



A SUMMARY OF THE TEACHING OF GENESIS 1-2

The first two chapters of the book of Genesis impart a positive view of:

1. God's Nature

In the Genesis creation stories God's power is the power to create, do good and confer good things. Every act of God in the order of creation, Genesis 1-2, is designed for the blessing and well-being of man and woman who are the crown of creation.

There is no suggestion of the egoism or violence which is much to the fore in some other creation accounts eg. *Enuma Elish* or the Greco Roman legends where the gods engage in wars, murders, jealousies, sexual infidelities, and display minimal concern for humans. In these epics and legends sin/evil exists 'prior' to creation and humans are implicated in evil and violence from their very origin. In Genesis, the whole created order is seen as 'very good' and sin/evil is clearly expressed as an aberration.

2. The Natural World

Genesis confirms what we humans know intuitively, that all of creation, its variety and beauty, lavishness and sparseness, strength and fragility is good. In Genesis 1 each aspect of the created order has its 'day' and God explicitly recognises each aspect of creation as good in, and of, itself. The earth provides the substance from which *adam* 'the made one' is formed and the earth provides 'adam' and all human beings with a receptive environment within which to flourish. In turn, human beings are given stewardship of the earth and all it contains and are commanded to do for it as God would do.

The word 'dominion' which has often been interpreted in a controlling, even exploitive sense, actually comes from a Latin word meaning ownership which is in turn derived from the Latin word for Lord, *dominus* (in Hebrew *adonai*). It implies that human beings far from being given permission to exploit and ransack the natural world are to relate to the world in place of the Lord God and treat it as God would treat it, that is, to use it and all its resources well for the benefit of all.

3. Communication between God and Humankind

The first words spoken by God in Genesis are 'Let there be light'. They indicate God's whole agenda toward men and women from the beginning which is enlightenment and truth-telling. God's blessing of human beings and their role in creation is communicated clearly and God speaks honestly to the man and the woman about boundaries established for the good of humankind.

Genesis 2 further portrays the relationship between God and humankind as one of great ease and intimacy. God walks with Adam and Eve in the garden created for them. Manipulation and intimidation are entirely absent from the divine communication.





4. Human Nature

Human beings are created in the image of God. To be made in the image of God means to reflect the character of God who is utterly good. We are created to have explicit relationship and communication with God and are given stewardship of the earth. We are blessed and invited to be fruitful and creative in relation to each other and the whole created order.

While the narratives in Genesis assert that we are created good, they then go on to explain why we are often not (the 'fall' story of Genesis 3). Yet the 'fall' of human beings from the original state of blessedness does not entirely eradicate the image of God from humanity and a hallmark of the human story is the ensuing tension between the desire for good and the impulse to evil in the human heart.

5. Human Freedom

The first words addressed to a human being are found in Genesis 2:16: 'And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free...."' God gave Adam freedom to eat from any tree in the garden. Then came the warning: 'but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.' This passage describes the ethics of informed choice: God makes known what is good and what is bad, warns Adam of the consequence of bad choice, but does not force him into good choices.

The biblical narrative shows that human beings possess freedom for creativity, for active interaction with the world, for good choices within the boundaries established by God but also freedom to choose against good, which paradoxically leads to the unfreedom of sin.

6. Human Sexuality

Genesis affirms the goodness of sexuality. In the first account of creation (Genesis 1:26-28) God blesses Adam and Eve. This first blessing is one which acknowledges human sexuality in its fertility: 'be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth'. The second account (Genesis 2:15-24) explains, in the context of their origin from one body, the desire and longing man and woman feel for union 'this at last is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh'.

Genesis is one of the few 'origin' stories that views women as moral equals with men. Both men and women are made in the image of God and pronounced to be 'very good'. It is also one of the few ancient texts with a description of human sexuality preceding human brokenness. Sexuality as an integral dimension of the human person is established prior to the sin of Adam and Eve. In Genesis sexuality is not equated with sin. After the Fall (Genesis 3), humans, including their sexuality, are affected and disordered by sin but this disorder is clearly not the original intent of God.



7. The Scientific Method

Genesis, describing the order of creation, treats the sun, moon and stars as inanimate celestial objects which have definite functions. They are not deities. The universe is magnificent in its array but in the end, finite and examinable. In contrast, many other 'origin' texts describe the sun, moon and stars and other natural phenomena as gods and goddesses that control human destiny. Invested with divine significance, they do not permit investigation by human beings. Genesis, on the other hand, demythologises the physical world and provides a basis for its exploration and study. Hence the various branches of science have flourished in human societies influenced by the Genesis account of creation.

8. The Meaning Of History

The key event in the religious understanding of Israel was the deliverance of a group of descendants of Hebrew tribes people from slavery in Egypt, their reception of an exceptional moral code and their eventual settlement in Canaan. In the historical events of the Exodus, the people of Israel saw the hand of God outstretched on their behalf, choosing them, saving them, promising them a future. This experience unified them as a people and was the basis of their confession of faith. For Israel, human futures were not locked into a cyclic repetition but opened to a future premised on the promises of God.

The genius of the Yahwist writer of Genesis was to combine the religious convictions surrounding the Exodus with the primeval stories to show how YHWH was not simply a local deity that belonged to Israel alone but was the God of all history. Thus the Genesis stories do not focus solely on Hebrew origins, but reflect on the origins of human existence and the meaning of human history, tracing both of these back to the creative will and purpose of God.

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