

Chapter 1

God, Creation, and Covenant

Most majestic words open the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1, RSV. This fantastic statement introduces God as Creator, whom we later come to know also as Redeemer.

This sentence includes four basic ideas. First, it introduces God. God is understood as the Creator.

Second, the verb of the sentence created, indicates God’s activity: God created. This means that the God who created reveals Himself in creative activities. The word created indicates how God as Creator made the world: He made the world in His creative activity.

Third, the expression “the heavens and the earth” is used in the same sequence or in reversed order forty-one times in the Old Testament, indicating that this phrase refers to our earth and its surrounding heavenly atmospheres. Here the question is answered as to what was created.

Finally we come to the opening words, “In the beginning.” These words tell us when God created “the heavens and the earth.”

In this sentence, four basic questions are being answered: who? how? what? and when? Genesis 1:1 gives us very basic information about God, our planet and its surrounding atmospheres, the way in which our globe came into existence and the time when it came into existence.

The Bible does not prove that God is Creator-it reveals that He is Creator. Without this revelation we would never have known that this world was created by God. Without this revelation we would never have known the purpose of our life on earth.

The Bible clearly reveals that God the Father was the originator of the creation (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 1:2), and it also reveals that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the triune Godhead, is the agent of creation (John 1:3; Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 1:2). The Bible clearly affirms that God did not create out of a need to fulfill Himself (Isaiah 40:12-31), for He was exactly the same after Creation as He was in Himself before (Psalm 90:2). God, the Creator, is self-contained and self-sufficient and not part of His creation; He stands as the transcendent God above and beyond His creation.

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God's creation is described in Genesis 1 and 2 as "good." He "saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." Genesis 1:31. God's creatorship and God's goodness belong together from the beginning.

Throughout the Bible the Creator is presented as the triune God. The Creator is the everlasting God and Lord. By Jesus Christ all things in heaven and earth (Ephesians 3:9) were created (Colossians 1:16). By the Word (Jesus) the world was made; "without him was not anything made that was made" John 1:3. The "Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Genesis 1:2.

The Place of Man in Creation

In the biblical story of creation, "man" (a generic word referring to mankind) is represented as the crowning climax of creation. We will focus on several key aspects of man's special place in creation.

The creation of man is the result of divine deliberation within the triune Godhead. This is expressed in the plural of deliberation used in Genesis 1:26: "Let us make man." No other creative act is preceded by such "God with God" deliberation. Man's lofty place in creation is thus established from the beginning.

Man is the only earthly creature that God created in His own image and after His own likeness. The "image of God" in man profoundly expresses that man's external resemblance, his character, and his mental, spiritual, and moral capacities are reflecting the divine image. All of this suggests the immense dignity and worth, authority and responsibility, with which human beings are endowed in creation.

The statements that man is made in the "image of God," that he has been created "after our likeness," reveals, on the one hand, closeness between God and man and, on the other hand, the basic distance between God and man. Man was not created to be another god or the god over the earth. God is creator and man is creature, but not creature on the level of an animal, even if one thought of a superior animal. Man is a creature in God's likeness and image. Man, created in the image and likeness of God, is set fully apart, not only from the animals but also from Deity.

Being created in the image and likeness of God was not Adam's privilege only. Both male and female were created in the image and likeness of God. In creation no distinction of rank or importance existed between man and woman—they were equal. Both man and woman find their full meaning, not in a superior-inferior relationship,

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but in their mutual relationship and in their common, vital communion with God.

Man is indeed a new order of being. Because God created man in His image and likeness, a most profound communion and a most meaningful relationship could exist between Him and human beings. This God-man relationship is God's fantastic gift to man. God made man so that this relationship would exist and could grow throughout the ages. Man is the crown of creation because he has been made especially to enjoy fellowship and communion with his Creator.

Initiator of Communion With Man

In the first two chapters of the Bible, which describes the time and events before sin entered the world, we find explicit evidence that God, the Creator, established communion with man and woman. In Genesis 1:28 we read, "And God blessed them." Before God spoke to Adam and Eve He "blessed them." The divine blessing is a free, undeserved gift of God involving well-being and prosperity, a wholeness rooted in God and experienced in everyday life.

The profound, unhindered, and undisturbed communion of the God-man relationship could never be complete and total if man did not have free choice to live within such a relationship. While man's highest calling was to serve God, he was unique in being the only creature who could respond to God in obedience as well as disobedience, in faith and trust as well as in rebellion and distrust. Unlike the animal creation, which obeys on the basis of instinctive impulses and laws, man and woman were given the freedom of will as part of their mental and spiritual heritage. Man and woman were given the possibility of separating themselves from God just as easily as they could maintain fellowship with Him. By their God-given choice, Adam and Eve "could obey and live, or disobey and perish."-E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 53. This choice was highlighted by that special tree, and only one at that, from which the first pair was not to eat. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you shall eat of it you shall die." Genesis 2:17, RSV.

The Test of Fellowship

The test provided in the form of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil indicated that man's relationship to God depended on free

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choice. No test existed if men and women were not free to say Yes or No to God.

The test would show that man was not superman and that he would function best only in dependence upon his Maker. The test would demonstrate whether man would wish to be like God and thus abandon his dependent role and status inherent in being created in the image of God. The test would demonstrate whether man would wish to be like God and thus abandon his dependent role and status inherent in being created in the image of God. The test would reveal that man's relationship with God can be effective and lasting only if man freely chooses to live and function in that beneficent relationship. To reject the relationship would mean that man would attempt to live independently from God thinking that he had no need of God. But to break the relationship was also to know evil, to experience alienation and loneliness and all the pain of separation from a life apart from God.

The creation narrative of Genesis 1:1 to 2:4a and the complementary story of the creation of man and his perfect environment provided in Genesis 2:4b-25 contain no hint of foreboding that would in any way suggest a threat to God's perfect creation. Everything in these two narratives has the seal of perfection stamped on it. Until man and woman disobeyed God, the future was one of continuous and unhindered fellowship with God.

Our first parents failed the test of love, faith, and obedience. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened." Genesis 3:6, 7, RSV. The tree that God had placed in the garden was not evil. It contained no magical enzymes or super vitamins or special fruit. The evil was in listening to the wrong person. The woman listened to the serpent whom Satan was using as his medium (2 Corinthians 11:3, 14), and man listened to his wife. Neither listened to God! Thus sin disrupted the life-giving, God-man relationship. Sin stopped open communion.

God, in His creative speaking and doing, brought about a loving, gracious relationship. But man, in deafness and disobedience, destroyed it. Man's disregard of the divine command, "you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:17), indicates that sin is an act of transgressing God's will. This rebel act manifests man's desire to be his own "lord," that he himself wants

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to decide what is good and evil. Adam's sin revealed his distrust of God's design for his well-being.

Sin's Change of Relationships

Man's sin blemished all phases of life on earth. See Romans 8:21, 22. Genesis 3 explains in verses 7, 10, 11-13 that several major changes took place on account of man's sin. First, the relationship between man and woman was broken, marked by an emergency action of sewing together fig leaves. Second, the relationship between man and the created world was interrupted and became marked by fear, alienation, and death. See Romans 8:19-23; 2 Peter 3:13. Third, the relationship between God and man was decisively interrupted. Man was made for fellowship and communion with God. After sin, man fled from God's face and hid himself (Genesis 3:8-10); thus wholesome communion is turned into bitter alienation and painful separation.

The biblical teaching of the fall of man opposes many popular conceptions. The modernistic conception of man as a product of slow, evolutionary upward development is not supported by the biblical teaching of man's fall into sin. The biblical picture of man's fall thus contradicts the evolutionary scheme of man slowly rising from primeval fear and groping ignorance to proud heights of religious sensitivity and insight. The Bible does not portray man as risen, but as fallen—a created being in desperate and continual need of a saving God.

Reestablishment of the God-Man Relationship

The immense tragedy of man's decision to yield to the evil one—a decision that led to an almost obliterated "image of God"—did not cause the Creator to turn from man in his desperate need. After man sinned, God again took the initiative. The marvelous story of God's love unfolded in His Word is that He is always the initiator, seeking man's attention and redemption. When Adam and Eve were hiding before God in fear, guilt, and shame, with marks of sin already within and around them, God approached them with the searching love call, "Where are you?" Genesis 3:9, RSV. No one in this world can possibly escape from this question.

The searching question "Where are you?" is not a curse, condemnation, or judgment. Rather, we hear God calling the sinner back to a redeeming relationship. Here the Creator is also man's Redeemer. Although creation preceded redemption, yet both have belonged together in God's heart from the beginning.

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Only the serpent and the ground are cursed. Genesis 3:14, 17, 19. The question “Where are you?” was designed to draw guilt-stricken man back into the arms of God. “God’s first words to fallen man has all the marks of grace. It is a question, since to help him [man] He must draw rather than drive him out of hiding.”- Derek Kidner, Genesis (Downer’s Grove, 111.: Inter Varsity Press, 1967), p. 70.

The initial reaching out on the part of God toward Adam and Eve did not end in Eden. Down to our day, this moment, the Lord continues to reach out to His creatures. The story of redemption is a recurring double theme: sin breaks the beneficent God-man relationship (the closest possible fellowship that can be conceived by the human mind) followed by the divine initiator of that relationship breaking through the barrier caused by sin and Satan to reestablish the lost fellowship with fallen man. At the moment of grief and guilt, shame and frustration, alienation and separation, God’s love reaches across the gulf of separation caused by sin-Adam’s and our own-to bring us back into His loving arms. The apostle Peter perceptively reveals, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9.

Provision for Salvation

In Genesis 3:15 (RSV) God’s surprising word of prophetic hope speaks of a divinely ordained hostility-“I will put enmity” between the serpent [Satan] and the woman, between his seed and her seed. This enmity climaxes the victorious appearance of a “He,” a representative offspring of the woman’s seed, who delivers a lethal blow to the head of Satan. Thus the first promise in the Bible speaks of One who will effectively break the power of the tempter.

This Messianic promise gave Adam and Eve hope in their desperation. This hope transformed their existence because it was a God-given, God-guaranteed hope. This hope of the Messiah and of final victory transcends all other hope. It is built on the promise of a renewed relationship with God, one of grace and mercy, forgiveness and salvation, pardon and power.

Thus, the beginning of Scripture tells us not only the story of creation but also the story of redemption-the story of a covenantal relationship between God and man. God can only be Redeemer because He is Creator.

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Human philosophy caused a separation between the doctrine of creation and the special revelation of God, making the study of creation a matter of natural theology. The Bible clearly depicts creation as the beginning of history; both creation and history are inseparably related and linked to each other. Creation is the foundation of the covenant and covenantal relationship between God and man. Thus it is not correct to say that the covenant is the rational principle, or the ground, of creation. The biblical picture of creation is prior to the covenant, and the covenant finds its meaning and its completion in relationship to creation, not vice versa.