



ESBT

**THE BEGINNING AND
END OF ALL THINGS**

A Biblical Theology of
Creation and New Creation

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Chapter One

CREATION'S COVENANT

I REMEMBER A HUMBLING MEETING with my PhD supervisor early on in my doctoral studies at the University of St. Andrews (Scotland). After seeing my initial engagement with the books and articles related to my research topic, he said something like this: “A good student is not the person who knows how to answer questions, but the one who knows what questions need to be asked.” His point to me was clear: a good student has to know with what they are dealing and how to properly engage it. Proper perspective and clear definition matters. If I could not actually see what the problem was, no solution I offered would satisfy. My supervisor’s comment has long stuck with me. Before I can begin the pursuit of answers, I must make sure I am asking the right questions.

I cannot imagine a more important place to ask the right questions than “in the beginning” of the Bible. Has any text ever caused more debate and division? The first two chapters of Genesis have confounded even the brightest scholars in every generation. So much so that modern publishers have apparently and understandably thrown in the towel regarding the text, manifested in the plethora of “three views” books that offer conversations in place of conclusions regarding the meaning and application of

Genesis 1-2.¹ The problem, however, only gets passed down to the church, primarily its pastors and teachers, who adopt a cautious approach and pragmatically decide to punt rather than risk on what feels like a third and very long. In the end, like an awkward relative at a family gathering, the church ends up becoming skilled at avoidance, never facing the issue directly.

To be fair, there are two reasons why we face this current conundrum regarding Genesis 1–2. First, the beginning of the Bible has become quite a political text, its own kind of litmus test for an “origins orthodoxy.” This reality exerts a palpable pressure on churches and their leaders, creating a force field around the subject matter in Genesis 1–2 in a manner that is highly prohibitive. Second, Genesis 1–2 is a very difficult text to interpret. In merely a few hundred words, the start of the world and the purpose of all things is explained. The complexity causes even the most experienced readers to tread cautiously. What is needed, therefore, is a proper biblical-theological analysis of Genesis 1–2.

NOT MERELY THE HOW, BUT ALSO THE WHO, WHAT, AND WHY OF CREATION

So, what are the correct questions that need to be asked of Genesis 1–2? For too long the word *creation* has brought to the mind of the average Christian the debates regarding origins. This, then, dominates the approach to the opening chapters to Genesis, with questions focusing almost exclusively on the *manner* in which God created the world rather than the *meaning* of creation.² When we carefully examine the opening chapters of Genesis, we see that the meaning of creation, its purpose, is central to the intention of the narrative. Our interpretive questions, therefore, must spring from and be led by Scripture’s own intentions—that is, by the communicative desire of God.

For this reason, *it is more accurate to say that Genesis 1–2 seeks to answer not one but four questions: not only the how question (i.e., origins), but also the who, the what, and the why questions.* The focus on the how question

¹See, for example, *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), which offers a helpful dialogue between five views on interpreting Genesis 1–2.

²For a helpful and related analysis, see J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Fearn, Ross-Shire, UK: Mentor/Christian Focus, 2007), 23-29.

reflects the influence of science on our reading of the Bible. Science asks the *physical* questions (cause and effect), which are good and true, but the church adds the *metaphysical* questions (nature and purpose). The church never considered the physical question—how—to be more important than the metaphysical questions—who, what, and why. In trying to explain or defend the Bible against various answers to the how question in the modern era, the church lost track of its ministerial responsibility to explain and defend the other three questions, which have to do with personhood (who), plan (what), and purpose (why). In short, the church must expand its treatment of Genesis 1–2 from merely the question of origin to include the questions of God's design and purpose for the world.

The importance of this can be explained from an even broader perspective when Genesis 1–2 is not simply interpreted in isolation but understood to be serving in the biblical canon as the Bible's prologue. The beginnings of ancient books were important, with most having a preface or prologue, formal or informal, that would provide key information regarding the purpose and contents of the narrative.³ Prologues, in particular, had a uniquely dramatic force in ancient writings. Prologues served the proper reading of narratives by offering the reader an introduction to three important aspects of the story: (1) the primary *characters*, who are situated within the story and given some understanding of their importance, (2) a projection of the *plot*, especially the seen and unseen forces within the action, and (3) the *privy perspective* of the *narrator*, the textual voice who represents the authoritative perspective of the story being told. In these ways, a prologue offers interpretive guidelines and trajectories that are central for the reader to be properly introduced and oriented to the story and its message. None of this demands that Genesis 1–2 be defined technically as a formal prologue, but simply that the opening chapters of Genesis have an intentional literary purpose with interpretive significance for not only the book of Genesis but also the entirety of Scripture and the biblical story.⁴

³See Morna D. Hooker, "Beginnings and Endings," in *The Written Gospel*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Donald A. Hagner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 184–87.

⁴Cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *Rethinking Genesis 1–11: Gateway to the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 4–6, who shows how the literary patterns in Gen 1, especially the multiple patterns of the number seven, reflect a carefully composed piece of work.

It is important to see how the three things a prologue provides for the reader connect to and coalesce with the three additional questions (meta-physical) the church has failed to ask of the beginning of Genesis: the characters (who), the plot (what), and the purpose-seeking perspective (why). In this way, the communicative intention of the beginning of Genesis—and the Bible—is to direct the reader to see properly the biblical story and to live rightly in the world. While there is some biblical wiggle room for us to disagree about *how* God created the world, we better not misunderstand *who* God is and who humanity was designed to be, or *what* God intended to do in the world, ultimately through the work and person Jesus Christ, or *why* God made the world in a way that explains my life and purpose in the world. In short, if we misread the beginning of the story, we potentially misread the rest of the story. And since this story is about the Creator and his creation, the stakes could not be higher. As my supervisor taught me years ago, we must make sure we are asking, and therefore answering, the right questions.

THE PROLOGUE (GENESIS 1-2): AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CREATOR AND HIS CREATION

Genesis 1–2 undoubtedly shows the reader God’s unique and creative power in the making of all things. In this sense, it is a *backward* look at the origin of creation. However, Genesis 1–2 is also concerned to show the reader God’s unique and creative intentions for which all things were made. In this sense, it is a *forward* look at the meaning and purpose of creation. The Bible’s prologue introduces the reader to the Creator and his creation, and therefore the purposes and plan for the world. It establishes a trajectory for the biblical narrative that propels the story forward and aims toward its climactic fulfillment. This forward-looking work is its presentation of the who, what, and why—or the characters, the plot, and the purpose-seeing perspective. Befitting the very nature of the creation account, Genesis 1–2 can be divided into seven parts, with each part working cumulatively to orient the reader to the world and its story. We will examine each of the seven parts of the Bible’s prologue in turn.

(1) God is the Creator of all things (Gen 1:1). The opening of God’s revelatory word to humanity establishes the foundation on which the rest of the

structure is built: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). Every other truth—and the purpose and function—of every created thing is governed by this statement. The apostle John revealed this more fully—both positively and negatively—when he said at the start of his Gospel: “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (Jn 1:3). And the apostle Paul reveals in creedal form the direction and purpose of creation: “For from him and through him and for him are all things” (Rom 11:36). What John and Paul explain is that any questions about provision and purpose begin with God. And since Scripture’s very first words answer the who question, it is clear that the how question is to be placed in a secondary and submissive position.

While the who is mentioned first, the what quickly follows. The phrase “the heavens and the earth” implies the totality of creation; not merely what can be seen but also the unseen. For “the heavens” likely refers to not merely the sky above the earth but also the invisible heaven, the realm of angels and the spiritual world, as in “the spiritual forces . . . in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12).⁵ In short, every created thing includes everything and everyone except God, the Creator. Genesis 1:1, therefore, is describing the cosmic opening act of origination.

Genesis 1:1 is not only establishing God as the Creator of all things but also as above and distinct from all things. The force of the verb “create” directs the reader to see that God is the sovereign master of the world he has created.⁶ More specifically, the term translated “God” (*Elohim*) reveals the Creator’s transcendence, unlike the covenant name “the Lord” (*Yahweh*).⁷ This distinction is significant. The start of the Bible’s prologue reveals what God initially wants to communicate about himself: God is the cosmic Creator who cannot be fully known or understood, is distinct from the world he

⁵Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), helpfully suggests that the textual distinction between “the heavens” and “the earth,” and even the specific ordering, guides the reader to see not only a difference in nature but also a difference in chronology, so that a heaven may have existed “at a time prior to the developments described in the following verses” (24).

⁶Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed., OTL, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 49.

⁷C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1-11* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 169-71.

has created, and bears a power, authority, and grandeur that stretches the imagination.

(2) *Creation is designed with purpose and for progress (Gen 1:2).* The prologue moves from the Creator to his creation, and more specifically “the earth.” The earth is described with two terms that are not easily interpreted: “formless and empty.” In the least these terms, along with the language of “darkness” and “the deep,” depict the earth as unfinished before the first command of God in Genesis 1:3. The fact that the unfinished state of creation is described before God’s creative “forming and filling” suggests that the creative process and creation project is a significant part of what God wants to reveal. There is no sign of a battle, like pagan myths of primeval chaos, only a description of the surface on which creation’s Architect was preparing to build.

The reason this description is significant, and the second thing God reveals after declaring himself to be Creator, is that the Creator is a Designer who is building the world purposefully and progressively. The world is a creation project, and this verse gives us insight into the foundation on which the structure will be built. The picture is itself a twofold statement: God has not yet begun his work and there is a lot of work to do. The Bible’s prologue is intending to communicate that creation is in “an immature state”⁸ or maybe better, the earth is “an unproductive and uninhabited place.”⁹ Creation’s embryonic stage depicted by the opening of Scripture directs the reader to see that creation is in a state of progression, for the Creator will finish his work (see Gen 2:1). It also wants the reader to see that creation is being prepared to move according to a purpose, for the Creator has intentions—a telos or goal. And as the rest of the biblical story will reveal, it is a goal only God can accomplish. To be fair, the purpose of creation is only implicit in the first two verses of Genesis. But its uncertainty is entirely the point. Creation (the what) is being formed by a Creator (the who); the purpose still remains to be revealed (the why). But

⁸Vern S. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden: A Guide to Faithfully Reading and Understanding Genesis 1-3* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 294.

⁹C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 54.

it is fair to say that where there is a Designer and a foundation there is also design.

(3) *The Creator has made a covenantal claim on his creation (Gen 1:2).* The design of the Creator is made much more explicit in Genesis 1:2. The phrase, which is easily overlooked and interpretively awkward, reveals the following: “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Since Genesis 1:1 revealed an important truth about *who* God is (the Creator), this careful depiction of God’s action is best interpreted as revealing *what* God is doing—revealing more of God’s plans for his creation. And the revelation is given in the form of the symbolic gesture of the Spirit of God over his creation that needs detailed attention.

Before God commands creation into its proper form (Gen 1:3), he holds a ceremony of sorts that makes a declaration that will extend throughout Scripture and the history of the world. It is a ceremony in which God makes a commitment to creation regarding the work he is about to begin and the faithfulness with which he will pursue it. The prophet Jeremiah declares this commitment to be a “covenant” (Jer 33:20) in word, even if Jeremiah 33:2 only declares it in deed.¹⁰ And this is communicated by the Spirit hovering over his creation.¹¹

God’s nature is not only revealed in the *process* and the *products* of his sovereign creative work but also through his divine *presence*. While Genesis 1:2 may give little explanation of the symbolic meaning, Deuteronomy 32:10-11 offers an interpretation of the Spirit hovering as wings above the dark waters. The use of two rare words found only in Deuteronomy 32:10-11 and Genesis 1:2 points to parallel and coexplanatory circumstances. The song in Deuteronomy recalls the presence of God with Israel in the barren wasteland, “hovering like an eagle over his people as he fashioned for himself a new and holy sanctuary.”¹² And this “hovering” presence is defined in the rest of Scripture

¹⁰A helpful definition of the biblical category of “covenant” is provided by Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God’s Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 2: “In the Scriptures all covenants involving God are fundamentally monergistic suzerain-vassal pacts: God the divine Suzerain initiates the covenant; God chooses the covenant partner; God declares the terms; God determines the consequences for the subjects . . . and God identifies the sign of the covenant.”

¹¹The following is adapted from Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 30-33.

¹²Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 30.

as the “Glory-presence” or “Glory-cloud” of God, which is also identified specifically with the Spirit (Neh 9:19-20; Is 63:11-14). In fact, throughout the Bible the image of the Glory-cloud covering God’s people is also depicted as a covenantal sign (cf. Hag 2:5).

When we apply the interpretive lens of the rest of Scripture to the imagery of Genesis 1:2, “we see that the Spirit at the beginning overarched creation as a divine witness to the Covenant of Creation, as a sign that creation existed under the aegis of his covenant lordship.”¹³ The covering presence of God is a visible divine signature, and its ceremonial presence at the start of God’s creative work reveals the unique relation between the Creator and his creation.¹⁴ This symbolism of the covenant not only offers insight into what the presence of God signifies in this instance but also serves as context for God’s use of the rainbow as a sign of God’s covenant with the earth (Gen 9:12-17), the glory with which Jacob is confronted in his dream (Gen 28:10-16), and the awesome glory that will make Israel tremble at Sinai (Ex 19:16-19), to cite just a few examples.

Discussions surrounding the relation between this covenant of creation and Adam need not concern us here. This is not to say that this covenantal ceremony does not relate to Adam or teach us about pre-fall divine-human relations (see Hos 6:7), only that it is not fully defined by Adam. Some dislike even the language of *covenant*, noting that the term does not occur before Genesis 6:18.¹⁵ Yet even those who are hesitant to see too much covenant in Genesis 1–2 will also admit that “it is thus clear that the concept of covenant is much more pervasive in both Testaments than the mere frequency of explicit covenant terminology might lead one to conclude. . . . Indeed, even when not mentioned explicitly in the biblical text, covenant is seldom far from the surface.”¹⁶ Even more, it seems canonically negligent not to interpret this covenantal symbol of the Glory-cloud in light of God’s later covenantal revelations. For with the Bible’s account of world history as a framework, God’s

¹³Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1980), 19.

¹⁴See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God’s Purpose for the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 20-23, for a brief and helpful defense of a creation covenant.

¹⁵Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 52-59.

¹⁶Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 33.

relationship to creation and his creatures “is expressed in and defined by the interrelated covenants” that hold together the biblical story from creation to new creation.¹⁷ We must, therefore, return to the Glory-cloud hovering over the start of creation.

What, then, are we to make of this sign of covenant in Genesis 1:2? The symbol makes three covenantal claims about creation. First, God’s *presence* over creation. Throughout Scripture the Glory-cloud serves as a witness to God’s presence and, more specifically, as a revelation of God in his glory. God’s Glory-cloud, which guided Israel through the wilderness wanderings, led to ongoing disclosures of the divine presence. And what is revealed by this presence? Kline explains it well: The hovering of the Spirit of God at the very beginning of creation reveals God’s intimate and personal involvement with creation.¹⁸ Even more, because this symbol-laden ceremony is covenantal in nature, the reader is introduced to the Bible’s own trajectory, “its progression of covenantal disclosures of God’s relation to creation,”¹⁹ leading to the new covenant when the “hovering Spirit” descended on Jesus (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:32), who makes God known (Jn 1:18).

Second, God’s *power* over creation. The revelation of the presence of God as the King of Glory is also a declaration of the reign of God. God not only relates to his creation but also rules over it. This fact sets the stage for the actions to come, beginning in the very next verse (Gen 1:3) when God commands forth creation. The hovering of the Spirit of God over darkness and emptiness at the start of creation makes a claim that God is the Creator of all things visible and invisible. It also makes a claim of ownership and absolute authority. As the psalmist declares, “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it” (Ps 24:1). The act of creation serves as a witness that the Alpha is also the Omega, ruling the end as much as the beginning (Rev 22:13). And befitting the covenantal sign, the fact that God reigns over his creation

¹⁷Scott J. Hafemann, “The Covenant Relationship,” in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 20-64, esp. 21.

¹⁸Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 17.

¹⁹James W. Skillen, *God’s Sabbath with Creation: Vocations Fulfilled, the Glory Unveiled* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 96-97.

means that “all creation is in a dependent relationship to God as its Sovereign, King, and Lord. This is the same as saying creation as such is in a covenant relationship since all creation is to live in accordance with the charter given.”²⁰

Third, God’s *pattern* for creation. The covenant sign of the hovering Spirit reveals that God has a blueprint for his creation and that God is beginning the work of shaping the world after the heavenly model. As Kline explains, “The Glory-Spirit provided a preview of the finished creation-structure, for this theophanic Spirit-formation was a divine paradigm . . . for the work of creation. Cosmos and man alike were to be formed after this archetypal temple pattern.”²¹ For this reason Jesus taught us to pray “on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). As the rest of the Bible’s prologue will reveal, God laid the foundation for his creation and showed humanity how to work and cultivate it in accordance with the fulfillment of his design.²² Yet it would always be God leading his creation by the progressing revelation of the Glory-cloud, as he explains to his people on Mount Sinai: “You yourselves have seen what I did . . . how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (Ex 19:4).

(4) Creation is designed to be the temple of God (Gen 1:3-25). If God’s Glory-cloud previews the heavenly realm, then God’s commands in 1:3-25 reveal how God is fashioning his creation into his dwelling place, and more specifically, his holy temple. From the perspective of our modern, scientific reader, the days of creation in Genesis 1 direct us to think in terms of time. But the biblical reader will eventually learn in Exodus that the days of creation are more accurately directions for the construction of a temple—again, not primarily answering the how question but what. The parallel between the days of creation and the design of the tabernacle or temple can also be laid out in a visual manner, as shown in table 1.1.²³

²⁰Roland S. Ward, *God and Adam: Reformed Theology and the Covenant of Creation*, rev. ed. (Lansvale, NSW, Australia: Tulip Publishing, 2019), 16.

²¹Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 31.

²²James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 45.

²³Adapted from Fesko, *Last Things First*, 70. Used by permission of Christian Focus.

Table 1.1. The relationship between creation and the tabernacle

DAY	CREATION	TABERNACLE
1	Heavens stretched like curtain (Ps 104:2)	Tent (Ex 26:7)
2	Firmament (Gen 1:2)	Temple veil (Ex 26:33)
3	Waters below firmament	Laver or bronze sea (Ex 30:18)
4	Lights (Gen 1:14)	Light stand (Ex 25:31)
5	Birds (Gen 1:20)	Winged cherubim (Ex 25:20)
6	Humanity (Gen 1:27)	Aaron the high priest (Ex 28:1)
7	Cessation (Gen 2:1) Blessing (Gen 2:3) Completion (Gen 2:2)	Cessation (Ex 39:32) Mosaic blessing (Ex 39:43) Completion (Ex 39:43)

There is also an intentional parallel between God’s commands over the seven days of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the seven commanding speeches of God to Moses in which he gives instructions for the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–27. In those speeches God gives specific commands regarding the materials (Ex 25:1-9), ark (Ex 25:19-22), table (Ex 25:23-30), lampstand (Ex 25:31-40), tabernacle (Ex 26:1-37), bronze altar (Ex 27:1-8), and the courtyard (Ex 27:9-19).²⁴ There are also “parallels in phraseology between the conclusion of the creation account in 1:1-2:3 and the tabernacle building account in Exodus 25:40.”²⁵ Just as God rested on the seventh day of creation, so also when God finished the seventh speech to Moses he commanded the Sabbath rest, directly connecting it to the creation account (Ex 31:17). Even more, when Moses finished constructing the temple, the presence of God was made manifest in alignment with the covenantal sign declared in Genesis 1:2: “The [Glory-]cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Ex 40:35).²⁶

²⁴Fesko, *Last Things First*, 68.

²⁵Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399-404, esp. 403.

²⁶As has been suggested, it may not be a coincidence that Moses had to wait six days at the foot of Mount Sinai before climbing to receive the instructions for the tabernacle (Ex 24:15-18), and Christ also ascended the mount of transfiguration after six days (Mt 17:1; Mk 9:2), corresponding to the six days of creation. Cf. Moshe Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the

If Genesis 1 speaks implicitly about the formation of the earth as a temple, Scripture is elsewhere much more explicit. For example, Ezekiel calls Eden a temple, referring to it as “the garden of God . . . the holy mountain of God” containing “sanctuaries” (Ezek 28:13-14, 16, 18)—all terms that elsewhere in the Bible are references to the temple. Ezekiel also speaks of an Adam-like person in Eden in adorned clothing like a priest (Ezek 28:13, alluding to Ex 28:17-20) whose sin profanes the sanctuaries and causes him to be cast out (Ezek 28:17-18).²⁷ In fact, the temple is designed according to the specifications of the Garden of Eden.

In summary, the garden was God’s sanctuary (Ezek 28:18), a cosmic temple, and a microcosm of the world.²⁸ And God’s temple was both a pattern and a promise of God’s world—the world still being cultivated in God’s creation project. The Bible’s prologue is revealing an important aspect of the plot of the biblical story, that God’s creation project is driven by his desire to dwell personally with his creation.

(5) Humanity is assigned to be the prophets, priests, and kings of creation (Gen 1:26-31). The peak of the creation narrative, the place where textual devices (e.g., repetition, emphatic structure; cf. Gen 1:27) draw the reader’s attention, happens when God creates humanity on the sixth day.²⁹ The creation of humanity—Adam and Eve—in the “image or likeness of God” has raised more than a few interpretive questions. The text never defines the nature of the image. Too often interpreters fail to pursue the questions Genesis 1–2 is primarily asking—not how but why. Even still, the answer can only be pursued by comparing humanity’s image to its source. That is, we can expect that God made humanity to imitate his character, attributes, and even his position in creation, though only representatively. And since the image of God in the first Adam (i.e., humanity) can be aligned with the image of God revealed in the second Adam, we should expect to see in Genesis 1–2 a

Lord,” in *Mélanges Bibliques et Orientaux en l’honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, ed. A. Caquot and M. Delcor (Neukirchen-Vluyn: NeukirchenerVerlag, 1981), 501-12, esp. 506.

²⁷G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth*, ESBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 6.

²⁸Cf. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 31-38.

²⁹Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 163.

trajectory that is aimed at the image revealed in Jesus Christ. A proper biblical theology requires we see the fullness of the revealed story. The apostle Paul suggests as much: “Just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man” (1 Cor 15:49). Playing on Augustine’s famous conceal-reveal statement regarding the old and new covenants, if the first Adam is the second Adam concealed, then the second Adam is the first Adam revealed. This does not mean humanity can properly bear the image of God as Christ did. Christ alone displays *and* fulfills the image of God (Col 1:15). A true image-bearer of God will be so “in Christ.”

How, then, are we to understand the revelation in the Bible’s prologue that humanity was made in the image of God? If the second Adam is the prophetic Word of God, the priestly Mediator of God, and the royal Lord of all, then the first Adam (again, all of humanity) was assigned by God to be the prophet, priest, and king over his creation. Humanity’s purpose is to represent God, and for this task they received a derived authority, power, and glory from God.³⁰

A brief explanation of these three representative roles of humanity’s created design is in order. God assigns humanity to be the *prophets* of creation. Kline makes a significant observation: “When we analyze the forming and functioning of the Old Testament prophets, we discover that the distinctive traits of prophethood coincide with the features we have found to constitute the *imago Dei*.”³¹ In essence, to be made in the image of God is to be in relation with God and a spokesperson for God—in word and deed. A biblical example of this is found at the calling of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 6, at which the Glory-cloud of Genesis 1:2 is portrayed, reflecting the heavenly throne room of God. A similar glimpse of the heavenly throne room is found in Genesis 1:26, with language that reflects the assignment for humanity made by divine council. Humanity is, quite simply, made in the son-image, in order to declare by their very existence the goodness and glory of God their Creator. The prophetic role of humanity was reflected in the Old Testament when the prophets were commissioned “to shape the historical course of the kingdom

³⁰Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003-2008), 2:562.

³¹Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 57.

in the midst of the kingdoms on earth” in the name of God, which was a renewal of humanity’s original assignment from God to enact a representative dominion over the world.³² In the New Testament the new humanity “in Christ,” the church, is commissioned with a prophetic mission of witness to the new covenant (cf. 2 Cor 3–4). The church is being re-created by the Spirit into the image of the Son in order to enact the ministry of the prophet-church, mediators of divine revelation to the world.

God assigns humanity to be the *priests* of creation. Based on the design and purpose of the created world, if creation is God’s temple, then humanity serves as its priest. Even the apparent agrarian language in Genesis 2:15, “to work and keep” the Garden of Eden, is the same vocabulary used to describe the priestly responsibilities in the tabernacle (Num 3:7-8; 4:23-24, 26).³³ The first Adam was not a farmer in God’s garden but a priest in God’s temple.³⁴ The Garden of Eden was the first Holy of Holies, in which God revealed himself and related to his people. This priestly assignment not only involved experience with God but service to God, specifically over the created order. This assignment is also aligned with humanity being made in the image of God. The God who reveals and relates to humanity assigns humanity a representative role over the rest of creation. In essence, the formation of humanity into the image of God was “an act of investiture.”³⁵ And this act would only be finally completed when the new humanity is “recreated” and “clothed with” Christ (Rom 13:14; 1 Cor 15:53-54; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

God assigns humanity to be the *kings* of creation. God’s image-bearers are to have dominion over creation. As Middleton has shown, there is an unquestionable connection between “rule” and the language of image or likeness.³⁶ But humanity’s rule is entirely deputized. “Man is king over creation, but he is a vassal-king, he reigns as one under the Creator’s authority, obligated

³²Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 60. Even the naming of the animals in Gen 2:19 reflect not only his kingly dominion but his prophetic shaping of the historical course of creation.

³³Fesko, *Last Things First*, 71.

³⁴Cf. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” 401: “Adam should be regarded as an archetypal Levite.”

³⁵Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 35.

³⁶J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 50.

to devote his kingdom to the Great King.³⁷ That is to say, when God created male and female in his image, he established a royal office that belongs to humanity. The reign of humanity is bounded, however, by the God who covenanted before he spoke creation into existence. The giving of creation to humanity's benevolent rule "may be viewed as the placing of the covenantal yoke of man's lordship upon the earth."³⁸ God the King has delegated to humanity a share in his rule on earth.³⁹ In essence, the first Adam became an heir of the kingdom in which he would rule, serving as judge over the world and even angels (1 Cor 6:2-4), all under the lordship of the King of kings (Is 9:6-7; Rev 19:16) and anointed Son, Jesus Christ (Ps 2).

(6) *Creation's sabbath framework establishes the goal of creation (Gen 2:1-3).* The covenantal nature of the relation between Creator and his creation is given further expression by means of the sabbatical framework of the Bible's prologue. The world God created was designed to move forward toward and consummate in a sabbatical rest (Heb 4:1). The history of the world, facilitated by the covenanting Creator, "was to be characterized by an eschatological thrust and direction."⁴⁰ That is, the world has a sabbath framework that structures existence and establishes the goal of creation—an ultimate rest with God made possible by Christ alone (Heb 4:8-10). This framework was to serve not only as a promise but also as a practice—an ordinance of creation's covenant revealed in Genesis 2:3 and confirmed by command in Exodus 20:8-11. The observation of the Sabbath (the Lord's Day) is both a confession that God is the King and a commitment to serve him. And as a confession and commitment, it orients humanity's hands and hearts to the ultimate goal of human life—rest in God in the new creation. This goal is established at the beginning by being built into creation.

The sabbath framework introduced in Genesis 2:1-3 reveals an important fact about the world: sabbath is more a beginning than an end. God's creation project "is oriented from its foundation toward its climax in the age to come."⁴¹ Proof of this is that unlike the other six days, which are concluded with an

³⁷Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 39-40.

³⁸Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 18.

³⁹Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 88.

⁴⁰Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 78.

⁴¹Skillen, *God's Sabbath with Creation*, 81.

“evening and morning” formula, the seventh day has no such conclusion. This reveals that the seventh day is open-ended and unfinished. This is clearly intentional and significant for the story to come, even if the reasons are not stated. The seventh day has no conclusion “since God continues to rest from creating, having entrusted care of the earth to human beings.”⁴² God’s rest does not mean God is inactive (cf. Jn 5:17), only that God has completed the establishment of the world in its initial form. This explains why God’s sabbath rest has begun but humanity’s is still future.

The fact that the seventh day is ongoing reveals that God’s creation project is not yet finished but aiming toward its cultivated completion. This is the ministry of the first Adam, who as prophet, priest, and king is assigned to extend the order and work of the garden to the rest of creation. Humanity was assigned the task to “extend Eden,” that is, to “fill the earth” with reflections of God’s glory (Gen 1:28). That means humanity, as God’s image-bearers, was assigned the task of multiplying the image of God (procreation), filling the earth with the image of God (expanding the garden-temple), and establishing the image of God over all creation (ruling over all creation as vassal kings).⁴³ In short, humanity was assigned to cultivate or culture-make in God’s creation project.⁴⁴

Just as God brought order to the cosmos out of nothing, so humanity is assigned to bring order to their world (cf. Is 45:18)—an ordered creation that reflects and glorifies the Creator. The goal of creation begins in Eden and extends to the ends of the earth. And this goal is structured according to a sabbath framework, reminding the workers and cultivators that they work as to the Lord and with an aim to the rest of God in the new (and fully cultivated) creation.

(7) God is the Provider of all things (Gen 2:4-25). Genesis 2 is not a second creation story but a complement to Genesis 1. Modern readers who think and write in a linear fashion need to see how Genesis 2 is approaching an aspect of Genesis 1 in a resumptive manner, that is, in a repeating and

⁴²Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 291.

⁴³Fesko, *Last Things First*, 101.

⁴⁴Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 36.

summarizing way. This kaleidoscopic approach allows the reader to look closer and deeper at a particular theme of importance. And the theme is clearly the design and purpose of humanity, the pinnacle of creation. If Genesis 1:1-2:3 gives a global perspective, then Genesis 2:4-25 offers a perspective on humanity.⁴⁵ If the mission of humanity is to carry forward the creative work of the seventh day, then the creation of humanity on the sixth day needs a closer look.⁴⁶

When this closer look is taken, two remarkable insights are found in Genesis 2:4-25. First, the God of creation is the God of the *covenant*. One significant distinction between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 is the terms used for “God.” In Genesis 1, the agent of creation is referred to as “God” (*’elohim*), whereas in Genesis 2 the agent is the “Lord God” (*yhwh ’elohim*). The first name depicts the Creator as transcending creation, a title in Scripture that serves “as the summary of all that commands reverence, as absolute majesty and power.”⁴⁷ The second name, however, describes the Creator with the covenant name Yahweh, sometimes rendered as “the LORD,” which depicts him as more immanent and personal. The sovereign Creator is also, according to Genesis 2, a God who is present and who cares for his people (cf. Ex 3:12-14).⁴⁸ Creation’s covenant, announced here and progressively revealed throughout the rest of Scripture involves a God who is both powerful and paternal.

Second, the God of creation is the God of *provision*. Genesis 2:4-25 reveals the personal care of the Creator in another way.⁴⁹ The theological function of Genesis 2:5 in Genesis 2 is similar to the function of Genesis 1:2 in Genesis 1. Both follow an ancient literary convention in that they describe the effects of God’s ordering of things in creation (Gen 1:2) and providence (Gen 2:5) in contrast to conditions that had prevailed previously. The contrast in Genesis 1, for example, allows the readers to comprehend the effect of God’s creative work in forming the unformed world. The contrast in Genesis 2 is

⁴⁵Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 183.

⁴⁶Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 111.

⁴⁷Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1888), 113.

⁴⁸Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 169-71.

⁴⁹The following is adapted from Don C. Collett, *Figural Reading and the Old Testament: Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 9-16.

also significant. Genesis 2:5 begins by describing the absence of rain and humans to work the land; only in Genesis 2:6-7 does the Lord provide both water and worker. By having a description of what the earth was like before the Lord sent rain or created humanity, the reader is in a better position to understand the importance of providence for the history of creation.⁵⁰ If Genesis 1:1-2:3 reveals God as the Creator of the world, the effect of Genesis 2:5-7 is to reveal God as the Provider and Sustainer of the world. The second creation account teaches the reader that “God’s providential ordering of things in creation *shapes the meaning of human life and existence* in the post-creation world. . . . That which divine speech *creates* in Genesis 1:1-2:3 is ordered and governed by God’s acts of *providential affiliation* in Genesis 2:5-25.”⁵¹ In this way, the agent of creation is also the agent of provision, the Creator and Provider of all things. And befitting the Bible’s prologue, this insight makes sense of the rest of the biblical story and its plot, explaining that creation remains faithful to its Creator, no matter what the creatures may do, for our God, as the new creation reveals, is called “Faithful and True” (Rev 19:11).

CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

As we draw this chapter to a close, maybe you, the reader, feel like I did when my PhD supervisor challenged me to look not for preconceived answers but for what questions need to be asked of a text. And how much more important is a proper listening to the message of a text when it is the Word of God! For too long the only question asked of Genesis 1–2, the prologue of the Bible, has been the how question. While this is not an unimportant question or irrelevant to the opening chapters of Scripture, I hope it is now clear that the who, what, and why questions are explicitly being addressed by Genesis 1–2. The manner in which God created, as important as that is, should not eclipse the meaning of creation—God’s design and purpose for the world.

Understood in this way, the careful reader can come to see that Genesis 1–2 is a pastoral text, shepherding humanity to know and live properly in the world God created. The Bible’s prologue is not simply giving details about the process by which God made the world but the purposes for which God

⁵⁰Cf. Meredith G. Kline, “Because It Had Not Rained,” *WTJ* 20 (1958): 146-57.

⁵¹Collett, *Figural Reading and the Old Testament*, 14; emphasis original.

made it, directing creatures to their Creator in word and deed. “It is a passage designed to draw our hearts to worship with eternal hope.”⁵² In light of the significance of Genesis 1–2, there are three applications we can draw regarding God’s creation project.

First, in its role as the Bible’s prologue, what Genesis 1–2 reveals is of the utmost importance to the rest of the biblical story and its message. As a prologue, these two chapters introduce for the rest of Scripture the primary characters (who), the plot (what), and the purpose-seeking perspective of the narrator (why). In this way, the Bible’s prologue orients the reader not merely to the physical question (cause and effect), but the metaphysical questions (nature and purpose). Genesis 1–2 set a trajectory for the biblical narrative that propels the story forward and aims toward its climactic fulfillment.

Second, Genesis 1–2 introduces seven significant truth claims regarding the design and purpose of the world. While each claim can stand on its own, they are also working cumulatively to orient the reader to the rest of the biblical story and the reality of the world. Even more, the seven claims can also be laid out in a chiasmic structure so as to show not only the central theme of Genesis 1–2, that creation is God’s temple, but also the relation of each corresponding claim.

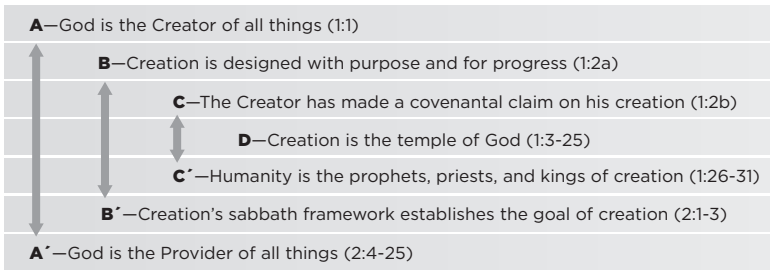


Figure 1.2. Seven truth claims in Genesis 1–2

The ultimate goal of God’s creation project is God’s desire to dwell personally with his creation, specifically with his people. The Bible’s prologue reveals a central aspect of the biblical plot—the world is designed to be a cosmic temple,

⁵²Michael LeFebvre, *The Liturgy of Creation: Understanding Calendars in Old Testament Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 135.

God's sanctuary. In short, God's purpose for the world is like Christmas multiplied by Easter, life with God in glory. This is what the rest of the biblical story will explain and reveal.

Third, unlike some who shrink eschatology into the study of last things, the Bible's prologue makes clear that eschatology flows from protology, or first things. In fact, eschatology appears in pre-redemptive history prior to the entrance of sin and therefore prior to soteriology.⁵³ In the story of Scripture, "the protological Adam" becomes "the eschatological Adam." Though we must not run ahead of the biblical text too quickly. In essence, the beginning of creation points to its end, with the creation's covenant serving as a witness to the telos or goal of creation.

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⁵³Fesko, *Last Things First*, 184.

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