

Details, Details...

What does 'in his image' mean?

It doesn't mean physical image. God, despite the way that paintings over the years have depicted him, is not white, and old, with a beard. The Bible is vague about what God looks like. He appears sometimes in human form, sometimes as a burning bush. Physically mankind looks like ... er ... mankind actually.

The image of God in us is something different. It is the spirit, the inborn dignity and sacredness of each individual. We are like God in that we can respond to God.

Things you don't find in the Bible: the Garden of Eden

There is no such thing as the garden of Eden. There is a garden *in* Eden, which is not the same thing. Elsewhere there are references to 'the Garden of God' (Ek 28.13 NIV or 'The Garden of the Lord' (Is 51.3 NIV). Eden is described as a region with a river with four tributaries: the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates. The latter two are identified, but we don't know where the others were, nor do we know where the garden itself was. The most common theory is that the garden lay somewhere in southern Mesopotamia.

What the garden was is much more important than *where* it was. It was a place where man and God worked and lived in harmony; a place of innocence, peace and happiness. Later, when people used the word 'paradise' to describe heaven, they were looking back to that place in Eden, for 'paradise' is the Persian word for 'garden'.

Adam and Eve 2.4–5.27

☒ The first humans

On the sixth 'day', God created his first human – Adam. The name derives from the ancient name for mankind. This is the first of the species, the representative man, the original.

There are two accounts in Genesis. The first, Genesis 1.26–30, is a general account. The second, in Genesis 2.7–25, is a more detailed account of the creation of men and women. Some have seen a conflict between these two accounts, but it is not clear why. The first account occurs within the passage which is describing the broad sweep of creation, so the writer does not pause to describe the detail of what happened. The second account is much more detailed, describing Adam's creation and his need for a partner.

The key word here is partnership. God creates, not a servant, but a partner. Many people have seen Eve as subservient to Adam because she came second. One might equally argue that she was an improved version – human version 2.0! But the truth is, she was meant to be a partner. And the end of the chapter indicates that this partnership was part of the natural order: a man and a woman, joining together to become like one being.

Adam was different from the rest of the animals for one reason: he was made in God's image. He was also given control over the animals. In these environmentally conscious days, that is a bone of contention – why should man be in charge? Apart from the fact that this ignores the obvious (i.e. man is obviously in control – I know of no countries which are being ruled by dolphins), the fact is that this dominion is balanced by another command from God: responsibility. Adam was put into the garden to take care of it (2.15). I try to avoid gardening, on the whole, but I do know that taking care of a garden means not polluting it, not destroying the environment and not ripping the whole thing up to dig for minerals.

☒ The fall

Chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis are the Bible's answer to the question of how sin came into the world. The answer is plain: it came through the choice of humankind. Adam and Eve are given only one rule: there is one tree, the fruit of which they must not touch. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Knowledge of good and evil here cannot mean knowing right or wrong: Adam must already have known that when God spoke to him. If he did not know right from wrong, then he would not have known enough to take any notice of God's commands. It is more a matter of who was to be in charge.

The question here is: who makes the rules? God was asserting his position as the one authority – his right as creator and carer to make the rules. By choosing to disobey him, Adam and Eve challenged that right. They chose their own path – a path that led them out of paradise and into a harsher world.

Doubt 3.1
The serpent tempts Eve to question the truth of God's words. This is the fundamental truth of sin: it is a rebellion against the goodness of God, a belief that we know best, that we are the only ones who matter.

Action 3.6
Doubt turns to action as each one eats the fruit. Although they later blame others, they are each responsible for their own sin.

Guilt 3.7
The minute they do this thing they know that something has happened. Things are not the same.

Separation 3.8
They have broken the rules. They have chosen their own path. They cannot stay in the garden. From now on there is a separation between man and God, and between man and nature. Things will get a lot tougher now – for all parties involved.

Love 3.22
Yet there is still something there. Man cannot get rid of his relationship with God. It is part of our very being – we are created in his image. And God himself is determined not to leave the situation as it is. As they leave, he gives them a gift. God does not let Adam and Eve go out of the garden without giving them warm clothes to wear. He is a father and he still cares.

The rest of the Bible tells of how God strove to repair the relationship and how human beings can satisfy the desire that still gnaws at every human heart: the desire to return to Eden, to live with and be loved by our true father.

☒ **Cain and Abel** 4.1–16
Far from sin stopping with Adam and Eve, things soon get worse. Their first-born child, Cain, is also the first murderer. By the time we get to Lamech, a few generations further on, murder has become a habit. Once again the root of sin is selfishness and pride; the belief that only I matter. Cain's offerings were not acceptable, because of the spirit in which they were given. From the start, the point about sacrifices is not their content but their intent; not so much what is given but the heart of the giver. It was a lesson that Jesus was to illustrate in Mark 12.41–4.

Noah 5.28–11.25

At the beginning of Genesis, God looks on his creation

Things you don't find in the Bible: the apple

The Bible doesn't mention an apple in Genesis. All it talks about is a fruit. It could have been a banana for all we know. It could have been any fruit. All right, probably not a gooseberry.

Tricky Bits

The serpent (3.1)

The serpent is not like the other creatures. What is he? Some argue that the serpent is a metaphor for man's own desire and pride. In that sense, Eve is listening to her own doubt. The traditional view, however, is that the serpent is Satan – the 'accuser' who tempts humanity to disobedience. ☒276

Why were they evicted?

Even if the earth has somehow been affected by their choice, it is not easy to grasp why Adam and Eve have to leave the garden. The Bible says that God exiles them because he does not want them to live for ever. He is putting a limit on their powers. It is also a symbol of how sin means that we cannot live with God. Only through Jesus will we be able to live for ever. Only through him will we be able to get back to the garden.

Why does God 'mark' Cain? (4.15)

The mark indicated to everyone that it was up to God to punish, not man. Abel's blood cries out to God for vengeance. Cain's punishment is banishment. He has to live in the Land of Nod – i.e. the Land of Wandering.

Who was Cain's wife? (4.17)

His sister. Look, incest is later banned in the Bible. But when there are only five human beings in the world, you've got to start somewhere. Verse 5.4 tells us that Adam had more children, although only Seth, Abel and Cain are mentioned.