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## A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

### THE BOOK OF GENESIS

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#### CREATION (1:1–2:3)

##### The Place of the Passage

Questions like, “Where do we come from?”, can be both simple and profound, and our answer affects the way we view the entire world. The answer to this question is given in this opening section of Genesis. The primeval history of Genesis 1-11 provides a broad view of God’s purposes for the world, followed by the narrow view in Genesis 12-50. These opening chapters of the Bible, as the great reformer, Martin Luther, reminds us, are “certainly the foundation of the whole of Scripture.” Genesis 1 begins “In the beginning, God,” reminding us that it all starts with God, and thus Genesis sets the stage for everything that follows afterwards.

##### The Big Picture

God creates the heavens and the earth and places humanity at earth’s pinnacle with a commission to populate the earth as his image-bearers.

##### Gospel Glimpses

**THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD.** We clearly and unequivocally see the power of God’s Word in Genesis 1:1. God creates by the power of his Word (cf. John 1:1-3). This same Word “became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The Word active in creation is revealed as a Person who becomes flesh and blood in redemption to come and save.

**REST.** When God finished his work, “he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done” (Gen. 2:2). He did not rest because he was tired, but to enjoy the world that he had worked to create. In Christ, this rest is fulfilled, so that “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). Jesus offers the key to enter that rest, since he invites us, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). In creation, the pattern was work then rest. In the gospel, the pattern is rest then work (1 Cor. 15:9-10; Phil. 2:12-13).

##### Whole-Bible Connections

**IMAGE OF GOD.** Humanity is created in the image of God, and this image is expressed in the use of God-given rational and relational power and also in ruling and subduing the creation. This image of God is passed down the generations through the line of Seth (Genesis 5). However, this image was distorted by the fall and is not seen in fully reconstituted form until the coming of Jesus Christ, the ultimate “image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). Those who believe in Christ are being recreated and transformed into

that image (2 Cor. 3:18), and this process of transformation will be made complete when we rise again (1 Cor. 15:49). Presently, we know that “all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose,” a purpose which is “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:28-29).

**SUBDUING THE BEASTS.** While Adam was to subdue the beasts, he was himself subdued by a beast, the serpent. The failure of the first Adam looks forward to the coming of a Second Adam, the Son of Man, who would, like Adam, subdue the beasts of the earth (Ps. 8:4–8; Dan. 7:13–14). Jesus is this Son of Man (Matt. 9:6; 25:31; 28:18), who subdued the wild beasts after his temptation in the wilderness (Mark 1:13). By the authority of this Son of Man over all heaven and earth, we are to make all nations disciples to him (Matt. 28:18–20). We should not be subject to the deception of the serpent like the first Adam but move forward with confidence since “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under [our] feet” (Rom. 16:20).

**BE FRUITFUL, MULTIPLY, AND FILL THE EARTH.** God called Adam to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28) with his descendants as images and representatives of God. This call is passed down to Noah (Gen. 9:1, 7), Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3; 22:17), Isaac (Gen. 26:4), and Jacob (Gen. 28:3–4). While it begins to be fulfilled in a small way in Egypt (Ex. 1:7), this call looks forward after the exile to a more global fulfillment (Jer. 23:3). This call is transformed by the coming of Jesus Christ with a focus on spiritual progeny birthed by the power of the word of God. As a result, the word of God increases (“increase” = “to bear fruit”; the same Greek word is used in Gen. 1:28 in the Greek Old Testament translation used by the apostles) and multiplies in Jerusalem (Acts 6:7), Judea and Samaria (Acts 12:24) and to the end of the earth (Acts 19:20). These are the key markers of the gospel’s progress in the book of Acts (1:8). In Colossians, similarly, Paul celebrates how “the word of truth, the gospel . . . has come to you, as indeed in the whole world [and] is bearing fruit and increasing” (Col. 1:5–6), so that they might walk, “bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). Through Christ, Christians fill the earth as images and representatives of God by the power of the gospel.

### **Theological Soundings**

**TRINITY.** God the Father is the Creator (Gen. 1:1) who works with the Spirit (Gen. 1:2) by the power of his Word (Gen. 1:3) to create the heavens and the earth. All three persons of the Trinity are at work in this opening chapter of Scripture. A glimpse of the Trinity can perhaps also be seen in the plural of Genesis 1:26: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” While some see this plural referring to God speaking to his heavenly court of angels (as in, e.g., Job 1:6), humanity is not made in the image of angels, and we have no indication that angels participated in the creation of human beings. This glimpse of the Trinity is filled out with more detail through the progressive revelation of Scripture.

**CREATION.** God surveys his creation and calls it “good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God’s good creation calls for humanity’s wise stewardship (Gen. 1:26–28). We can worship God not only by looking at his Word but also by appreciating his works demonstrated throughout all creation. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1).

**HUMANITY.** The climax of this chapter is found in the creation of humanity. The largest number of verses is devoted to this day of creation. Only humanity is created by God in community (Gen. 1:26), in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27), and is given dominion over the animals (v. 28) and the fruits of the earth for food (Gen. 1:29). No wonder the psalmist celebrates, “you have made him [humanity, a collective noun] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas” (Ps. 8:5–8).

### **Glossary of Terms**

**Tabernacle:** The tent where God dwelled on earth and communed with his people as Israel’s divine King. The temple in Jerusalem later replaced it.

**Sanctuary:** A place set aside as holy because of God’s presence there. The inner sanctuary of the tabernacle and the temple was called the Most Holy Place.

**Redemption:** The act of buying back someone who had become enslaved or something that had been lost to someone else. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus purchased redemption for all believers (Col. 1:13–14).

**Satan:** A spiritual being whose name means “accuser.” As the leader of all the demonic forces, he opposes God’s rule and seeks to harm God’s people and accuse them of wrongdoing. One day he will be destroyed along with all his demons (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

## A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE : GENESIS (CREATION 1:1–2:3) WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

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Read Genesis 2:4-3:24 in a modern translation of the Bible.

Answer the following:

1. God's special role for humanity seen in Genesis 1:26–30 is amplified in chapter 2. How is God's special blessing on humanity evident (Gen. 2:4–9)?

2. Many scholars recognize Eden as the first sanctuary and dwelling place of God, corresponding to the later temple. Just as a river "flowed out of Eden to water the garden" next to the tree of life (Gen. 2:10-14), so in the Bible's climactic vision a river flows from the presence of God in the temple, surrounded by trees that bring life (Ezek. 47:1-12; Rev. 22:1-2). Also, this river is surrounded by gold, bdellium, and onyx stone (Gen. 2:12), just as gold filled the temple (e.g., Rev 21:18), bdellium recalled the manna (Num. 11:7) in the ark of the covenant, and onyx stones were placed on the clothing of the priests (Ex. 25:7; 28:9). Finally, after sin enters the garden, cherubim protect the garden and tree of life from unclean humanity (Gen. 3:24), just as the cherubim guard the ark of the covenant (Ex. 37:7-9; 1 Sam. 4:4). Indeed, "he built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever" (Ps. 78:69), and Eden is called "the garden of God" and "the holy mountain of God" (Ezek. 28:13, 14). Consider the significance of Eden as the first temple. If Eden is the sanctuary of God, what does that tell us about the whole universe, or about Adam's role?

3. Just as Adam was to "to work and keep" the garden sanctuary of Eden (Gen. 2:15), so the priests were to keep "all the furnishings of the tent of meeting . . . as they minister at the Tabernacle" (Num. 3:8). What does this teach us about Adam's role? Consider also that Jesus, the Second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), was himself the final priest (Heb. 7:23–28).

4. In Genesis 2:18–25, how does God provide help for Adam to fulfill his calling?