

The Compass

Week 1

OT Readings - Genesis 1:1-19:38

NT Readings - Matthew 1:1-7:14

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Genesis 1:26-28 contains some important foundational ideas about who we are as humans and what are God's intended purposes for us. Created in God's image for relationship, we are given the awesome responsibility to work with Him (co-rulers) to steward and care for His creation.^{1, 2}
- Genesis 1-11 tells the story of God's dream for humanity and then the tragedy of sin and its consequences.
- Gen 12 transitions from the big picture of creation, sin and its consequences to the story of one man, Abraham, who God engages to play a significant part in God's redemptive rescue of humanity (Gen. 12:1-3).
- We have a very realistic portrayal of Abraham, including his weaknesses and mistakes. Yet, he shows himself to be "wholehearted" toward God (Gen. 17:1).

New Testament

- Jesus is both God and man! The genealogy traces His human descent with the remarkable caveat that He was conceived of the Holy Spirit.³ God has come into our world to be with us, to show us who He is, reveal His heart and redeem us back into the love and the relationship for which He created us (Gen. 1-2).
- Matthew's early chapters are wrapped around Jesus birth and infancy; very little information is given to us in any of the Gospels about Jesus' early years.
- Heralded by the prophet John (the "Baptist"), Jesus wins a decisive battle with the devil and begins His public ministry (3-4). Note His message, He comes proclaiming "the kingdom of heaven," the bringing of God's loving rulership.
- Matthew 5-7 is sometimes called the "Sermon on the Mount" because of the location from which Jesus teaches. Jesus challenges the "religious" of His day in a dramatic and forthright way; contrasting religious "righteousness" with what it means to be right hearted towards God in fact. This section of teaching is what life in Jesus' kingdom is to be like and look like. Read with an open heart; it has real implications and application for our lives!

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Gen. 6:5-6. All of us have experienced disappoint in our lives at one time or another. The greater our expectation and hope, the deeper the pain when things do not go as we dreamed. Gen. 6:5-6 paints a picture of God's profound pain and disappointment over what has happened to the world which He created so "good" (Gen. 1:31). God's heart was broken, filled with pain. His dream of a world filled with love and light has now become a world where "everything they thought or imagined was totally evil." What a terrible and dark picture of a world that has turned its back on God! What should we take away? God is intimately involved in our lives and world; we impact Him personally and profoundly by what we think, imagine, say and do.

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

What does it mean to walk with God and be “blameless?” God asked this very thing of Abraham. The word “blameless” in Gen. 17:1 means to be *complete* or have *integrity* in our walk with God. Interestingly, Jesus addresses a similar concern in Matt. 5-7. Look carefully at Matt. 7:15-27. It is not enough to say “Lord, Lord.” Our profession of allegiance and love for God must be matched by the way we live. The difference between what we *say* we believe and *how* we actually *live* is what I like to call the “hypocrisy” gap. Jesus makes it clear – if we are to have integrity in our walk with God, bear fruit and build a foundation that can sustain us in life’s difficulties, then we must have hearts that are “completely His”⁴ and express that heart in a lifestyle of total responsiveness to God.

Difficult Question of the Week

Question: “What about the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil?’”

Genesis 1:31 indicates that this tree was “very good.” Of the all the trees in the garden, only this tree and the tree of life are named. They represent two alternative ways of doing life. As long as Adam and Eve chose to walk with God and allowed Him to lead them, they experienced “life.” Sadly, when they chose to become their own “gods” and attempted to go their own way independent of God – the consequence was “death.” Was the tree put there to be a “stumbling block” or temptation? No, rather, the tree was a reminder to Adam & Eve (and to us) that they were incapable of determining for themselves what is real or true. They needed to be totally dependent upon the only One who has the perspective to reveal what is true, God.⁵

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¹ This passage is called the “Dominion Mandate.” Despite humanity’s sin, God has never revoked this responsibility. In a true sense, the Great Commission mandate given by Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20) is a restatement of the original Genesis summons to make God our King and to bring all of life under His loving rule.

² Few statements in the Bible are more important to our understanding of who we are than Gen. 1:26. To be “created in God’s image” means that we have intrinsic, “built in,” worth and value; notice that both men and women share this characteristic. This idea has been revolutionary in changing cultures and societies as they come to recognize the truth that each individual, regardless of race, gender, caste, social standing have value and should be treated with dignity and worth.

³ See Matt. 1:18, 1:23.

⁴ See 2 Chronicles 16:9.

⁵ Scholars reflect on the exact meaning of the phrase, “knowledge of good and evil.” This “knowledge” cannot be inherently wrong or involve sin because God Himself has this characteristic (Gen. 3:22). Perhaps we could say that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil means “to determine or decide what is ‘good and evil,’ what is in one’s own best interests.” Only God can determine this because He is of infinite intelligence. I am finite and lack the necessary perspective to know what is best; my brain “fits inside my head.” (Larry Allen)