

## Reflections on Genesis One

The scientific controversy over origins, that is, billions of years and Darwinian evolution *versus* young-earth creation, as important as it is, has sadly been a huge distraction. The evangelical church has lost the fact that this chapter is the theological foundation for not only the Gospel but all of the Bible. Its theological significance has almost completely disappeared from view. Yet, salvation history actually begins here, in this chapter, not at Genesis 12, as is usually supposed. We need to think deeply and carefully about this Creation chapter.

Let me say first of all that this text is certainly the narration of true history. It's written with lofty poetic style, but it's not merely poetry. It literally happened in time and space as the text documents, a bit earlier than approximately 4,000 BC. I dismiss a so-called "Big Bang," all "deep time" (billions of years), and progressive evolutionary development as an Enlightenment fantasy to rationalize rebellion against God. I likewise dismiss as foolishness the assertions many evangelicals of late are making that it was written with ancient Near East creation myths in view or that the Genesis account can be harmonized with what secular science teaches. Like most other narrative texts in the Bible, this chapter is rich in theologically important matter based on what actually happened in history. No human was there to witness creation, so we're expected to accept God's word as to what happened. It's unique revelation, entirely trustworthy because God does not and cannot lie. For this study, instead of verse-by-verse exposition, let's just look at certain key words and key ideas that are embedded here and think thru them canonically and theologically.

**Verse 1.** In this opening statement, God states that He first of all made two places: a place for Himself to dwell, and a place for humans (and all the other creatures) to dwell. There are three heavens, one for the birds to fly in, one for the stars to fill, and a third one where God will reside. The term, "beginning" indicates that God created time. Prior to verse 1, there was no such thing as time. Nor space or matter. (What was there before the beginning? Don't ask.) A transcendent Being, one who is infinitely wise and powerful, brought these three fundamentals of the physical world, space, time and matter, into existence. Everything begins with God's initiative. Creation is His; He owns it, He rules it, and He must have deep, trenchant purposes for it. By the way, notice that no apologetic is necessary to account for God's existence. There are no arguments for God's existence, and there's no explanation of it. He exists! When God revealed Himself to Moses (Exodus 4:14), He identified Himself as "I am." That's all. He is totally self-sufficient, independent and transcendent. He's the Uncaused Cause of all that exists.

**Verse 2.** Already, something ominous appears, "darkness." In Scripture, "night" and "dark" suggest something evil. At the very outset, God is revealing that a purpose of creation might be to deal with evil. Indeed, at the end of the Bible, in the last chapters of the Book of Revelation, we read "there will be no night" (21:25 and 22:5). The purpose of Creation, of all that happens in the Bible, thus seems to be God dealing with evil. We in the churches are so engrossed with salvation that we miss this: A major theme running thru all the Bible is a good God overcoming or defeating evil. Something else in verse 2 is, "the Spirit of God" was there. The Son was there also (Colossians 1:16). The Persons of the Godhead work together in their interactions with creation and with humanity. This is the theological "doctrine of inseparable operations."

**Verse 3.** Several things to discuss in this verse. (1) God speaks!! He is transcendent, but He reveals Himself (the text we're studying), and His word is so powerful it creates light out of nothing! On subsequent days, His word will continue creating. John 1:1 refers to Jesus as the Word. He is the powerful Creator and the truthful Revealer. The Bible reveals God as one who seeks to be known by His beloved human creatures, and He does that by His Word. His Word has power not only to create but to cause repentance, faith, fear, love and obedience. The serpent took control of the first couple by getting them to doubt God's words. We're saved by trusting God's words. (2) Light is good. Now there are two opposites: light and dark. The biblical theme of God overcoming evil involves a choice of two options. These options are going to surface soon in the test in Genesis 3 with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Deuteronomy will close with these same two options (30:15-20). These options climax with John 3:36. The Bible then will close with the outworking of these two options, good and evil, life or death. (3) God named the day and the night, and in subsequent verses He'll name the other created entities. In Scripture, naming someone means authority over that one, so God here is exerting authority over what He is creating. It's all His, and He rules it. As Creator, God owns all that He made, the house is His as well as all the creatures, and He has the right to command how creatures live in His house and the right to dispose of His house and His creatures according to His holy will. He has total authority over His creation. (4) This is the "first day." It will take God six of these days to construct and furnish this house for man to dwell in. Six days is just the right time period for a master builder to make a dwelling place, a human habitation.

By the end of Day 3 (verse 13), the three domains of creation, sea, air and land, are complete. Days 4 to 6 will fill those domains. Three days to create the spaces, then three further days to fill those spaces with things, even living things.

**Verses 4-19.** “God separated . . .” (5 times). We read that God separated light from dark, waters above from waters below, land from the seas. “Separation” is a subtheme or thread that runs all thru the Bible. For example, the people of Israel were to be separate from the idolatrous Gentile nations. The church is to be separate from all that’s worldly. At the end of time, God will separate the ungodly from those who are godly. Many other examples could be mentioned. The theme of opposites continues. This opening chapter introduces one of the most compelling theological themes of the Bible. God is in control of His creation so that good ultimately will prevail and evil will be dealt with, separated from good. By the way, let’s notice that the earth was made first, the heavenly bodies were made on a subsequent day. A worldview that sees planet earth as a fortuitous speck in a vast, cold universe is false. God wants us to be delighted with His creation, so He filled the night sky for us with stars. Something else: In these verses, God repeatedly sees that what He made as “good.” That necessarily means that God is good. That which is good can come only from a good God.

**Verse 22,** God “blessed” the creatures in the seas and the birds. The theme of blessing is here introduced: It’s God’s intent and pleasure to enrich His creatures in some way beyond what they already had by creation. The word reappears in verse 28. But in Chapter 3, a curse is introduced. For us, in our present era, to be blessed by God is for our faith to be made perfect (James 5:10-11). The Book of Revelation concludes with a blessing, as if the goal of biblical history – can we say, the goal of life – is to receive God’s blessing. God is good, and He seeks our good. In the future, God won’t merely restore things to the way they were originally, but something vastly greater and more wonderful awaits, blessing. The house is fully filled at **verse 25**, finished and ready for man. So next, God will make humans to dwell in it.

**Verses 26-31.** “. . . man in the image of God, in His likeness.” The Creation narrative reaches its climax with God making man. The whole purpose of building the house was for humans to live in it. But “image”? What’s this all about? God made man with the capacity to reflect Himself, that is, His goodness, His character. We’re here to reflect God’s perfections, as a mirror reflects an image of someone. Doing that glorifies God. God is an infinitely glorious Being, so He can only be glorified by seeing Himself reflected in His creatures. It is to us, mankind, that God gave the privilege of glorifying Himself. The rest of the Bible narrates the story of whether humans, having been given a measure of free will, will do that or not. Humans and the expression of their free will and the choices placed before them, are central in the great cosmic conflict of good versus evil that spans the entire biblical narrative. Notice also that “rule” is another privilege given to humans. As Creator, God rules His creation. We were created to serve as God’s vice-regents, serving Him on earth in the capacity of a king and/or priest under His superintending rule. So God gave us, when He made us, the capacities to do that.

We need to discuss these two privileges of reflecting God’s Person and ruling over His creation so as to glorify Him. Almost all of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament was written for the sanctification of believers. Sanctification is our transformation from sinful rebels into persons who reflect God’s goodness and glory. It’s our expressing the image of God, a creational obligation that was grotesquely marred by our fall into sin and by God’s handing us over to sin in judgment (Romans 1:21-32). Sanctification is putting to death our sin nature and instead living according to God’s revealed will. We have to want to do it because we love God. Sanctification is by obeying God and serving Him as He has ordained for us to serve Him. Sanctification is taking the side of God which is the side of good in the great time-and space-spanning conflict between good and evil. Believing in Christ is the starting point for our sanctification; it is not the end or purpose of salvation. To say it another way, biblical belief in Christ *includes* our wanting to glorify God by our sanctification.

But we can’t do it on our own. The whole Old Testament testifies to that. Our sin nature prevents it. The Evil One does all he can to prevent it. That’s why God gave us the Person of Christ. In Christ we have not only forgiveness of sins, but the gift of the Spirit *to enable* our sanctification. The Spirit is given to us to empower us to obey God’s will and to serve him. That’s because the goal of the Gospel is our Christ-likeness, which is God-likeness, which is reflecting God. And that is to His glory. This is so important, I need to repeat it: We’re saved to restore the image! So that God is glorified. Christ Jesus is the true and perfect image of God; the 3 references to “image of God” in verses 26 and 27 anticipate Him.

Now, what does “rule” mean in verse 28? It means this: God created us *to serve Him*. We are not here to live as we please! We’re here to fulfill God’s intent for us, serving Him as He revealed we’re to do. The next chapter will expand on this role. Later, the Nation of Israel was called to serve God (a “kingdom of priests”). Jesus came as the promised, ultimate Servant of God. The Book of Acts documents the early church serving Christ doing Gospel outreach. The first

man failed to rule in Genesis 3; he allowed the wicked serpent to sneak into the Garden to blaspheme God. And so we forfeited “rule” by our fall into sin. Someone however had to rule! It was God’s creational intent. So the Son came to earth in human form to fulfill God’s intent for man to rule. The God-man, the Lord Jesus, is anticipated by the command for man to rule over creation under God’s superintendence. Jesus is the ideal human, the ideal priest, the ideal king. He will rule the Millennial Kingdom not only as King of the Jews but as king or Ruler of all humanity. We today fulfill God’s creational intent by being *in Christ*. The “image of God” and “rule” render this chapter Messianic.

**Verse 28.** “Fill the earth.” God loves life. We too are to cherish it, nurture it, and protect it. It’s God’s unique and marvelous invention, and so we should be in awe of it. Death is a curse. To take the life of any of God’s creatures offends God. Only God has the right to do that.

**Verses 29,30.** “Food.” God alone is independent and free. None of His creatures are. All creatures are dependent on God to provide for them to maintain life. Supposing we’re autonomous and free to live as we please is not merely a vain conceit but stupid. We depend on God’s goodness to continue our existence, necessarily. All of life is contingent on God’s goodness and holy will. Unbelievers refuse to acknowledge this, and so dishonor God. We believers, in contrast, thank God for our daily bread (Matthew 6:11), indeed, our heartbeat and next breath as well.

**Verse 31.** It was all “very good.” That created world was peaceful, innocent, beautiful and delightful. As every reader would know, that world that God created is not what we experience today. Why not? The coming chapters of Genesis will explain why: Sin entered the human race, and God had to curse His creation. So the “very good” isn’t here anymore. But will a wise and capable Creator settle for His creation to remain under a curse? No indeed. The “very good” here in Chapter One anticipates a new heavens and new earth in the future that will be “very good,” without any curse. In Revelation 22:3-5, at the end of time, “No longer will there be any curse. . . There will be no more night.” Creation is to serve God’s great purposes. He will see to it that His will is fulfilled. On “the sixth day” God finished His creative work. Why? So that the drama that is about to unfold can proceed without delay. God has a definite purpose or plan (called in theology, a Covenant of Redemption) that will take place in this world He made, the best of all possible worlds. It begins in the very next chapter with a test centered on a certain tree of knowledge of good and evil.

**Verse 2 of Chapter Two.** Chapter One really should include verses 1 and 2 of Chapter Two. The chapter break is misplaced. God “rested.” Not only did He rest, He “blessed” the seventh day because on it He rested. Something very special is intended here. Looking at His work of Creation, God was pleased. But He didn’t merely cease His work, He made the day special *for us*. What else does making it “holy” mean but that it’s a time set apart for us? It’s a day that would be for intimate fellowship between our Creator and us, humanity. The “rest” is for us as well, and the blessing is for us. This “rest” looks forward to the goal of creation, a special time in the future when we humans will be able to enjoy God in His very presence. Hebrews Chapter 4 will explain that entering that “rest” and experiencing God’s unique blessing is by believing the Gospel. Understood canonically and theologically, Genesis One compellingly points to Christ.

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Three things about this chapter: 1. Chapter One narrates a beginning, which necessarily implies that at some time in the future there will be an ending, a conclusion. The God who creates is good, so we can be sure that there will be a good ending. But what’s in-between? What’s the plot line? How will it all proceed? We need to read further into the Book to find out. More to the point is, we’re ineluctably involved in it. We’re an integral part of the great Plan of God as it works itself out in history.

2. This chapter is a set-up. It prepares us for what comes next. We were given privileges and responsibilities at Creation, as well as a sense of moral awareness, so we must have a measure of free will. What, therefore, will we do with our freedom? Will we obey God, or not? In Chapter 2, the critical test is put to humanity, and the tragic result is in Chapter 3. Yet, this chapter clearly instructs us that God is in control. He is not only Creator, He is creation’s sovereign Ruler.

3. This chapter is all about God. He is excellent in all He is and all He does. He is a wise and imaginative inventor, a master-craftsman and engineer, and supremely powerful. He is also lovely and we should love Him and honor Him and serve Him. And we should fear Him too, because He’s the Ruler of His creation, He has given clear instructions how we’re to live, and He has the right – and the power – to dispose of us. He’s dangerous, but He’s good. Knowing what we do about God from just this one chapter, the appropriate human response is humility before God and trust in Him.