

CREATION, SIN, REBIRTH, AND PERFECTION

A Reinterpretation of the Bible Account

I. Introduction

Historically, one of the primary proofs for God's existence has been our existence: creation itself was proof there was a Creator. Today, scientific theories contravene that intuitive proof for God's existence for many, and geological evidence seems to contradict the Bible creation story. Both have had corrosive affects on confidence in the Bible and the God it purports.

The problem, contrary to the assumption of many, is not the modern science theory of evolution per se, nor is it the geological evidence for the earth's age. The problem identified herein is a flawed understanding of the Bible creation narrative.¹

The interpretation presented in this paper shows the creation narrative reflecting a dual creation, rather than two accounts of a single creation. The validity of this view rests primarily on corroboration with other Bible passages and secondarily on the efficacy the view affords in interpreting other Bible passages and concepts, including here "sin," "rebirth," and "perfection."

The objective of the reinterpretation is to better understand the Bible's account of human creation and to identify in the revised understanding possible "keys" for interpreting the Bible more broadly. Collateral reconciliation with long cherished Church doctrine and dogma, as well as personal beliefs and faith, while daunting, remains outstanding should the reinterpretation stand.

At a minimum, reconsidering our interpretation of the Bible creation account should put our "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" questions and answers back in the forefront of our beliefs and faith.

II. The Two Creation Accounts

¹ Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the KJV.

From the beginning the opening creation narrative in the first chapter of Genesis (Genesis 1:1—2:3) has stood in contrast to the creation narrative presented in the second chapter of Genesis (Genesis 2:4—25). Reconciling the accounts has been a stumbling block for ancient and modern readers alike.² The apparent confusion in the Bible accounts and lack of consensus in their reconciliation puts every reader on notice that the text of the Bible is multivalent. Ironically, the apparent irreconcilable parallels in the two accounts are our key for their understanding.

For some this discrepancy is off-putting and a sign of weakness, casting a shadow of doubt on the authority of the Bible. And even when its authority is recognized, who can interpret it? The interpretations of our forefathers, prophets, churches and personal conclusions have sufficed for many, but evolution science and geological evidence have broadened and enriched their appeal. Today, tradition and authority are being cast off for firmer foundations in logic and reason.

Nevertheless, evolution science and geological research are not the problem—we are. Our encrusted diatribes citing the Bible's creation narrative for our beliefs in a divine creation, a narrative we evidentially fall short of understanding ourselves, are our problem. Compounding the misbegotten interpretations is citing incredulity for the linchpin to faith. We are as it were our own worst enemies. We need to reconsider our blind faith to mortal interpretations of the Bible creation story. Moreover, we need to review all mortal interpretations with their self-serving nexus for having distorting effects on our understanding of the Bible.

In the two opening chapters of Genesis we are confronted with two divergent creation accounts wherein God creates humanity.³ Modern

² Wegner, Walter, *Creation and Salvation, a Study of Genesis 1 and 2*, Concordia Theological Monthly, 37 no 8 Sep 1966, p 520-542.

³ De Beer, Wynand, *The Patristic Understanding of the Six Days*, Journal of Early Christian History, 5 no 2 2015 p 4. There is a consensus among biblical scholars that Genesis has two accounts of creation: the *HEXAEMERON*, Gen 1:1—2:3, a cosmocentric creation of the world; and the Generations creation, Gen 2:4—3:24, an anthropocentric creation of humankind.

reconciliation of the accounts has tended to explain the divergence using historical-critical exegetical methods whereby the two accounts are the result of being written at different times by different authors with different intentions and redacted later into the text we have.⁴ While these explanations may help us to understand how the conflicts and disparities arose in the creation accounts, the explanations fall short of helping provide the reader with a “cornerstone” or “key” for interpreting and understanding what the creation accounts have to say to us.

The evident disparities in the two accounts themselves are compounded by the multitudinous interpretations of the accounts, leaving many believers to acquiesce to doctrinal or denominational positions taken by churches or theologians, or to hold in abeyance the meaning of what is written until Understanding presents herself. This leaves the cornerstone of our Bible understanding on tenuous footing, even on more personal or ecclesial footing than usual, where meaning is flowing less from the text and more from the reader or extrinsic authority. As such, we need to be particularly vigilant and seek where possible Scripture corroboration from other passages and concepts in the Bible for our understanding.

Our assurance minimally is we are part of a divine creation by God, which in itself establishes the authority, if not the details, for our existence, and the rule-maker/evaluator for our lives.

III. The First Creation: Our Creation In the Image of God

The creation finale in the first creation account is our creation “in the image of God” (Gen 1:26-27) on “the sixth day.” Neither the light that is created on the first day, nor the “day” in which humanity is created is defined. Likewise, neither is “the image of God.”

Humanity’s creation “in God’s image,” *imago Dei*, has remained variously understood, yet the attribute is considered the hallmark of our

⁴ Wegner, op. cit., *Creation and Salvation*, p 520-21.

creation.⁵ In its plain sense, humanity could be a physical reflection of God's divine nature/Spirit in the world, similar to creation itself being evidence of a creator, but unlikely, given Adam and Eve's Fall in Eden. (Gen 3) Contrariwise, our redemption could restore the possibility by preparing us for glorifying God, if not in this realm, in the realm above Heaven.⁶

The evidential understanding of our *imago Dei* creation is God's foreknowledge of us, God choosing to create us, and our being not only the recipients of God's divine design, but also a divine plan, should we return to the kingdom of heaven. (Mat 3:2).

Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name; for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him." (Is 43:5-7)

IV. The Second Creation: Our Creation From the Earth

The second account tells us of our embodiment in "flesh," or corporeality, similar to Jeremiah 1:4-5:

Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

The account follows directly after the first creation account. It tells us of Adam's creation from the dust of the ground and Eve's creation from Adam's rib by God (Gen 2:7; 2:10, 21—25).

⁵ Ortlund, Gavin, *Image of Adam, son of God: Genesis 5:3* JETS 57 no 4 Dec 2014, p 673-688, p 678. "The image is notorious for both its theological significance and its ambiguity in meaning."

⁶ See Gen 1:6—8a for the creation of realms below and above Heaven; presumably Genesis 1 deals primarily with the realm above Heaven, and Genesis 2 deals primarily with the realm below Heaven.

Early on the patriarchs recognized the two accounts as two aspects, or stages, of one creation, rather than two divergent accounts of one creation, or even two separate creations.⁷ Modern exegesis has tended to diminish these distinctions with historical-critical analysis whereby the two accounts are treated as one event with separate authorship—“poetic” and “pragmatic” accounts, or “Priestly” and “Yahwistic” accounts—the details of which may be true, but with spurious results.⁸

The second creation account is a “generations” narrative (Gen 2f) that could be construed as “evolutionary,” there is temporality, but no time frame except “in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,” (Gen 2:4b). There is corporeal existence and the start of an ancient genealogy in what appears to be the realm below Heaven cited in Genesis 1:6—8a:

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven.

It is here, below the firmament of Heaven that Adam and Eve are “formed” (rather than “created” as in the first account when humanity is created in the image of God) and it is here where they have their paradigmatic “fall” in the Garden of Eden by rejecting God’s guidance, and, by extension, God’s plan/image for them/us. Consequentially, they lose their compass—their relationship with God where they have ongoing conscious guidance to God’s desire for them—even the life God has prepared for them.

But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for **in the day that thou eatest thereof** thou shalt surely die. (Gen 2:17, emphasis mine.)

⁷ Wegner, op. cit., *Creation and Salvation*, citing Martin Luther, p 524.

⁸ Wegner, op. cit., *Creation and Salvation*, p 529. “Our comparison of the two creation chapters of Genesis has shown us that the two accounts outline different sequences of creative acts, describe a different methodology of divine creation and employ a different chronology.”

Much has been made of this paradigmatic transgression, and rightfully so, it is the dramatic crux of the story, but many of the interpretations have gone awry as well. “The Fall” of Adam and Eve from perfection in the Garden is considered by many “original sin,” a stain dooming humanity to death unless redemption is found. The problem with this interpretation is our presumption that we know what “sin” is, or more precisely, what sin is for Adam and Eve.

“Disobedience” is the efficient cause for the Fall, but as has been made plain from the beginning of the creation account, we are created in God’s image, meaning God has a plan for our lives. Have Adam and Eve transgressed God’s plan for their lives? It would appear so. However, God has a greater plan, a plan to fulfill the purpose of their creation, to enable them and us to become sons and daughters of God. Consequently, sin is not at the root of their Fall, God is.

In the Generations creation in which we find ourselves, humanity is formed by God from the earth and we have corporeal existence, and we follow our will, rather than God’s will, as portrayed in “The Fall.” (Gen. 2:7f) Our individual/paradigmatic fall evidences both our dramatic falling away from relationship with God and our exile from eternal life. (Gen. 3:22-24)

The choice to do as we think best is both the dignity of our creation on earth and the formal cause of our estrangement from God and the loss of God’s image for us in our consciousness. Our focus is on ourselves (Gen. 3:7) and our free will has yet to embrace fully God’s will for us. Consequently, as foretold, we die to who God created us to be (Gen. 2:17), and we are cut off from the tree of life. (Gen. 3:24)

But God has given us robes to remember:

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make
coats of skins, and clothed them.

(Gen. 3:21)

Sustaining us, we are enabled to develop love, faith and trust in God's purpose that we may freely choose God's guidance and be resurrected (reconciled).

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

(John 11:25)

Consequently, the Fall is crucial to help bring us to our knees and eventually to repentance.

I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

(Luke 13:5)

The stage is now set: like prodigal sons, we must repent, even return all the way back to the kingdom of Heaven where we were first conceived, that we may be born again to God's image for us—to lift up in us the image of God—even the Son of man.⁹

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...Except a man be born of water [amniotic fluid, i.e., natural childbirth] and of the Spirit [the Son of man], he cannot enter into the kingdom of God...And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, [ruling over the serpent's dominion of us in the world¹⁰] even so must the Son of man be lifted up [having dominion over us in the world]: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3, 5, 13—15)

Like the Apostle Paul, we must be struck down by the grace of God that we may acknowledge and repent our hubris and become transformed.

⁹ "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 4:17

¹⁰ "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sinneth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire [our self-serving nature] and thou shalt rule over him." Genesis 4:7

That through consciousness of Christ in us, we may become the image-of-God we are created to be.¹¹

V. Being a Sinner

Contrary to common sense, being a sinner is not our problem. Lacking awareness of being a sinner is.¹² The proverbial perfect prison is the prison of which we are unaware, and therefore do not seek to escape. Likewise, in conflating “being a sinner” with “sinning” we think if we stop sinning we may avoid being a sinner. But that merely enables us to delude ourselves. Being a sinner is “who we are,” not “what we are.”

As Christians we know everyone who is not Jesus Christ is a sinner, not just because everyone else has sinned, as Paul points out, but because we all fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Being the immaculately conceived image of God we are created to be in the first creation is yet to be in our second creation on earth. Not because we have “fallen,” but because we are sinners—having self-serving eyes, hearts and minds—and lacking the divine attributes necessary to faithfully serve God. As such, we fall short of the glory of God.

Knowledge of ourselves as sinners is of paramount importance to lead us to repentance and to seek the kingdom of heaven. Repentance, rightly understood, calls us to “go back,”¹³ to go back to the beginning, where the *imago Dei* is at hand, even to the primordial time when we are nothing but the image of God. “Sin” follows from lacking the *imago Dei* with which we are stamped at our first creation.¹⁴

¹¹ “But when it pleased God... To reveal his Son in me... that I might preach him...” Galatians 1:15-16

¹² “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...”
Romans 3:23

¹³ Strong, John T, *Interpretation*, 50 no 1 Jan 1996, p 51. To repent literally means, “to turn around.”

¹⁴ Ortlund, Dane, *What Does It Mean to Fall Short of the Glory of God?*
Westminster Theological J, 80 no 1 Spr 2018, p121-140, p 124.

Our “fallen” status is no mistake. Our “fallen” status is central to the thematic unity of the Bible: the Hebrew word for “repent” appears 83 times in the books of the twelve Minor Prophets.¹⁵ It is the process by which God redeems the first creation of us. Through repentance we are enabled to return to being sons and daughters of God, and obtain the key to eternal life—Jesus Christ. However, as sinners, we fall short.

The cycle of repentance and relapse is a familiar one to Judaism and Christianity.¹⁶ The call to repentance is both a call to “return from exile” and an acknowledgement that “one is accountable to God.”¹⁷ However, the promise, “Return to me and I will return to you” proves short-lived.¹⁸ The short cycling of our repentance and redemption is caused by stopping at forgiveness, and never fully returning to Yahweh¹⁹ or fully embodying Christ in us.²⁰ We fall short of going all the way back, back to being nothing but the image of God.

We need to become what the apostle Paul called “a new man,” “a new creature in Christ.” (2 Cor 5:17)

“Doesn’t the gospel, in a very real sense, obliterate our preoccupation with ourselves... ‘Why am I so interested in me?’”²¹

Repentance (Matthew 4:17), rebirth (John 3:3-8) and “dying to the old man” (Romans 6:6) are gospel injunctions to lead us to the redemption of our

¹⁵ Chatraw, Joshua D, *Jesus’ view of repentance and forgiveness: a hermeneutical test case*, Southeastern Theological Review, 5 no 2 Wint 2014, p 185-202, p 188.

¹⁶ Chatraw, op. cit., p 199, citing Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, p 709, “Repentance is explained in the context of individual conversion: The word *conversion* itself means ‘turning’—here it represents a spiritual turn, a turning from sin to Christ.”

¹⁷ Chatraw, op. cit., p.193

¹⁸ Chatraw, op. cit., p.249, the theme of “failed repentance.”

¹⁹ Chatraw, op. cit., p.260

²⁰ “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:” 2 Cor 5:17

²¹ Welch, Edward T, *Who Are We? Needs, Longings and the Image of God in Man*, Journal of Biblical Counseling, 13 no 1 Fall 1994, p 25-38, p 28.

image-of-God self. Our death in Eden, contrary to all appearances, is the beginning of our journey to our birthright.

VI. Rebirth: Lifting Up the Son of Man

The perfection we seek, more than human perfection, is the spiritual perfection of the Son of man, our image-of-God self, whereby we might reflect divinity raised in us. And we may find, as Paul did, that others are able to glorify God by us.

And they glorified God in me. (Galatians 1:24)

To have sound beliefs and faith, the Apostle Paul stresses our need to die to the “old man” (our Generations creation) and birth the new man (the Son of man from heaven). In birthing the new man—in lifting up the Son of man in us—we are born of both water and spirit²² whereby “we come in unity of faith, and knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13)

In Eden we are incomplete. Our completion requires repentance, and being born anew²³ on earth to our image-of-God creation in heaven,²⁴ but we have not yet fully repented, nor do we fully value the *imago Dei*, even the “Pearl of Great Price,” to fully seek the kingdom of Heaven (Mat 13:45-46). Without the grace of God, the subsuming of our mortal self and lifting up consciousness of Christ through the Son of man in us, there is no perfection, no divinity and no eternal life.²⁵ In Colossians Paul writes of our creation as a dual creation: “To whom God would

²² “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” John 3:5

²³ Schneiders, Sandra Marie, *Born anew*, Theology Today, 44 no 2 Jul 1987, p 189-196, p 192. “Born anew” is the suggested translation by Schneiders, and works best with the retranslation proposed here, but “born from above,” or “reborn” are alternates.

²⁴ “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven...” John 3:13

²⁵ “This is the record: that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” 1st John 5:11

make known...this mystery which is Christ in you...that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” (Col. 1:26-28)

VII. Perfection: Our Religious Mandate

To establish God’s image for us on earth in flesh requires divine help, which begins with repentance and the grace to know we need divine help. The Bible acknowledges and most of us are aware that all human efforts to be perfect fall short of the perfection required of us. However, the perfection to which we are called is not human, but divine.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:48

Many Church doctrines suggest a **legal**, juridical payment role for Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, (to reconcile our transgressions with God), not recognizing it is God’s will that Jesus Christ is fulfilling, not his personal will: “Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:42)

Consequently, contrary to many doctrines and preachers in the pulpits, Christ’s crucifixion is Christ’s sacrifice for God, and God’s sacrifice for us, in order to show us the way.

I am the door: by me if any man enter in he shall be saved...
The thief cometh not, but to steal...

John 10:9-10

Jesus Christ, in showing us the way, calls for our reconciliation to be our **personal** sacrifice: love of God where we lay down our self-centered lives to be born again to our first creation—to raise up the Son of man—that we may trust in God through Jesus Christ’s indwelling guidance.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me...

Galatians 2:20

Perfection then is through repentance, rebirth, and being in Christ for obedience to God, rather than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And even then, we will need angels.²⁶

And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

Luke 22:43

In heaven we are created according to God's will for us:

Which were born, not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God.

John 1:13

Under heaven, on earth, we are incarnated, but incomplete. We need to rule over the serpent [our self-serving mind],²⁷ and lift up the Son of man from heaven to be in us for ears to hear Christ, and the mind that is in Christ for obedience unto death on the cross, that we may be reunited with our *imago Dei*.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

VIII. Conclusions About Our Life on Earth

Our focus should no longer be about “our life,” but about making present the life God has given us—the lives of sons and daughters of God—the life of Paul, rather than Saul, the attentive life, rather than the indulgent life. Unlike Adam and Eve, whose focus was on their life, we need to see God in our lives and hear what God has created us to do and to be.

²⁷ “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.” Gen 4:7

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Matthew 10:38-39

Like Joseph in Egypt, we have to remember our origin, and like Moses, we have to claim our birthright and address the duties thereof when God enables us.

Do not imitate the pagans who live an aimless kind of life...Renew yourselves spiritually from inside, put on the new self, the self according to God, which is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Ephesians 4:17, 22-2

We cannot psychologically follow mortal minds to immortal results, and we cannot be in the old man and be in Christ. To reflect the risen Christ in us, the flesh self must step aside that the Son of man, our image-of-God self, might be lifted up into our consciousness.

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God...For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For...they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:8-14