

## The Bible in Context Ep 7: Gen 1:26-31 The Image of God

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All right, Mercy Hill, we are back here with the Bible in Context. I'm here with Caleb again, and we are going to dive into the image of God. And so we are back in Genesis chapter 1. So Caleb, you want to get us started? Yeah, yeah. So last time we talked about...

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Who is God talking to whenever he says, let us make man in our image? And then we talked about how that is most likely the divine counsel. It's possible that is the seeds of the idea of the Trinity, multiple persons of Yahweh, but we kind of landed on again, this is probably a divine counsel. Either way you take that, it's not gonna really hinder us in the narrative, but we think that might be more of a divine counsel scene. And we're gonna talk about why that makes sense a little bit this time.

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And then we talked about what is the word God? What does it mean in Hebrew? That way we can orient our thinking a little better when we talk about, first of all, our God, and also what does it mean for us to be made in the image of God? Sounds good. So do we want to reread Genesis chapter one, maybe starting in verse 26 and 27? Yeah, I'll read that. I won't read this whole section because it's a

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a large paragraph from 26 down to 31. Our sections are starting to grow a little bit, and we don't want to produce like a new audio Bible, so we're going to, I think from here on out, kind of discuss the text. If you want to follow along with us, awesome. You know, pause and listen to it, go read it, but we're just going to plug on through here. So Genesis 1 verse 26.

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Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. All right. The image of God. What do you think?

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is the popular understanding of the image of God. Have you heard it preached or talked about in the past? Yeah, and so I think typically when people think about the image of God, they're thinking about parts of God's character that gets passed on to us as his children. And so things like his love, his grace.

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his mercy or empathy towards one another, even the ability to have an intimate relationship with one another, our intellect, things that separate us in our character from the rest of God's creation. Yeah. And so what we're going to see is that the ancient Near Eastern thinker and the biblical author, they thought a little bit differently about the image.

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But all those things are still true. We're gonna see those things aren't exactly related to the definition of the image of God. But again, I don't wanna downplay and say, well, that means that all those things aren't true, that God hasn't given us different characteristics, separated us from the animals in some way, and all those other good things that God has made us with. Now the image itself has a rich history in the ancient Near East as...

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as a word and as a symbol. So in the ancient Near East, we see throughout Mesopotamia and Egypt and Assyria, texts that speak of, first of all, kings, the ones who rule on behalf of the gods. Essentially the idea is the gods have taken this person and set them up to rule that kingdom, that kingdom that the god is in charge of. So that king has the divine stamp of authority.

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and he has the authority to dictate that deity's will and to maintain goodness in the land on that God's behalf as a royal representative of the deity. Well, and even in our text if we go down to the next verse...

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you see some of that kingship kind of mentality, don't you? And God blessed them and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. And so yeah, there's this idea of kingship that's explained right after the statement that God made us in his image. So yeah, I think it lines up well with that idea.

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Yeah, yeah, you see it directly in the text. It is immediately linked with dominion and authority and subduing and all these rulership ideas and language. Yeah, and also, I mean, the danger with us equating the image of God with Him just giving us His character or His attributes is that, like, humans vary in their capacity. And so the temptation that is to place our value in how...

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much intellect we have or how much creativity or whatever the characteristic of God that we hold highest. And for those who are limited in their capacities are at times I think looked at as subhuman. Yeah, yeah. And let's just take a thought experiment of a couple characteristics. Say that you and I are both varying levels of compassionate and creative. And you know,

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let's just say for the sake of the thought experiment, you're more compassionate and less creative. I'm more creative and less compassionate. But I think the idea is a lot of the time that if you stack us up to rate us, those things are gonna balance out so that we have the same rating. We're both the same amount of the image of God because we have the same value of characteristic. Yeah, but okay, what do you do with somebody who, like my daughter Hope, who is gonna at least...

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it's harder to see those kind of characteristics in somebody who has special needs. Right. And that gets to be some of the problem. I mean, I think there are a lot of people who have thought, well, for those who are unable to do certain things or to the extreme extent somebody's in a coma and a vegetable for half their life or whatever it may be, they can't express those characteristics. Well, they would say, well, they were meant to have them and so they're still made with the image.

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But ultimately, you really do run the risk of saying that if the image is linked to your characteristics, as people vary in their characteristics, they also vary in the image of God. They can be more or less the image of God. And that's...

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That is not true. Yeah, and I don't think that's biblical either. No. And then you get perfect grounds to say things like, hey, slavery is okay, and it's okay to think of other people as less, and it's okay to use them as fodder for something or whatever it may be. That's a justification used throughout history. And so this is actually kind of interesting to think about. Throughout ancient cultures, if someone was poor or a slave or whatever,

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It's usually because that person's gods, their national gods or family gods, whatever it is, they couldn't protect them. So this person has been taken over by our national deity. So we are the ones on top, our God has placed us there, and he's placed this one on the bottom. He is less of a person, less cared about, about the deity who determines what is good and bad in reality.

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Okay, so if the image of God is not meant to be looked at as simply God giving us his character traits or his attributes, how are we to look at the image of God in Scripture? Yeah, so we already talked about the kingship aspect. There's one more thing from the ancient Near East I wanted to bring up, and that's that the word images, both in the Bible and, again, throughout the Bible, are not meant to be

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Ancient Near East and the different languages that they speak. That word image is the same word as idol. In Isaiah, for instance, whenever he's talking about you make these dumb wooden metal idols and he's giving this long taunt about the idols that people make. It's the word sell him

image. There are some other words that he's using there, but he does bring that that word image into the discussion. So the idea, what an image is in the Ancient Near East is you make a statue or a figurine or whatever.

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And the deity comes and indwells that piece of metal or wood, whatever it is you've crafted. And so you come to that little figurine or statue to discern the deity's will. That thing is now an authoritative representation of the deity who you can talk to and go to seek their decision and authority. Now, where were these idols placed a lot of times? Yeah. So.

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In temples, most often, other times, you know, little figurines, people have them in their in their little shrines, in their homes and things. Even the images of kings, when they would conquer a place, they would set up an image of themselves, a statue of themselves, often in temples, again, to say, this represents my authority in this place. So, really, all around this idea of image, whether it's relating to kings or relating to deities, it's this idea of

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representation and authority. So when you think of the Israelite tabernacle or the temple and you go into the Holy of Holies and you've got the Ark of the Covenant and above the Ark of the Covenant you would expect there to be a figurine, an idol there but instead... A little Salem there. Yeah, right? A little Yahweh. But there's not, right? And I think that's intentional, right? That we are meant to be...

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God's image bears, God's idols. Yeah, we are the little living, breathing statues that he's made to rule and represent him in creation, to walk with his authority and to use his wisdom. That's the part we don't do so good on. But that's the idea. So it's all about us being royal. I like this term, royal representatives of Yahweh. I don't know if we read that somewhere, if you started using that or if I started using that, but I like that term.

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Yeah, I can't remember where that came from either. It might be from Carmen Iams book, but I'm not real sure. I know she does coin, I like this phrase that she uses in her book where she talks about the image of God is definitely kinship, but it's represented or expressed through kinship. I think she said that, but I like that phrase that there's definitely some obvious kinship going on and you see that even in the line of Seth where

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Adam gives birth to a son in his likeness, in his image, and it uses that same kind of language. And so you have this idea of family that goes along with the image of God. But at the end of the day, what does that family look like? It looks like, well, we're royalty. We're children of the king. And so we represent the king as his children. Well, yeah, and I like that you brought that verse up because a lot of people will look at that verse and say, well, when we have children,

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we don't necessarily have children to rule our homes, or something like that necessarily, that they don't become kings on our behalf. They take on our characteristics, they look kinda like us, so obviously, again, the image must be related to the characteristics we pass on. But that's not exactly the case in this culture. Again, if Adam and Eve were supposed to be the image of God, the representation, or yeah, the representatives of

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Yahweh, then they're passing that role on to Seth when they give birth to him. The earth, which they had rule over, they're now giving inheritance as the next ruler in the line to Seth. That's what's going on there. Not a communication of attributes, but a communication of a status. Yeah, and that, you see that same pattern throughout history if there's a nation that has a king.

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typically the kingship is passed down through their line, through their family. And so the expectation was if you have your firstborn son or whoever the one, and you go into, it's interesting, if you ever read like Shakespeare and some of the history of the kings in Europe, it gets really, it's like a big drama, but it's a big deal.

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to pass on that kingship through your line. And it's very meaningful. And so I think the default back in this ancient world would have been very much that that was the understanding that if you have a child, they're blessed with the responsibility of inheriting the rule of their parents. Yeah, absolutely. They take over the family, taking care of the family. That's gonna be their job in the future. I mean...

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you know, it's a nice little bonus. They look kind of like you, but that's not the first thing on their minds. They're saying this is the one who's going to take care of the next generation of our household. Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I think it's also significant that we see that the image of God is still significant after the fall, so that the fall doesn't ruin the image of God. You still see in Genesis chapter 6, we already mentioned the line of Seth that happens after the fall.

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genealogy, there's a reminder that man is made in the image of God and then also in Genesis 6. I believe it's Genesis, or is it Genesis 9, where I think it's after the flood. Yeah, it mentions that humans are the image of God and so you shall not murder. It's when he was making the covenant with Noah. Yeah, yeah, it grounds this idea of not murdering another human in the image of God. So it's still very significant after the fall.

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Yeah, the big difference is we still actually have, you know, rule of the earth. I mean, we actually don't, you know, God doesn't go around stopping us a lot of the times, which for better or worse,

that's the plan for now. But the problem is we don't rule with Yahweh's wisdom. We took of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, not from the tree of life. Yeah. So our status has not changed, but our, uh, uh, the, the way in which we go about our business and, and

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doing what we've been called to do has been diminished significantly because of the fall. We still have the job. We just don't fill the job description very well. Yeah. Oftentimes. Almost like a lame duck president in a sense. They still have the title and the status. Exactly. But their ability to function and get things done is much more challenging. Yeah, exactly. But that brings us to Christ though. I mean, what Christ does for us. He is the image of the invisible God.

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the image of the, who is the perfect image of God is in the business of renewing our ability to image God well and do our job by filling us with His Spirit. Yeah, yeah, through His Spirit He indwells the image again in a more full way that makes us back into what we were supposed to be, representations and authorities of Yahweh that actually act on behalf of His wisdom and His way of doing things. Right.

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And so we've hit on this word a few times and I wanted to bring it back up the the status Idea, I don't think we've talked about that in depth yet so again, the image of God is not is not a Set of characteristics, but rather it is a status it is not something God has given us that can wane and wax and vary and change from person to person

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but it is simply like a job description. He said, I've made you to do this job, even though you've fallen, I still made you for the purpose of doing this job. We just need to keep in mind that it is a status that cannot change, it cannot vary, it cannot be taken away. We have that status, that job description, simply by the fact that Yahweh said we do. And so only He can give it and take it away. And, you know, He doesn't wanna take it away. Yeah, and I think it lines up with the job description that Jesus gives His disciples to.

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go into all the world and be my witnesses, be my representatives. And so the church now carries out the great commission which was given back in Adam and Eve's day, really. Now we have a little bit more nuanced understanding of what that looks like by making disciples and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. But the idea of us representing God.

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has been there from the very beginning and it's carried out through the mission of the church. Yeah, and we're going to see this more later. I think we may have mentioned this previously, but the image is told to be fruitful and multiply. That's the first command that they're given, and that command is going to change over time slightly. So here they're told to be fruitful and multiply. Ultimately, that's going to mean to expand the boundaries of the garden.

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and they are to subdue the earth. Well, in this context, subdue the earth means be gardeners, turn the desert wasteland into the garden, expand the bounds. Whenever you get to Joshua, that same command is given, but it means go and subdue the Canaanites. Those who are rebels to Yahweh who are going after Baal, subdue them and make this Yahweh's land. You get to Jesus, and subdue the earth means bring his gospel to the nations. Take those who again are worshipping

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idols and rebel gods and bring them back to worship Jesus. So that word subdue, it's Each time we read it, you need to realize that we're reading something that's part of a larger motif, a larger theme It's not just like, oh it means to guard and oh it means to wipe out God's enemies because that's not what we're supposed to do today. It's and it doesn't mean inherently to make disciples, but as we see that theme grow and as we see Jesus become part of it

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That's what it means for us today. Yeah, so it's this overarching idea of spreading, partnering with God to spread his loving order and loving kingdom throughout the world. And at the beginning with Adam and Eve, it seems like, well, the only thing that was out of order was the wilderness and the sea. And so it was going in and bringing order by farming, like you're saying.

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But after the fall, well now we've got these rebellious nations that now need to be brought back into order and drawn into the kingdom. And ultimately Israel fails at that miserably. But Jesus, where they failed, Jesus would succeed through his death and resurrection and bringing about the church age. Right, yeah. And I don't know if we've talked about the whole expanding garden idea.

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yet we should take a second to just mention that here. Since Adam and Eve are told to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth. And just like the trees, they are supposed to bear seed. Now the idea here, and there's really, actually there's a couple of good books on this. Again, I think *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* by John Walton talks about this. And

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*The Temple and the Church's Mission* by G.K. Beale. That one is very good. Throughout the Bible, as these themes develop, what we see is this command to be fruitful and multiply and to subdue the earth. It means to take the garden and the goodness that Yahweh has started to put in this bad chaotic place and expand it on His behalf. And we're going to see in chapter two that the garden is just part of Eden.

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It's not like Eden is not all garden. It's the garden that's in Eden. And so the expectation is that it would expand out through Eden and then beyond beyond that too. Yeah, I mean, even in this chapter in chapter one, we have we start off with land that's in ruin and the chaos waters in the darkness. We have darkness separated out. The waters are separated from the land and some of the waters become seas, which are a little better than the chaos waters out there.

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And then on the land, we have parts of it that get greenery, that get life. So even in that, there's kind of this gradation of, you know, there's the good part of the land where the people are, but there's still elements of ruin out there that need to be subdued. What about those? What are we supposed to do? Well, be fruitful and multiply is the first step in overcoming those things and making everything come under. Yahweh. Yeah. So I mentioned the book.

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before by Carmen James, Being God's Image, I think is the name of the book. But that's one of the best resources I've seen on the image of God. She goes into a whole lot of detail and gives a lot of ancient near Eastern context, but it's a helpful tool. Yeah, it's also a very easy read. She's a really easy reader or writer to follow. All right, so yeah, I think.

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I think that's all I have to say about the image. I'm sure other things will arise that we can talk about later, or someone will ask us a question and realize we completely forgot something. But yeah, I think now we have a good understanding of the image as a status, as humans being made as Yahweh's royal representatives to subdue the earth and to continue his act of creation, continue turning the bad into good, being fruitful to multiply. So.

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I think that gives us a good leg to stand on as we move forward, now we know how to think about humans. I like it. Well, thanks for joining us this time and we look forward to being with you next time. Yeah, looking forward to it.