

# The Story of Origins

Genesis Chapters 1 to 3

January 3, 2012

## Readings for the day:

Genesis:

Chapter 1:1 to Ch 2:3

Chapter 2:4 to 25

Chapter 3

### It is time to count our blessings

The Bible begins imaging God as creator. God's breath hovers over the mightily moving waters, bringing order out of chaos. God sees creation as good. The word "good" appears seven times in the first story of creation. Seven, as used in the Bible, is a symbolic number meaning completeness, fullness, totality, wholeness, and even perfection. The implication is that God did a perfect job when he created.

The epitome of God's creation is humankind, men and women who are created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:27). God blesses them, and they are challenged to bring God's presence to all of creation.

This is God's original blessing. From the very beginning God bonded with all of creation. He established a relationship with humans to be co-curators and fellow tenders of his garden of creation (Gen 2:15). This was the original covenant that God established and viewed as very good (Gen 1:31).

God blesses the animal kingdom, humans (Gen 1:22, 28), and the Sabbath rest (Gen 2:3). To bless means to set something or someone aside for a specific purpose. Sabbath rest is God's way of challenging us not to make our work our god. God blessed the need for rest, a time out from the hustle and bustle of life, a time to set work and busyness aside so as to be wonder-filled by the myriad of God's blessings throughout creation. In Genesis 1, humans are made to God's image and likeness. Thus, the only permitted icon of God is the human person male and female..

## This Week at Home:

We will be doing these three readings at our Wednesday sessions but to really get to understand Genesis I suggest you reflect on each of these readings on a separate day at home.

**Day 1 "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." GENESIS 1:31**

**Read Genesis Chapter 1:1 to 2:3**

**Reflection** How have I helped God tend the garden of creation?

**Prayer Starter:** God the creator, bless me and help me to appreciate and care for your creation. May I always remember that I am made in your image and likeness..

**Day 2**

**"And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden." GENESIS 2:8**

**Read Genesis 2:4 to 25**

**Reflection:** How do I bring the living breath of God to everyone I encounter?

**Prayer Starter:** God, you who formed me with your breath, help me to remember that every breath I take comes from you. Help me never to choose to be cut off from your living breath.

**Day 3**

**"You will be like God, knowing good and evil" GENESIS 3:5**

**Read Genesis, chapter 3**

**Reflection** How has God protected me from embarrassment?

**Prayer Starter:** Forgiving God, please continue to forgive me for the sins I commit. Help me to remember that you always look for me in this garden called earth.

## Are we going to till the garden in harmony with God? (Chapter 2)

The attentive reader will notice some discrepancies between Genesis 1 and 2. Chapter 2 belongs to a different author (the Yahwist, see table "Sources in Genesis" below). Now human beings are created before the animals and God is imaged as both a gardener and a potter. One of the marvelous characteristics of Sacred Scripture is that the believing community preserved all these stories without worrying about contradictions.

God does not plant the earthly garden before there is a person to take care of it (v. 4-5, 15). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word for "garden" is *paradeisos*, from which we get the English word "paradise." The "garden" should be understood not so much as a geographical place but as an ideal situation in which God and all creation are in harmony with one another.

The heart of the chapter is God's creation of human beings. God imaged as a potter forms human beings from the clay of the earth and breathes into them the breath of life. Since God breathed his breath into us, we have become the lungs of the whole earth. If we cut ourselves off from God, the whole earth suffocates. But human beings also need each other. So God creates from one flesh (adam) two persons male and female (v. 21-23).

These two are to be co-curators with God of this fragile garden, earth. The terms "to till it" (the garden) means proper care of the environment so that it will continue to reflect the God who created it.

## Learning from our mistakes (Chapter 3)

If we were to stop reading the book of Genesis with chapter 2 we would wonder why the world in which we live is so markedly different from what is described in the Garden of Eden. The world in which we live is laden with starvation, wars, suffering, violence, and bloodshed. The world that God created to be very good seems not to exist. The central message of Genesis 3 is that the evil that exists in the world is caused by humans and not divinely willed. Humans have corrupted God's creation and thwarted his plans. Genesis conveys this with the story of the fall in the sense that humans fell away from imaging God.

What was the sin that the man and woman committed? Contrary to popular belief no mention is made of an apple. The "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:17) is a symbol for God's knowledge; the prohibition to eating from it meant that the humans are content to be humans, and are not to try to usurp the place of God (v. 5). But we naturally resist any limits being placed on us; acting as if we and not God had the last word on everything we may do.

Even after the humans broke away from God, God walked in the garden looking for them (w. 8-9). God even provided clothes for them to hide their embarrassment (v. 7, 10, 21). God still cares for those he has created, even though sin inevitably has dire consequences. Being cast out of the garden is a metaphor for humans being alienated from their previous relationship with God. Humans have to leave the garden and learn wisdom through experience (v. 22-24).

<b>How to recognize sources in Genesis</b>			
<b>MAIN FEATURES</b>			
	<b>Yahwist</b>	<b>Elohism</b>	<b>Priestly</b>
<b>Favorite term for God</b>	<i>Sacred name YHWH</i>	<i>Elohim</i>	—
<b>God envisioned as</b>	<i>Close at hand; immanent (Described with human features and emotions)</i>	<i>Transcendent</i>	<i>Holy</i>
<b>Style</b>	<i>Vivid and colorful. Makes use of storytelling and anecdotes</i>	<i>Tends to be abstract</i>	<i>Makes extensive use of genealogies and symbolic use of numbers</i>
<b>Covenant</b>	<i>Emphasis on God's promise of a land and on human response in faith</i>	<i>Stipulations are seen as the logical follow up of God's saving acts in Exodus</i>	<i>Worship is seen as the means of response to the covenant</i>