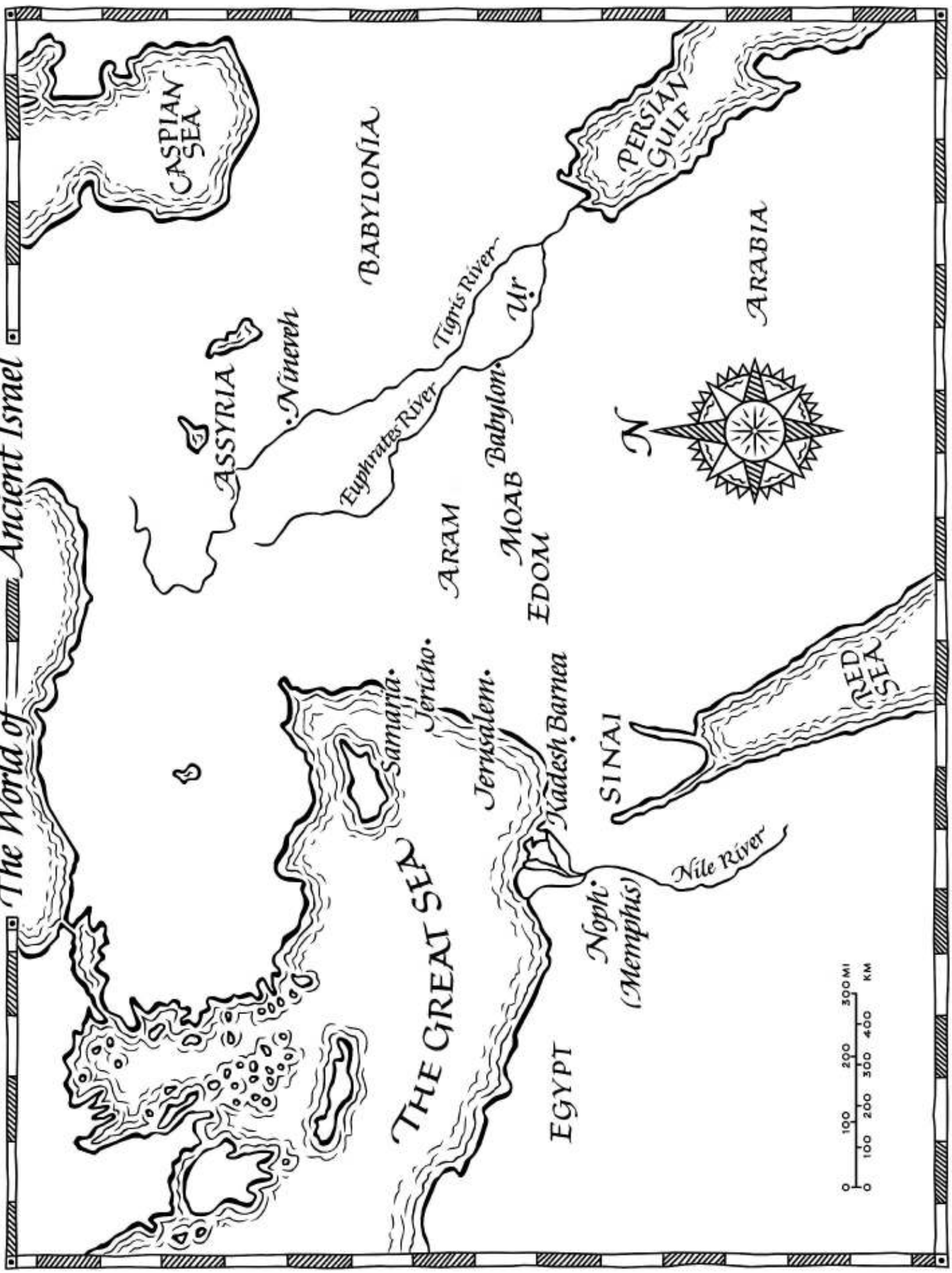
waters finally start to subside, and the ark rests on a place called Mt. Ararat (see map once again).

When Noah finally gets to exits the boat, the very first thing he and he family does is offers a sacrifice to God. It was their way of saying “Thanks” to God for keeping them safe during the Great Flood. It was a sign that they desired to continue in a relationship with Almighty God. And when God saw the sacrifice they were making, God says, “I love the people I have created. I love Noah. I love his wife and family.” God has a change of heart. And God decides to never again wipe out the people he has created in his image.

So God makes a covenant with us, he makes a promise that he is going to get us back. The covenant takes the form of a rainbow. And so every time we see a rainbow, let it remind us of God’s love, and of his promise to pursue his Grand Vision for creation: to claim us as his own people, to walk with us, and to extend to us great blessings as part of that relationship.

So this is how *The Story* opens! The vision of God is to be with us. But we, because of our sinful nature, have chosen to live not by the vision of God, but rather by our own selfish vision. So we have become separated from God – the very source of life and goodness. The rest of *The Story* is God’s rescue plan to win us back. That’s where we will pick up next time.

The World of Ancient Israel



CASPIAN SEA

BABYLONIA

PERSIAN GULF

ARABIA

ASSYRIA

Nineveh

Euphrates River

Tigris River

Ur

Babylon

ARAM

MOAB

EDOM



Samaria

Jericho

Jerusalem

Kadesh Barnea

SINAI

RED SEA

THE GREAT SEA

EGYPT

Noph
(Memphis)

Nile River

