

# Biblical Theology of Creation

Genesis 1:1-2:3

# The Message of Genesis

- In Gen 1:1-2:3, God reveals his purpose for creating the heavens and earth in 7 days, as a place where life can flourish
- The apex of God's creative activities is making humanity in his own image as his agents to fill and rule the earth ([Gen. 1:26-28](#))
- After Adam and Eve sinned, the promise was given that the offspring of the woman will defeat the serpent and restore the earth ([Gen. 3:15](#)):
- "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"
- This promise is traced throughout the book in its genealogies ([Gen 12-50](#)), which provide the backbone of the entire book
- Genesis is foundational to the whole Bible, and to every human life. It tells us who God is, who we are, how things went wrong, and the plan of God to restore his creation to the way it was meant to be

# Creation by Word

- In Gen 1, God speaks creatively eight times: “And God **said**, ‘Let there be light, and there was light’” (vv. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26)
- By using speech as a metaphor, the biblical writer is indicating that creation is a divine and rational activity
- Did God create from nothing? (*creatio ex nihilo*)
- Rom 4:17: “the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were”
- 1 Cor 8:6: “yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live”
- The Hebrew text of Gen 1:1-2 is not exactly clear
- These verses could be interpreted as speaking of uncreated raw material from which God moulded the heavens and the earth

# Gen 1:1-2

- In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
- What is the relationship between 1:1 and 1:2?
- Dependent clause: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void" (NRSV)
- Independent clause: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [Now] The earth was ..." (NIV)
- Verse 1:1 makes the assertion unprecedented in ANE literature: it ascribes the entire work of creation entirely to one God
- This counters ancient and Hellenistic belief on the eternity of matter

# Gen 1:1-2

- Likely, 1:1 does not refer to some creation activity that preceded the seven days creation account (young earth theory)
- The grammar seems to suggest that 1:1 introduces and summarizes the activity of the seven day (1:3-2:3)
- **What are the evidences for the latter view?**
- Genesis is structured by introductory statements (*toledot*) in sections, beginning in 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 8:1; 10:1; 11:10; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2
- The six days closes with the comment that “the heavens and the earth” were completed (2:1)

# Gen 1:1-2

- <sup>1</sup> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth
- What does the Hebrew term “created” (*bara*) mean?
- It refers to a divine activity in which something is “brought into existence” with specific “design” and “functions”
- What do the “heavens and the earth” represent?
- God brought the universe or cosmos into operation
- <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
- What is this verse saying?
- God brought the world of disorder (*tohu wa bohu*) and darkness into an organized world with specific roles and functions

# Gen 1:1-2

- In Hebrew thought, darkness and the watery deep represent elements of chaos
- The **Spirit of God** (*ruach*), which could be translated as “**wind**” or “**power**,” brought about order
- The term “hover” depicts a bird brooding protectively over a nest of eggs
- In other words, “The earth was non-functional, primordial, watery darkness prevailed, and a supernatural wind that was permeated with the power of God circulated over the surface of the waters”
- **What function does 1:1-2 serve in ch 1?**
- This passage reminds us that everything starts with God, and thus 1:1-2 sets the stage for the seven-day creation story in 1:1-2:3

# Creation, Time, and History

- Another striking feature of the Genesis account of creation is the priority given to **time**—the alternation of light and darkness flows the temporal succession which is the basic context of created reality
- Time is fundamental to creation, as demonstrated by the fact that activity of creation is placed within a temporal sequence
- Seven days creation—need not be taken literally. The number “seven” occurs repeatedly in the passage, e.g., seven days, seven fulfilment formulae, seven approval formulae
- Its significance is symbolic, indicating “**completeness**” or “**perfection**” of God’s creative activities
- Moreover, the days need not be defined as 24-hour periods



# Views on the Concept of Time

- The Wheel of time or wheel of history (also known as Kalachakra) is a concept found in several religious traditions and philosophies, notably religions of Indian origin such as Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism, which **regard time as cyclical and consisting of repeating ages**
- Hindus believe that when Kali yuga is over, the entire universe dies. From these ashes, the universe eventually recreates itself and then cycles through the entire process again, for infinity. **Hindus see time as progressing in a spiral**
- **The perception of time as samsāra, or cyclical world, is at the core of Theravada Buddhism** and differs from the Western perception of time as a linear conception. In this world, which revolves from birth to death and rebirth, one has to find a way to free oneself from this repetitive cycle

# Humans Created in God's Image

- The pinnacle of God's creation is placing humanity in the garden, with a commission to populate the earth as his image-bearers (1:26-28)
- <sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." <sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- <sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

# Humans Created in the Image of God

- **Who is God?** There are glimpses of the Trinity at work in Gen 1:1-3. God the Father is the Creator ([Gen. 1:1](#)), who works through the Spirit ([Gen. 1:2](#)) by the power of his Word ([Gen. 1:3](#)) to create the heavens and the earth
- In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. <sup>3</sup>And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
- A glimpse of the Trinity can also be seen in the plural of [Gen. 1:26](#):  
"Let *us* make man in our image, after our likeness."
- God created humans (*Adam*) in his image, which has to do with their role and purpose in this world. Humans are to reflect God's character, to represent God's rule on his behalf, and to take dominion of the created order

# Christ and Creation

- Christ's significance for creation becomes explicit in Jn 1
- "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1)
- John uses the term *logos* to convey unity and plurality (1:1)
- The term *logos* is a theological interpretation of Gen 1 and relates to *dabar* (Gen 1:3ff), giving a different account of God's work of creation
- Jesus is the agent of creation and the source of life:
- "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (1:3-4)

# Christ the Image of God

- **The 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
- However, this image was distorted by the fall and will not be fully reconstituted until the coming of Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate “image of God” ([2 Cor. 4:4](#); [Col. 1:15](#))
- <sup>4</sup>The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor 4:4)
- <sup>15</sup>The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (Col 1:15)

# Conformity to Christ's Image

- Those who believe in Christ are called to be conformed to the image of Christ ([2 Cor. 3:18](#)), and this process of transformation will be completed 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](#))

# The New Jerusalem

- The hope for the whole of creation is portrayed by the apocalyptic vision of the book of Revelation, stating God's plans for the whole earth involves creating the new Jerusalem (Rev 21-22)
- The new Jerusalem brings to fulfilment what began in Eden, because both share common features like the "tree of life" (Gen 2:9; cf. Rev 22:2-3)
- John's vision reveals a city of enormous dimensions that is shaped as a golden cube, reminiscent of the Most Holy Place within Jerusalem temple, also shaped as a cube and plated with gold
- John explicitly says there is no temple within the city, and points out that "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev 21:22)
- This suggests that the whole city is a Most Holy Place, where there is no barriers exist between God and humanity
- As royal priests, we will be able to see God's face (Rev 22:4-5)

# Application Pointers

- Jesus Christ is the perfect example of what it means to be human
- The goal of the Christian life is striving to become more Christ-like in our daily lives