



God, Adam, and You

Biblical Creation Defended and Applied

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EDITED BY RICHARD D. PHILLIPS

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To Dr. C. Stuart Patterson,

gracious servant of Christ and
champion of the doctrine of creation

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Editor's Preface

WHAT DIFFERENCE does Adam make? The answer to some influential Christians today is “not much.” Adam, we are told, is a disposable person from biblical lore, who can be safely abandoned to meet the demands of an unaccepting secular culture. Historic Christianity answers differently, however. Adam makes a world of difference when it comes to our understanding of God, mankind, the Bible, and, yes, the gospel. Together with Christians of prior generations, we affirm both the necessity and the importance of the historical, biblical Adam to our Christian faith and witness.

Even if we affirm a historical Adam, however, do we know what he means to the Christian faith today? What does the Bible really say about Adam, and what role does this teaching have in a Christian worldview? Why does Adam matter to our world, and what difference does he make to me? Most significantly, why is God's beginning in Adam inseparable from God's completion in Jesus Christ? These are questions that the contributors answer in *God, Adam, and You*.

Our belief in the Bible's account of the beginning—and especially its teaching on Adam—is important because this issue shapes so many topics of significance. Adam is highly relevant to the question of whether the Bible can be relied upon to tell us the truth about the world's history, even in the face of secular scorn. Adam matters greatly to the way we think about the

human race and culture. What does it mean for man to bear the image of God as a distinctive, special creation for the glory of God? What the Bible says about Adam informs us about God, Adam's maker, and the kind of relationship that God desires with us. Most significantly of all, Adam matters greatly to both the great problem of history and its solution in the person and work of Jesus Christ. If the Bible's teaching about Adam is not true, then what of its teaching about Christ? The Bible's beginning, starting with God and Adam, cannot be separated from its end, with its teaching on the believer and Jesus Christ. Given these important issues, it is vital for Christians and churches to defend the Bible's teaching on Adam. More than this, it is essential for us to understand and glory in the vital relationship between creation and salvation as they center on the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

Having the honor of editing this volume, I pray for God to bless these studies for the building up of the reader's faith in Christ and for the extension of God's glory in the world. God told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28), a task that the apostle Paul ascribes to the spreading of God's Word during this age of grace (Col. 1:10). May these humble studies spread the knowledge of the Lord on the earth and help Christians to understand their task as followers of the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The studies contained in this book arise from the 2013 Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, sponsored by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. In addition to thanking the contributors, I wish to thank Mr. Robert Brady, executive director of the Alliance, together with his outstanding staff. I further wish to thank the host churches for this conference: Byron Center First Christian Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan, and Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

I am grateful to my dear wife, Sharon, for her tireless support of my ministry and to the session and congregation of Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina, where I am privileged to serve as senior minister. This volume is dedicated to Dr. Stuart Patterson, who for more than a generation has been a stalwart defender of the doctrine of creation in the church, with praise to God and to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Richard D. Phillips
August 2014

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The Bible's First Word

DEREK W. H. THOMAS

*In the beginning, God created the
heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)*

I REMEMBER IT WELL, for I was a teenager in 1968. I remember the Christmas message that came from Apollo 8 with a glimpse of planet Earth, which has now become very familiar to us, but then was something rather new. We all felt a little smaller as we viewed the earth from an entirely different perspective. And from somewhere out in space, these words of Genesis 1 were heard: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

It is no accident, of course, that the Bible begins with God. God is what the Bible is all about. One of the first lessons that we learn when reading the Bible is the importance of asking the right questions. Today people are prone to ask, “What is this passage

saying to me?” We put ourselves in the center hermeneutically. Instead, the first question that we should always ask about any passage of the Bible is, “What is this passage teaching me about God?” For God is first, and he is the center, and he is last.

What Was in the Beginning?

One of the great philosopher-theologians—great, that is, in terms of his influence, rather than in terms of his orthodoxy—Gottfried Leibniz, began his systematic theology with one of the greatest questions that we can ever ask: “Why is there something and not nothing?” Various answers are given to explain why the universe exists. Prominent today is the Big Bang theory, which is so simple, erudite, and perfectly understandable. In the beginning, there was an explosion, and you can visualize it! You can imagine the particles moving out into space. The problem with the Big Bang, however, is that it fails to answer a fundamental question: what was there before the Big Bang? Now, scientists tell us this is an unfair question, but I want to know what is unfair about it. What caused the explosion? For an explosion to take place, there has to be something. Explosions just do not happen in a vacuum. They happen because of a chemical, electromagnetic reaction of some kind. So what was there before the Big Bang?

The Scriptures start, “In the beginning, God . . .” In the beginning was the Lord. In the beginning were the Father and the Son and the Spirit, three persons, one God. There is no express mention here that in the beginning, apart from God, there was nothing. Genesis 1:1 doesn’t actually say that God created out of nothing. But, of course, the very absence of any expression, the very absence of any reference to any material, is

in itself suggestive of what Moses wants to tell you. The cause of everything that is, he says, is the creative, powerful, and sovereign hand of almighty God.

The first creation story actually ends in verse 3 of chapter 2, where we read, “So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” In this account, there are references to God’s act of creation at both the beginning and the end. They are like two bookends of this first creation story. It is as though God is at the beginning of this story looking forward to what he is going to make, and then at the end of the story he’s looking back on what he has made. As we think about the doctrine of creation and the importance of it, I want us to see a number of truths that emerge from this opening prologue, this opening statement of Moses.

Creation Exalts God

First, we should notice a very simple thing: that the biblical doctrine of creation exalts God. We live in a culture, and even in a church culture, where God seems to be without weight. The “weightlessness of God” is what David Wells calls it.¹ One of the great words in the Old Testament for the glory of God is actually a word that is suggestive of weight, much in the sense that some people use the word *heavy* today. If something is significant, they say, “Heavy, heavy.” That is, it has weight and depth. God is weighty. God is significant. He is the almighty and sovereign Creator. He is the glorious God who is. Everything that is, the totality of existence—space and time, the vastness of the cosmos,

1. David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), chapter 5.

everything from the microcosm to the macrocosm—was made to exalt God.

You may enjoy looking at the stars in the night sky. I have an app on my iPad that, when it is tilted up to the sky, identifies the star you are looking at and provides information about it. I was looking at a star recently, as I was walking the dog, and pushed a little button, and it said that the light from this star had begun somewhere in the middle of the sixteenth century. It had taken all those years for it to get here. As a Reformed preacher, I of course mused that the light I was seeing began its journey when Calvin was preaching in Geneva. Extraordinary! The vastness of creation! That light was traveling at 186,000 miles per second from just one of the stars that we can see with the naked eye—not to mention what the Hubble Space Telescope has now given us glimpses of. And all of the universe, in all its vastness, was brought into existence by almighty God. God spoke and there it was. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

Instead of looking up at the stars, many scientists are looking down through microscopes into the microcosm of the universe. They are gazing upon the various particles that make up the universe, looking for what they refer to as “the God particle.” This is supposed to be a little particle that explains everything. Out of this little particle everything comes, they think. They think that Haydn’s *Creation*, Hubert Perry’s *I Was Glad*, and everything else comes from this little God particle. As Christians, we mock this idea for the nonsense and silliness that it is. Moses, too, is mocking the idea that something in creation can account for everything, as he begins the Bible with the creation account.

Moses was writing during the exodus to the oppressed Jews emerging from bondage and slavery in Egypt. The Egyptians worshiped the sun and moon and stars, their plethora of gods.

Against this pantheon of gods, Moses writes of Yahweh, the LORD, the sovereign God omnipotent, the only God there is. He made the sun. He made the moon that you bow down to and worship. God made it. He brought everything that is into being. Hebrews 11:3 says, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” Peter wrote, “The heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God” (2 Peter 3:5). Psalm 33:6 says, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” Matter, time, and space—everything was brought into being by this sovereign, omnipotent God.

Creation is a work of the Trinity, which is why Genesis 1:2 includes a reference to the Spirit and his role in creation. People ask, “Is the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament?” “What does the Holy Spirit do?” “Does the Holy Spirit come only at Pentecost?” An answer is found in Genesis, chapter 1: “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2). Creation is a Trinitarian act. It is an act of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The early church had a little formula for this: *opera ad extra trinitatis indivisa sunt*. This says that “the external operations of the Trinity cannot be divided.” All the external acts of God are acts of all three persons of the Trinity. Who created the universe? Who brought it into being? The Father did, and the Son did, and the Spirit did. All three persons of the one God were operative in the work of creation.

Moses' record of creation thus exalts God. One way to see this is in the verb used for *creation*. There are actually three verbs used in the Genesis accounts for *creation*, but a particular word is used in Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning, God *created*” (Hebrew, *bara*). This is a distinctive word because only God is

ever its subject in the Bible. Man is never the subject of this verb. God created because he created it out of nothing. It was an act of sovereignty. It was an act of God's particular action. And the very sparing use of this word for creation only magnifies the dignity with which God created the universe.

Genesis 1:1 is saying that matter is not eternal. The Big Bang theory suggests that the universe came into being through a singularity—not technically an explosion, to be sure, but a singularity and an expansion about 13.7 billion years ago. But the question remains, “What was there before the singularity?” If that is how the universe came into being, what was there before the singularity? What caused the singularity? That is not an unfair question, as the secular scientists object. There are a limited number of answers, so let's take them on.

One option is that there was *nothing* before the singularity. Consider this example. If you enter a church sanctuary at midnight, you might say that nothing is there. The people have gone, but in fact many things remain there. The pulpit is still going to be there, the pews are still going to be there, and the organ is still going to be up in the loft. There may be nobody in the building, but that is not nothing. You may go into an empty room, but it is not nothing. Actually there are all sorts of little bits of you floating in the air. It's called dust, and you are shedding it all the time. If a shaft of light comes into the room, you will suddenly see that what you thought was nothing is full of particles. Bearing this example in mind, one explanation of what was there before the Big Bang is that there really was nothing—absolutely nothing at all. And this theory postulates that out of nothing, everything came. And people who believe this cannot accept the resurrection! They find the story of Lazarus coming to life after being dead for three days impossible to believe. It is contrary to medical science, they say. But the whole

universe in all of its beauty and complexity supposedly came out of nothing. It makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. It is utterly and completely irrational.

So let's consider another answer. What was there before the singularity and the Big Bang? Perhaps it was ether, hydrogen, or carbon dioxide. Or perhaps there was electromagnetism, and out of it everything came into being. This is scientifically absurd. It is irrational. It is contrary to everything that we know about the universe.

Now, we all trust science to some degree. However much Christians may scoff at secular scientists, we all trust science. I would not get into an airplane as frequently as I do, knowing it will careen down the runway at about 150 miles per hour with three hundred people on board, if I did not trust science. You get into your car, switch on the engine, and it works. You trust the science. You need surgery, and so you go to the hospital. You trust the science. Science is not irrational. Yet when science meddles in theology and philosophy, it often becomes absurd. It is speaking beyond its own knowledge.

So what was there before the singularity? It was either nothing or something like hydrogen or electromagnetism. Neither view makes any sense. The Bible's answer is, "In the beginning, God" was there.

I do not mean to advocate a view of the Big Bang at all. I hold to the traditional view of six twenty-four-hour days of creation. God brought the universe into being, and he is perfectly capable of doing that and making it look very old. I have no problems with that whatever. The fact that light, coming from the furthestmost parts of the universe, would take longer to get here than the biblical age of this world would allow for, causes me no problem at all. I have no problem with thinking that God created the universe with light already halfway here. What

is the problem with that? Why is that so difficult to believe? The essential point of Genesis 1 is simply to exalt God: “In the beginning, God . . .” Why is there something and not nothing? Because God is. Because he always is. He exists eternally. He is the “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14). This opening prologue of Genesis is here to exalt the glory, transcendence, magnificence, power, and sovereignty of almighty God.

The Creator-Creature Distinction

A second thing for us to notice is that the biblical doctrine of creation emphasizes the Creator-creature distinction. The first and greatest lesson that you can learn as a human being is that there is only one God—and that you are not that God. You are not the fourth person of the Trinity! Sin, of course, works to confuse this matter. Sin exalts the self, making us into God. John Calvin thus made the famous statement in Book One of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that man’s mind is a perpetual “factory of idols.”² Man’s mind is an idol-making machine. In Genesis 1, Moses confronts this tendency in the ancient Near Eastern culture and particularly in the cosmology of Egypt. Later, he gives God’s name as Yahweh, a name that sounds in Hebrew like the verb *to be*. “I am that I am.” The problem with all the Egyptian gods, he insists, is that they do not exist. Moses says to the ancient Near East that the problem with all of their gods is that they do not exist. They do not have being. They exist only in the minds of their creators. But actually they do not exist, because there is only one God, and no human being

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960; repr. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 108.

or created thing is that God. In this way, Genesis 1 underlines the Creator-creature distinction.

Things like pantheism, materialism, dualism, and eternal matter are all ruled out by the opening sentence of Genesis. There is only one God, and we are not that God. Adam was made out of the dust of the ground. Adam was earthly. He was formed, molded, and shaped in the way that an artist shapes contours. As a musician takes notes and shapes them into various sounds and separations of beats and so on, or as a painter takes paint and paints a picture, so God created Adam out of dust. Adam did not have some kind of eternal existence. He is a creature. He is made by God, whose image he bears.

Nowadays, if you look at the label on something that you bought, it is probably going to say “Made in China.” I looked on the back of my smart phone, and in very small print that is what it declared: “Made in China.” But when you look into the human genome, what you see is a little label that says “Made by God.” Created by God. Out of dust we were made and, in the words of Cranmer’s great liturgy, “to dust we shall return.”³ This is a fundamental lesson of godliness. It is fundamental to Christianity. We must learn the distinction between the Creator and that which he has created—Creator and creation. We, along with everything that is, belong to creation, belong to something that he has made. But God always is. He always exists.

The Goodness of Creation

A third point made in the biblical doctrine of creation is the goodness of creation. Creation—that is, matter, the stuff of the

3. Thomas Cranmer, *Book of Common Prayer* (1549; repr., Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1865), 281.

universe—is essentially good. Throughout history—perhaps in Moses’ time, but certainly in the time of Jesus and the apostles—there has been the idea that the spiritual and the good are inherently nonmaterial. This idea continues to flourish today. You find it in Plato, and this is one of the ways in which Plato has influenced the Christian church. The idea is that the body is but the prison house of the soul, while salvation is exclusively for the soul. Salvation is something spiritual, involving release from the bondage and captivity of the human body and physical existence. The soul is released into the ether, to float in the universe as something nonmaterial.

Genesis 1 shows the goodness of matter, starting with God’s creation of light in verse 3: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.” Then in verse 10 he talks about the land and the seas, and they are assigned their respective spheres: “And God saw that it was good.” Then again, verse 12 talks about the vegetation and fruit: “The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.” Then the great heavenly luminaries appear in verse 18: “And God saw that it was good.” We read of the advent of animate life in verse 21 and the proliferation of animals in verse 25: “And God saw that it was good.” Finally, God created man, male and female. “And behold, it was very good” (verse 31).

Now two things come to the surface immediately. The first thing is that matter itself is not evil. I often have to address this issue in response to a question that arises from my love of my dog. The question is, “Are there dogs in heaven?” My answer is always the same: “Of course.” If you think about it, it is a rather silly question. What sort of new heavens and new earth are you actually looking for, if not a restoration of Eden? I like

to say to people, “What do you think it is going to look like?” It is going to look like this world, only without sin—as physical and tangible and malleable and structured and visual and audible as this world is, because there’s nothing sinful about the world itself. True, this issue is viewed differently by Lutherans and Calvinists. The Calvinist position is not that this world is going to be obliterated because there is something inherently evil in it, but that this world is going to be restored to its designed, stunning beauty.

I was recently in New Zealand to see my daughter and her children. While there, we went on a little tour of New Zealand. It is a staggeringly beautiful country. You drive along a lake with mountains on either side, and you turn a corner and think, “It can’t get more beautiful than this.” Then you turn another corner and it takes your breath away—the sheer, stunning beauty of it, the goodness of it.

But notice in Genesis 1 that there is good—and then there is very good. Even God says there are standards of beauty. There are layers of aesthetic beauty. Some things are more beautiful than others. There are pieces of music, and some are more beautiful than others. There are works of art. Some of them are trash, and then some of them are absolutely breathtakingly good. Who is the judge? Who is the ultimate judge of what is beautiful? God is.

The creation account in Genesis suggests that there are biblical standards of beauty and biblical standards of aesthetics. Beauty is not just in the eye of the beholder. It’s not just what works for you and what works for me. It’s not just a kind of cultural elitism that suggests that some things are more beautiful than other things. God is saying here that there are some things that are beautiful and there are some things that are absolutely breathtakingly, staggeringly beautiful. Along the way, the biblical doctrine of creation teaches the essential goodness of creation.

A true study of creation will always point to the goal of both creation and redemption. What is the goal of redemption? The goal of redemption is not contrary to creation, but rather to restore creation. Grace is always restorative, as is constantly emphasized in Calvinistic thinking.

Creation as the Basis for Ethics

A fourth point from Genesis 1 is that the biblical doctrine of creation is the basis for morality and ethics. Notice that in the original creation “the earth was without form and void” (Gen. 1:2). Then “God separated” things in verse 4 and again in verse 7. There are some things that are to be separate, and they are not to be joined together. Even though it is possible for man to join them together, God has separated them. We are on the cusp in genetic engineering of doing something, through cloning, that God has separated. Inherent in our createdness is an inward sense of “ought.” The fact that we are created produces in us an obligation. We are created in God’s image to reflect his glory back to him, to be his servants, to love him, to praise him, and to live for him according to standards that he has laid down. Inherent in creation are the concepts of God’s sovereignty and dominion, together with our dependency. The loss of the idea of creation within our modern society explains the slide into degeneracy and immorality. The two go together. When you forget that you are a creature, when you think that you are God, you can then justify doing as you like. You can make up your own laws. You can make up your own morality. You can declare that which is good to be evil and that which is evil to be good. Whatever we think about the length of days in Genesis, the doctrine of creation is fundamentally important to

maintaining the standards of ethics and morality: that which God has said is right and that which God has said is wrong.

Outside the biblical worldview of creation, there is, for instance, no argument against homosexuality. There is no basis, outside of a biblical doctrine of creation, for saying that marriage is to be between one man and one woman. This illustrates why creation is so important to ethics and morality. God created the world a certain way. He has set the pattern. He has established the format. The biblical doctrine of creation provides a sound basis for morality and ethics.

Creation as the Ground of Worship

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, the biblical doctrine of creation is essential as the basis, ground, and motivation for worship. Consider Psalm 104:

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

O LORD my God, you are very great!

You are clothed with splendor and majesty,

covering yourself with light as with a garment,

stretching out the heavens like a tent. (Ps. 104:1–2)

O LORD, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom have you made them all;

the earth is full of your creatures.

Here is the sea, great and wide,

which teems with creatures innumerable,

living things both small and great. (Ps. 104:24–25)

May the glory of the LORD endure forever;

may the LORD rejoice in his works,

who looks on the earth and it trembles,
 who touches the mountains and they smoke!
I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
 I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him,
 for I rejoice in the LORD. (Ps. 104:31–34)

The psalmist is talking about creation. God is the Creator! Knowing God as the Creator inculcates within him a desire to worship, praise, and give glory to God.

We were made for worship. We were made to worship God. Yet outside of union with Christ, we are dysfunctional. We do not know what we are here for. The angst that we find so much in society and in so many of our youth and various forms of culture is but an expression of the loss of identity that we have as God's created beings. God made us for worship. He made us to bring him glory. When we are brought back to him in the gospel, we bow down before him, acknowledging him to be the true and living God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who re-creates us in Christ and has promised us a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell. When we study creation, it is important to examine the details, as subsequent chapters will do. But it is fundamentally important that we grasp the basic truth that God is the Creator and we are his creatures, remade in Christ to worship him in all of his beauty and glory.

What difference does Adam make?

The answer, to many Christians today, is “not much.”

Adam, we are told, is a mythological figure who can safely be abandoned without compromising the authority and infallibility of Scripture. After all, is holding on to a historical Adam more important than downplaying Genesis 1–3 enough to mediate the gospel to our secular culture?

The Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology joins with historic Christianity in saying that yes, it is. Adam is not only necessary to our Christian faith and witness, but he makes a world of difference to our understanding of God, mankind, the Bible—and even the gospel itself.

The following contributors examine what the truth of Adam means about the truth of Scripture as a whole, how he shows us what it means to bear God’s image, and what an understanding of Adam teaches us about Christ.

Derek W. H. Thomas

Joel R. Beeke

Kevin DeYoung

Liam Goligher

Richard D. Phillips

Richard D. Phillips

Derek W. H. Thomas

Joel R. Beeke

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Carl R. Trueman

The Bible’s First Word

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Two Views of the Human Person

Adam, Lord of the Garden

The Bible and Evolution

God’s Design for Gender, Marriage, and Sex

Differing Views on the Days of Creation

Christ, the Second Adam

From God’s Garden to God’s City

Original Sin and Modern Theology

Learn what difference the historical Adam makes to us today, as followers of the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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