

Act One: Creation

I. INTRODUCTION

The Storyline

It's important to pay attention to the first few scenes of any story since they typically introduce the story's setting, main characters, and initial plot. The biblical story begins in much the same way. In the first act of the biblical narrative, the reader discovers that...

Through the act of creation, God establishes his kingdom over all things and appoints human beings to rule on his behalf as his image bearers, to fill the earth and develop his creation into a glorious civilization.

The Place of Act One in the Bible

The creation accounts of Genesis 1–2 are often the battleground for fierce debates among Christians concerning the origins of the world. These disputes, however, often miss the main thrust of what God is trying to communicate about himself, humanity, and the rest of his creation.

How to Read Genesis 1–2

Our Questions about Creation. When contemporary readers approach Genesis 1–2, they naturally bring to the text certain modern-day questions about biology, physics, and cosmology. However, these types of questions would not have occupied the biblical author or readers, so it is essential first to read the creation accounts from the vantage point of their own world rather than from our own.

Other Ancient Creation Accounts. Genesis 1–2 were not written in a vacuum, but in a time period when other creation accounts competed for attention. The biblical account utilized the concepts in some of these accounts to argue for a different understanding of the world and how it came to be.

Reading Genesis 1–2 Today. In light of the above, one should not read Genesis 1–2 to satisfy one's curiosity concerning how God made the world, but rather to discern what the original author was attempting to highlight in relation to other creation accounts about God, humanity, and the rest of creation.

“The historical, cultural and literary distance we are at from the time of the author makes Genesis difficult to grasp without study. Indeed, one of the biggest mistakes we can make in interpretation is to read it as if it were written for us today.”

Tremper Longman III
How to Read Genesis

II. ACT ONE: CREATION

The Creator King

The creation account is first and foremost concerned with presenting God as the uncontested creator of all things. Creation is not the result of some cosmic conflict, but of God's free decision. He is therefore described as the king over all creation. This kingship is highlighted by the frequent use of royal imagery.

- In creation, God brought order to chaos (1:2).
- By his spoken decree, God establishes the extent of his reign (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14–15, 20, 24, 26).
- By naming his creation, God exercises his sovereign right over it (1:5, 8, 10).
- When God creates humanity, he addresses the heavenly court by saying, “Let us make humankind in our image” (1:26).
- On the seventh day, God rests (2:2). Divine rest is the principal function of a temple, which means that God has taken his place on the throne as the king of the entire cosmos—the cosmos being his temple.

The creation account describes God establishing creation as his own vast kingdom and then establishing himself as its sovereign king.

The Creator's Kingdom

The Bible begins with these well-known words: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” What follows is a description of this heaven-and-earth creation, indicating that heaven and earth were always intended to go together as the twin realities of God's world, i.e., kingdom. The creation account reveals that God's kingdom is designed to be ordered, purposeful, and good.

- **Ordered.** In the first three days, God brings order to chaos by establishing three realms for his kingdom.
 - Light and darkness
 - Sky and water
 - Dry ground
- **Purposeful.** In the next three days, God places inhabitants in those three realms each for a particular purpose.
 - The sun, moon, and stars govern day and night.
 - The birds and fish are to fill the sky and water.
 - The animals and human beings are to fill the earth.
- **Good.** After each of the six days, God declares his ordered and purposeful creation to be good.

The Creator's Rulers

The climax of act one is when God creates humankind as co-rulers with him over all of creation. Humankind is unique in that they are made in the image of God (1:26–27). In this context, which is full of royal imagery, the word *image* is best understood to mean a representative to rule on behalf of the king. Humanity is to serve God not as slaves but as partners. Humanity is commissioned by God to *rule over, subdue, and fill* the earth (1:28). In Genesis 2, this commission begins.

- The man is placed in the garden to cultivate it (2:8–17).
- The man is given the authority to name the animals (2:19–20).
- The man is given a woman to help him rule and fill the earth (2:21–25).

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STORY

The Creator of Creation

The first act of the biblical story introduces the primary character as God himself. There are at least three aspects of God's character that are highlighted in the creation account and are significant for a biblical worldview.

- **God is sovereign over all creation.** There is no other to compete with God. Creation is not the result of a cosmic battle between opposing deities, but is a result of God's own free and loving choice. God alone created, ordered, and rules over the entire universe.
- **God is distinct from his creation.** God is in a completely different category than everything else—physical and spiritual. Contrary to pantheism, God is not a part of the created order, and the created order is not divine.
- **God is involved with his creation.** Though he is distinct from his creation, God does not stand at a distance as deism asserts. Instead he continually sustains creation and is constantly working in history and through the lives of people.

The Goodness of Creation

Creation before and apart from sin is completely good. The inherent goodness of creation indicates that God is going to restore it, and it should keep Christians from embracing the notion of dualism—the belief that physical things are evil and spiritual things are good. This is not a biblical idea; it is a Gnostic one. The creation account is intended to show that the mess of the world that motivates God to make a covenant with Abraham (Gen 12) is not the result of some defect in God's creative work.

The Pinnacle of Creation

Human beings are given a place of prominence in God's world as the only part of creation made in God's image. Such becomes the foundation for a high view of human life. While we are to care for all parts of God's creation, human beings in particular are to be treated with the utmost respect, care, and dignity, which is why the Bible is replete with calls to care for those who are most vulnerable—the poor, the oppressed, the prisoner, the widow, and the orphan.

The Task of Development

Creation is not a finished project; it's only the beginning. As God's image bearers, humanity is commissioned to continue expanding God's kingdom through the development of his created order. Human beings are meant to make something of this world. They are called to unlock the full potential of God's creation, to take what is good (nature) and make it very good (culture).

- Nature (good) → Culture (very good)
- Grain (good) → Bread (very good)
- Grapes (good) → Wine (very good)
- Eggs (good) → Omelet (very good)
- Abundance and order (good) → unlocking creation's full potential (very good)

Such development only happens when you have image bearers, which means that human vocation is integral to God's mission in this world. Vocational stewardship is the foundational mission of human beings. Work places us into the stream of divine action. We are called to participate in God's creative purposes through our work.

Because humankind is commissioned for this task, the development of creation will naturally be societal and cultural in nature. In other words, the task ahead of us is civilization. Even today, everything human beings do to contribute to this trajectory is a fulfillment of our God-given purpose. Of course, with sin in the picture, other dimensions of this task will be added, particularly God's redemptive purposes, but this would take us into the acts two and three of the biblical story.

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The stage has been set, the director is in his chair, the actors are introduced, and now the drama of human history is about to unfold. Humanity is to develop God's creation into a glorious civilization in areas such as agriculture, industry, education, economics, politics, computer technology, parenting, film, printing, chess, skydiving, etc. In this kingdom, humans are in union with God, at home with ourselves, in communion with one another, and in harmony with the world around us. Everything is as God intends, but let's see what happens next.