Serving God in His Temple

The Gospel in Creation — September 27, 2026

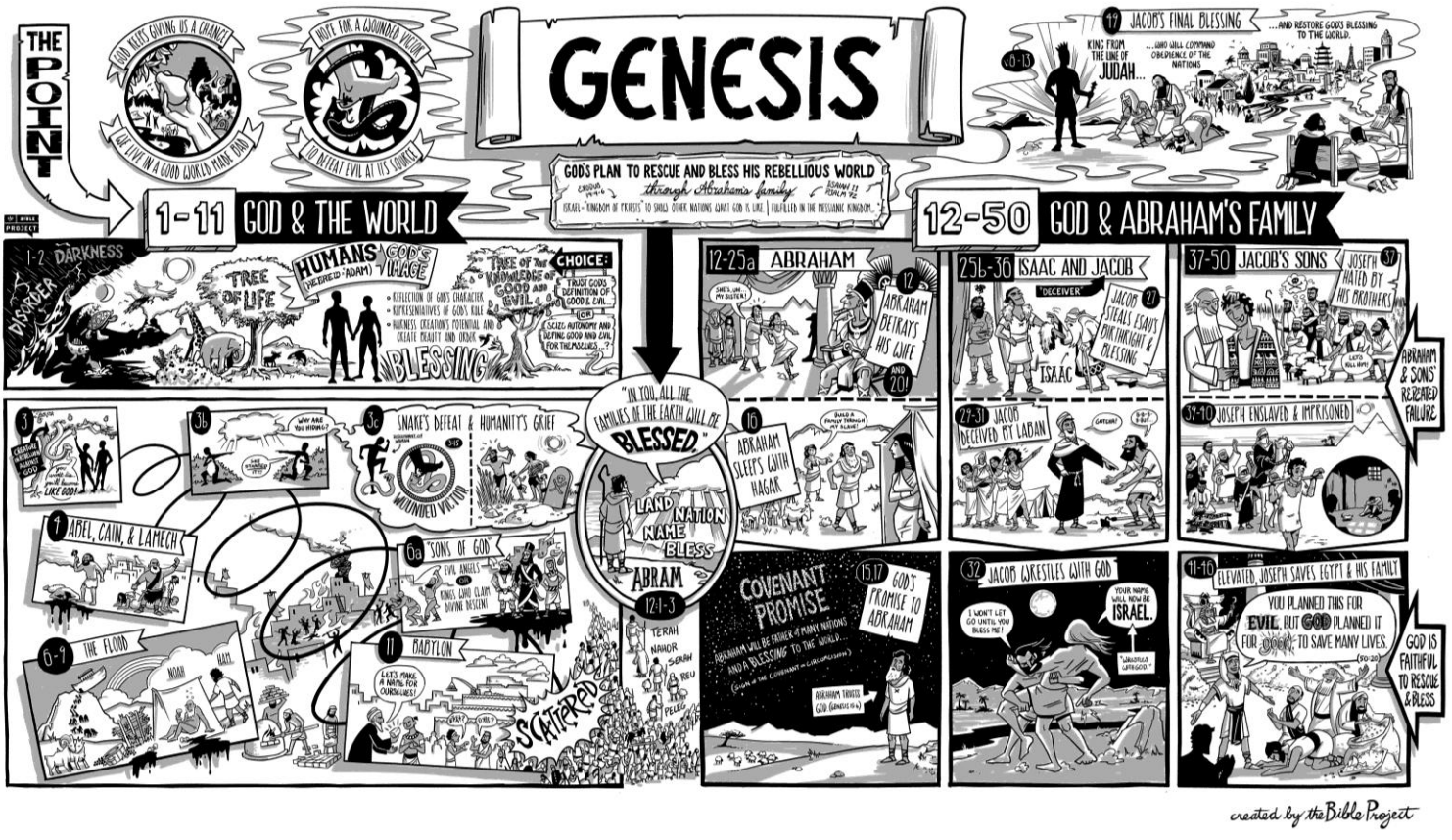
The Lord God took the man
and put him in the garden of Eden
to work it and keep it.
(or to worship and to obey [him].)
Genesis 2:15

The perspective from below

1. The main point remains the same: God is creating a place, *ha 'aretz*, to be with his people. Now the garden of Eden becomes a proto-temple (looking ahead to 3:8) with all the beauty and order of the Jerusalem temples and the garden-city in Revelation 21-22

2. This text fits "inside" the sixth day, ending Chapter 2 with the man's commentary of God's *tōv*.

3. Listen this morning for the subtle change in the name God chooses for himself. What does this change teach us about the relationship between the Creator and his creatures?



Genesis 1:1-2:3

4 These are the generations
of the heavens and the earth when they were created,
in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

5 When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— 7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. 14 And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone . . . .

What it means (exegesis)

1. Genesis 1:4, the first of eleven "generations" sections in Genesis, places this text both in the context of the sixth day and sets the stage for the fall. The new perspective, from below, reveals a new name for the Creator, the covenant name which is going to identify him to his people (Exodus 2). No, there are not two creations stories but one story told from two perspectives.

2. The "from below" perspective on humanity's creation reveals his connection to both his covenant God ("formed" and "breathed") and the rest of creation (*'adam* from *'adamah* to work the *'adamah*)

13 For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.
Psalm 139

3. God place the man in the proto-temple to serve God by caring for creation.

7 And you and your sons with you shall guard your priesthood for all that concerns the altar and that is within the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood as a gift, and any outsider who comes near shall be put to death.
Numbers 18

4. This text introduces the pre-fall Covenant of Works which reveals that God's ordinances are for all creation and that "to err is human" has never been completely true. Humanity in this probationary moment learns to "trust and obey" which is the proper relationship between Creator and creatures.

15 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. 16 If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

Deuteronomy 30 (See Ligon Duncan's essay for the best summary of the Covenant of Works.)

A text with important lessons

1. What God shows me about myself: I'm created to serve the Creator, and to truly enjoy his creation I need to seek his *tōv,*

4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

10 "And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, 11 and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, 12 then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 13 It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. 14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— 15 for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

Deuteronomy 6, the *shema'*

2. What God reveals about himself: He is God for everyone, but in special relationship with his people.

8 Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
9 For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

Psalm 33

3. Where do I find grace in the Covenant of Works? I don't deserve to enjoy *shabbat* in God's *'aretz*, before or after the fall, but Jesus' fulfillment of all the covenants makes it possible!

18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 5

Resources for studying Genesis 1-2

I found these commentaries helpful:

Bruce Waltke's *Genesis: A Commentary* (Zondervan, 2001).

John Sailhammer's *EBC* commentary on Genesis (Zondervan, 1990).

H. C. Leopold's *Exposition on Genesis* (Baker Book House, 1950).

I recommend Lee Strobel's *The Case for a Creator* (Zondervan, 2004) as a good introduction to the argument for creation.

Alexander Maclaren has a very short summary at *https://www.ccel.org/ccel/maclaren/gen_num.ii.i.i.html*

All of Vern Poythess' work in Genesis is good. See "Christian Interpretations of Genesis" at *http://www.frame-poythress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/2013ChristianInterpretationsOfGenesis1.pdf* , "Ten Things You Should Know" at *https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-genesis-13/* and "Let There Be Light" at *https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/let-there-be-light*

Ligon Dunon has a wonderful sermon advocating for the six-day creation position at *https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/the-first-things-creation-3-the-days-of-creation/*
He sermon on this text is a classis statement of the covenant of works at *https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/the-first-things-creation-7-the-covenant-of-works/*

Ligonier has a "What does R. C. Sproul really believe" article at *https://www.ligonier.org/posts/what-rc-sprouls-position-creation* and a good study at *https://www.monergism.com/adams-fall-and-mine*
Also see *https://learn.ligonier.org/podcasts/ultimately-with-rc-sproul/the-goal-of-creation*
Doug also appreciated *Tabletalk's* short essay on the Covenant of Works at *https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2006/10/covenant-works/*

Doug really likes Spurgeon's sermons on the first day at *https://chspurgeon.com/sermons/light-natural-and-spiritual-660* and *https://chspurgeon.com/sermons/the-spirits-work-in-the-new-creation-3134*

Ron Thompson, an engineer who writes interesting theology, posted this good description of the "Big Bang Creationism" and the polemic nature of the Genesis 1 poetic creation story at *https://gpront.blog/2024/01/20/genesis-11-5-day-1/*

Timothy Keller has a classis "The First Wedding Day" sermon at *https://www.monergism.com/first-wedding-day-%E2%80%93-genesis-218-25* It is interesting that "Marriage" was the most popular series ever preached at Redeemer.

Keller also has a good message on Genesis 3 at *https://www.monergism.com/paradise-crisis-%E2%80%93-genesis-31-9* His sermons on Genesis 1 are available at *https://gospelinlife.com/book-of-the-bible/genesis-1/*

Michael Milton has a good defense of the 6-day creation position at *https://michaelmilton.org/2010/04/01/dr-doug-kelly-creation-rts-and-the-foundation-of-scripture/*

Christopher Yuan has a fine summary of the male/female themes in Genesis 1 and 2 at *https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/he-made-them-male-and-female*

Doug appreciated John Piper's study of the image of God at *https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-image-of-god*