

KINGS AND QUEENS

Genesis 1:26-28

Well-written stories introduce main characters in both memorable and prescient ways. Whether subtle or heavy-handed, those introductions set the boundaries within which we come to understand the characters and the stories they inhabit. That storytelling technique helps us appreciate the way God introduces humanity in the Bible's carefully crafted narrative. We will, in this lesson, briefly consider humanity's introduction in the Bible and how it both prepares us to understand the rest of the Bible's story and how it helps us understand our place and purpose in the world.

Beginning consideration

It is important to remind ourselves that, while God wrote the Bible *for* us, He did not write it *to* us – we are not the Bible's original audience. When we therefore begin to ask about the meaning of something in the Bible, we have to begin by asking what it would have meant to the original audience before considering what it means to us. ***Studying the Bible is always a cross-cultural experience.***

God's image-bearers

- Genesis chapters one and two offer a foundational portrait of humanity's identity and purpose upon which God builds the remainder of the biblical narrative.
 - While he was a real person, Genesis presents Adam as an archetype who represents all humanity.
 - The name "Adam"¹ literally means 'man' or 'humanity' (cf. *Genesis 1:26-28; 3:17*).
 - The New Testament makes Adam's representative role clear through, for example, Paul's presentation of Adam as the embodiment of fallen humanity (*Romans 5:12-20*).
 - God created "humanity" (Adam) to represent His divine will and authority within the creation (*Genesis 1:26-28*).
 - When Genesis comments that "God created man in his own image", it uses a Hebrew word often used in reference to idols (cf. *2 Kings 11:18*).
 - People in the biblical world did not believe their idols bore a physical correspondence to the god it represented but, instead, considered it a sacred object embodying the identity and authority of their god.
 - Genesis draws on that understanding to picture God giving humanity the special role of representing His divine authority and will within the creation.

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- God placed humanity in His sacred space to care for it in a priestly capacity (*Genesis 2:15*).
 - The garden God created occupied a special place within the creation and is portrayed in the Bible as the source of life for the rest of the world (*Genesis 2:8-14; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Revelation 22:1-2*).
 - The Garden of Eden's association with life comes from its identification as the place where God dwelt (*Genesis 3:8; Ezekiel 28:13*).
 - God placed humanity "in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (*Genesis 2:15*), to maintain the garden's sacred space in a way parallel to the priests' role in maintaining the temple.
- Genesis' picture of humanity's identity and purpose offers two insights that help us begin to understand God's expectations for human relationships.
 - **All humans are kings and queens** (*Genesis 1:26-28*).
 - Ancient near eastern cultures in the biblical world often used the idea of a human being made in the image of God/gods, but they almost always applied it only to kings. Genesis, however, expands the role of being God's image-bearer to all humanity.
 - Neither did God limit that role of image-bearer to Israel; Genesis applies it equally to all men and women throughout the whole world.
 - The responsibility of being God's image-bearers in the world reveals the role God gave to all humans – all humans are kings and queens.
 - Because God created all humans to be kings and queens, **all humans deserve dignity and honor**. Thus:
 - Matthew 7:12
 - Matthew 22:34-40
 - Romans 13:8-10
 - Galatians 5:14
 - James 2:8
 - 1 John 2:7-11

Applications

- While God made humanity "in his image" (*Genesis 1:27*), humanity has a history of trading their Godlikeness for "images resembling mortal man" (*Romans 1:18-23*).
- Prejudice offers one symptom of exchanging the 'image of God' for the 'image of man'.
- Our nation has a history of prejudice that, for example divides people by their skin color or their nationality. We must not assume we possess an immunity to the weight of that history.
- We should consequently ask ourselves questions like:
 - "Do I expect people to be like me or to be like Jesus?"
 - "Do I see diversity as a threat or an evidence of the awesome grandeur of God?"
 - "Do I reduce the issues surrounding racial equality to political matters or do I see them as opportunities to advance God's plan for humanity?"

