

A lush, sunlit garden scene with a large tree and a couple walking. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled branches and dense green foliage with small red flowers stands prominently in the center. Two silhouetted figures, a man and a woman, are walking away from the viewer along a path that leads into the distance. The path is reflected in a body of water in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

# In the Beginning: The Garden & The Choice



<https://atbethel.church/sunday-adult-bible-study>

Sunday Morning Bible Study  
18 January 2026  
Presented by: Dr. David Utzke

## **Overview**

Genesis is the foundational narrative of the Bible, detailing the origins of the cosmos, humanity, and the introduction of sin and suffering into the world. It presents a theological framework for understanding God as the sovereign Creator, humanity as uniquely made in His image, and the consequences of disobedience. Chapters 1-3 explores the creation of a perfect world by a sovereign God, humanity's special role as His image-bearers with free will, the catastrophic entry of sin through disobedience (the Fall), and God's initial acts of judgment and mercy, revealing themes of divine order, relationship, rebellion, consequence, redemption, and rest.

## **Theme**

The overarching theme of Genesis chapters 1–3 is the transition from God's perfect creation to humanity's brokenness due to sin – “In the Beginning: The garden & The Choice.” Key ideas include God's powerful word creating order, humans' purpose to rule the earth, the choice between obeying God or defining good/evil, and the first foreshadowing of redemption even amidst punishment, setting the stage for humanity's journey.

## **Narrative Arc**

- **Creation (Ch 1-2):** God establishes everything, forms humans, places them in Eden with clear directives.
- **The Temptation & Fall (Ch 3):** The serpent tempts Eve; both Adam and Eve disobey, leading to their expulsion from Eden.
- **Consequences & Hope (Ch 3):** Curses are pronounced, but God initiates the story of redemption by clothing them and promising a future deliverer.

## **Study Points**

- **Creation & Order:** God brings order from chaos, creating a "very good" world and establishing divine patterns (light/dark, days/rest).
- **God's Image & Purpose:** Humanity (male and female) is made in God's image, given dignity, and appointed as caretakers (stewards) of creation, reflecting God's character.
- **Relationship & Free Will:** God desires a genuine relationship with humanity, granting them freedom to choose obedience (represented by the Tree of Life) or disobedience (Tree of Knowledge).
- **The Fall & Sin:** Disobedience leads to a break in relationship, introducing sin, shame, fear, and death, as humanity tries to seize autonomy.
- **Justice & Mercy:** God judges sin but also shows initial mercy (clothing them) and promises future redemption, preventing complete ruin.
- **Sabbath:** God models Shabbat as a time to abide, which He sanctified as holy time.

# Point 1 - Genesis 1: The Creation of the World

Genesis 1 presents a profound theological and structural narrative that lays the groundwork for the entire Bible. The provided outline accurately captures the main themes and structure

- **God as Creator (vv. 1-2):** Introduction of God as the primary agent, creating *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), bringing order from chaos.
- **The Six Days of Creation (vv. 3-31):** The highly structured, repetitive format (e.g., "And God said...", "And it was so...", "And there was evening and there was morning, the *n<sup>th</sup>* day") is not merely a scientific chronology, but a literary and theological device designed to convey order, purpose, and the divine endorsement of creation as "good."

The repeated refrain "it was good" affirms the intrinsic value of the material world, countering later gnostic views that the physical realm is evil. Gnosticism began as a diverse philosophical and religious movement with roots potentially in the 2nd-1st centuries BC.

# Point 1 - Genesis 1: The Creation of the World

- **Forming (Days 1-3)** - God creates the realms
  - **Day 1:** Light and darkness (vv. 3-5)
  - **Day 2:** The expanse/sky (vv. 6-8)
  - **Day 3:** Land, seas, and vegetation (vv. 9-13)
- **Filling (Days 4-6)** - God creates the inhabitants or objects that fill those realms. This correspondence highlights a meticulous and deliberate act of creation, where every element has a designated place and purpose.
  - **Day 4:** Sun, moon, and stars (vv. 14-19)
  - **Day 5:** Sea creatures and birds (vv. 20-23)
  - **Day 6:** Land animals and humanity (v. 24-31). The creation of human beings (vv. 26-31) is the pinnacle of the account.

# Point 1 - Genesis 1: The Creation of the World

- **Theological Themes**

- **The Nature of God:** The text presents an omnipotent, transcendent God who speaks reality into existence (Fiat Lux). Unlike contemporary Near Eastern creation myths involving divine warfare, Genesis 1 depicts a calm, effortless, and purposeful process.
- **Creatio Ex Nihilo** (“creation from nothing”) vs. **Ex Materia** (“order from chaos”): Ex nihilo means absolute nothingness; Ex materia refers to a primordial, watery state. While verse 1 implies creation "out of nothing," verse 2 describes a "formless and empty" (tohu wa-bohu – Gen 1:2) state. Theological commentary highlights God as the Great Architect who imposes boundaries (light/dark, land/sea) to make life possible.
- **The Imago Dei:** The climax occurs on Day 6. Humanity is the only creation made in the "image of God," granting humans a unique status and the mandate to act as stewards over the earth.

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

Chapter 2 opens by concluding the initial creation narrative, establishing the seventh day as a day of divine rest (shabbat), which God blessed and made holy. This act is not described as a necessity due to exhaustion, but rather as an intentional act of completion and a pattern for humanity. It is a sign pointing to a life in balance, where work is followed by cessation and communion with the creator.

- **The Seventh Day:** The Sabbath Pattern (vv. 1-3): God rested (shabbat), establishing a pattern for the Sabbath, as God's cessation from creation work. God blessed and sanctified the seventh day as a model for humanity's weekly worship and delight in His completed, good creation, establishing the Sabbath pattern for divine-human communion, a foreshadowing of Christ's ultimate rest, moving from "doing" to "being" in His presence.

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

### ○ Genesis and the Sabbath

#### ▪ Completion of Creation (v. 1):

- **Finality:** The heavens, the earth, and "all their host" (the vast array of life and celestial bodies) are declared "finished".
- **Order and Perfection:** God reviews His work and finds nothing bad or out of sync with His plan; the world is exactly as He intended.

#### ▪ God's Cessation (v. 2):

- On the seventh day, God "rested -sabbat- from all His work" (not from fatigue).
- This signifies a pause to behold and enjoy the finished, good work.
- While God ceased His creative work, He continues His work of upholding the universe, and later, His work of redemption.

#### ▪ Blessing & Sanctification (v. 3):

- God blessed the seventh day.
- He sanctified (set apart as holy) the seventh day because He rested.

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

- **Genesis and the Sabbath (cont'd)**
  - **A Model for Humanity:** God established a pattern for man to cease labor and enter into His presence:
    - To Stop Striving & Start Savoring: A time to pause from our own pursuits and enjoy God's goodness.
    - To Contemplate & Worship: To meditate on God's power, goodness, and majesty.
    - To Receive Refreshment: A divine gift for spiritual, mental, and physical renewal, fostering true holiness.
  - **Not Idleness, but Presence:** God's rest involved no longer creating, but sustaining and enjoying His creation.
  - **A Holy Day:** The seventh day became intrinsically linked with God's presence and delight in His world but later codified in the Ten Commandment to the Jews.

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

### ○ Jesus and the Sabbath

- **Customary Practice:** Jesus regularly attended and taught in synagogues on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16).
- **Lord of the Sabbath:** He declared Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8), asserting authority over how the day should be observed.
- **Purpose of Sabbath:** He taught that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27), emphasizing that the day was intended as a gift of rest and mercy rather than a burden of rigid rules.
- **The Ultimate Abiding:** Jesus offers true soul cessation from labor and sin (Matthew 11:28-30).

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

### ○ The Early Church and the Sabbath

- The New Testament shows early Christians gathering on Sunday (the first day of the week) to break bread (Acts 20:7) to commemorating Jesus' resurrection and collecting offerings (1 Cor. 16:2), but it doesn't present this as a strict command replacing the Saturday Sabbath.
- The New Testament also shows those continuing to observe some Jewish festivals like Pentecost and Unleavened Bread (Acts 2, 8, 20). Key passages highlight worship in homes, gathering for fellowship, and Paul's guidance on not letting others judge observance of specific holy days (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor 5:6-8, Col 2:16-17).
- Continual worship in the New Testament shifts from location-based rituals to a holistic, heart-centered life of devotion, expressed through living as a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1), worshipping "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24), and integrating praise, prayer, and gratitude into every moment (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). It's a 24/7 response to God's reality, encompassing daily actions, service, integrity, and seeking justice, rather than being confined to specific times or places, though communal gatherings remain vital (Heb. 10:25).

# Influence of Roman Rule on early church Sunday worship

- Constantine was the first so-called “Christian” Roman emperor. Though he did stop much of the persecution of Christians as a whole, it seems he did more to introduce sun worship into Christianity than any before him.
- Historian Paul Johnson details some of this influence: “Constantine was almost certainly a Mithraic, and his triumphal arch, built after his ‘conversion’, testifies to the Sun-god, or ‘unconquered sun’... . Constantine never abandoned sun-worship and kept the sun on his coins. He made Sunday into a day of rest, closing the lawcourts and forbidding all work except agricultural labour.”
- So, a royal decree to rest and worship on Sunday instead of Saturday was made by the Roman emperor, a sun worshipper. Now, thanks to Constantine, Christians were celebrating on the same day the Mithraics worshipped the sun. This is a blatant example of pagan influence in Christian practices. Christians, now holding services on the venerable day of the sun.
- Surging anti-Semitism in post-apostolic times also played a major role in the change to Sunday. The Council of Laodicea in A.D. 365 decided: “Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord’s Day, and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ” (Canon XXIX).
- So, keeping the Sabbath on Saturday was considered “judaizing,” which was considered a great evil. Constantine, at the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, was reported by the historian Eusebius as saying, “It appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast [Passover] we should follow the practice of the Jews ... . Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd.”
- Thus, since Christians wanted nothing to do with Jews, they wanted to have a different day for rest and worship: Sunday. The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) was the first ecumenical council of Christian bishops, convened by Emperor Constantine to unify church doctrine, primarily to resolve the Arian controversy over Jesus's divine nature, resulting in the Nicene Creed that affirmed Christ as "of one substance" (homoousios) with God the Father, and also established rules (canons) for church practice, like the date of Easter.

## Key Council Decisions:

- **Formulated the Nicene Creed:** They created a definitive statement of Christian belief, affirming the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and stating Jesus is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father".
- **Defined when Easter is celebrated:** Established a standardized date for Easter, celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox.
- **Established Canons:** Passed rules governing clergy conduct, bishop appointments, and excommunication, shaping church structure.

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

- **Theological Significance:**

- God's Presence (Immanuel): The Sabbath is the time when God makes Himself available to humans, a manifestation of "God with us".
- Righteousness by Faith: Resting from work on the Sabbath affirms that salvation comes through faith in God's completed work, not our own efforts.
- Eschatology (End Times): The Sabbath points forward to the future, eternal rest and the re-creation of the new heavens and new earth. The "last things will be like the first things".
- A Shift in Perspective: Viewing cessation as sacred, not wasted time.
- Practical Step: Intentional disconnection from the world.
- Experiencing God's Presence: Moving from "doing" to "being," allowing God to refresh and restore.

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

- **A Closer Look at Humanity's Creation: The Dust and the Breath (vv. 4-7):** Verses 4-7 shift the focus to a more intimate, immediate account of human creation, providing theological depth to the general account in chapter 1. Here, God is portrayed using the personal name Yahweh (LORD), highlighting a close, relational aspect of the deity.
  - **Introduction to the Narrative Context (Genesis 2:4-6)**
    - **The Toledoth Formula (v. 4):** The phrase, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth," marks a structural break, shifting the focus to a detailed account of what the heavens and earth produced, specifically mankind. It serves as a "behind-the-scenes" or supplementary view to the broader creation account of Genesis 1.
    - **The Pre-existence of Environmental Conditions (v. 5-6):** The text describes an earth waiting for human cultivation, noting the absence of shrubs or plants of the field because the Lord God had not sent rain and "there was no man to cultivate the ground". A mist watered the ground, setting the stage for creation in a specific environment. This emphasizes that the planet was made for human habitation and stewardship.

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

- **The Intimate Act of Humanity's Creation (Genesis 2:7)**
  - **The Divine Action: Forming (v. 7a):** "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground...."
    - The use of "formed" (Hebrew: yatsar, like a potter shaping clay) denotes a deliberate, personal, and careful process, contrasting with the spoken word used for much of the rest of creation.
    - The divine name "LORD God" (Yahweh Elohim) emphasizes both God's covenant relationship and supreme power.
  - **The Material Composition: The Dust of the Ground (v. 7a):**
    - Humanity's origin from dust ("Adam" relates to the Hebrew adamah for ground/earth) signifies humility, frailty, and a deep connection to the material world.
    - This serves as a reminder of mortality: "for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19).

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

- **The Intimate Act of Humanity's Creation (Genesis 2:7) (cont'd)**
  - The Breath of Life (v. 7b): "...and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life..."
    - This action signifies an intimate, life-giving act directly from God, setting humans apart from other creatures.
    - The "breath" (neshamah in Hebrew, often linked to ruach or spirit) is a unique divine gift, representing God's own life and power imparted to man.
  - The Result-Humanity as a Living Being (v. 7c): "...and man became a living being" (nephesh chayah).
    - The union of the physical form (dust) and the divine breath (spirit) results in a complete, living person with physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions.
    - Humans are a unique composition of material and spiritual elements.j
- **Theological Implications:**
  - Human life is a direct creation of God, instilling inherent value and purpose.
  - Humanity is uniquely capable of a relationship with God, moral decision-making, and stewardship of the earth.
  - The passage highlights human dependence on God for life and sustenance.

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

- **The Creation of Woman and Institution of Marriage (vv. 18-25):** A central theme emerges - "It is not good for the man to be alone" (v. 18), indicating that solitude contradicts God's design for human flourishing. After naming the animals highlights man's distinct nature, woman (*ishshah*) is created from man's (*ish*) side (*rib*).
  - **The Problem: Man's Loneliness (v. 18a)**
    - **God's Assessment:** "It is not good for the man (*ish*) to be alone" (v. 18a).
    - **Divine Solution:** God decides to make a "helper (*ezer*) fit for him" (v. 18b).
  - **The Search for a Helper (vv. 19-20)**
    - **Naming the Animals:** God brings animals to Adam to name them (v. 19).
    - **Realization of Need:** Adam names them, recognizing his own distinctness and the absence of a suitable partner (v. 20).
  - **The Creation of Woman (vv. 21-23)**
    - **Divine Process:** God causes a deep sleep, takes a rib, and forms a woman (v. 21).
    - **Symbolism of Origin:**
      - Taken from man's side/flesh, symbolizing oneness and equality (not from feet/head).
      - A "helper" (Hebrew: *'ezer*), a term also used for God, implying partnership, not inferiority.
    - **Adam's Response:** Adam recognizes her as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," calling her "woman" (v. 23).

## Point 2 - Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden and the Creation of Man and Woman

- **The Institution of Marriage (v. 24)**

- **Divine Ordinance:** "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (v. 24).
- **Key Components:**
  - **Leaving:** Separation from parental home/dependence.
  - **Cleaving/Joining:** Commitment and bonding.
  - **One Flesh:** Intimacy, unity, and sexual union.

- **The Original State of Intimacy (v. 25)**

- **Nakedness:** Both were naked and felt no shame.
- **Purity & Trust:** Signifying complete openness, transparency, and trust in their relationship.

## Point 3 - Genesis 3: The Fall of Humanity

Genesis 3 describes humanity's tragic "Fall" through disobedience, where Adam and Eve, tempted by the serpent to doubt God's goodness, ate forbidden fruit, introducing sin, shame, broken relationships, toil, and death into the world, separating humanity from God and marking the beginning of our fallen condition, with God promising a future Redeemer amidst the immediate curses.

- **The Temptation & Doubt (v. 1-5):** Satan exploits a gap in Eve's knowledge (or memory) of God's command, questioning God's motives and promising god-like wisdom, a pattern of spiritual deception.
  - The serpent (Satan) tempts Eve by questioning God's command and truthfulness.
  - The desire for autonomous knowledge of "good and evil" is introduced.
- **The Disobedience & Rebellion (v. 6-7):** Eating the fruit represents a deliberate choice to defy God's simple rule, prioritizing personal desire over divine command, leading to a distortion of truth and self-centered judgment.
  - Eve eats the fruit; Adam also eats.
  - Their eyes are opened, they feel shame, and they hide.

## Point 3 - Genesis 3: The Fall of Humanity

- **The Curse & Hope (v. 8-19):** God confronts Adam and Eve and curses are pronounced. Sin is portrayed not just as a mistake but as an act of “disobedience and pride.” By eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve sought autonomy, attempting to “be like God” by defining reality on their own terms.
  - **Alienation:** Immediate shame (hiding nakedness) and separation from God's presence (v. 8-11).
  - **Broken Relationships:** The event caused immediate “disintegrating effects,” including shame (symbolized by nakedness), fear, and blame-shifting between Adam, Eve, and the serpent. It created a fundamental alienation between humanity and God, and between humans and the natural world. (v. 12-13).
  - **Serpent:** The serpent is cursed to crawl on its belly (v. 14).
  - **Universal Impact:** Adam's sin as humanity's representative (covenant head) brought this fallen condition to all descendants, explaining universal sin and brokenness; however, the Protoevangelium (first Gospel) is introduced: the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head (v. 15).
  - **Woman:** Increased pain in childbirth; struggle in relationship dynamics (v. 16).
  - **Man & Ground:** Hard labor and toil and a return to dust upon death (v. 17-18). The judgment extended to the ground itself, resulting in “toil” and a struggle for survival (thorns and thistles) that characterizes human labor.
  - **Mortality:** Introduction of physical death, ending the possibility of eternal life in that state (v. 19).

## Point 3 - Genesis 3: The Fall of Humanity

- **Banishment & Provision (v. 20-24):** Genesis 3 isn't just about fruit; it's the foundational story explaining why humanity needs a Savior, as all our deeper needs (health, justice, government) stem from this initial break with God.
  - Adam names his wife Eve ("mother of all living") (v. 20).
  - God provides clothing (first covering of sin/atonement) (v. 21).
  - Humans are cast out of the Garden to prevent access to the Tree of Life (v. 22-24).

# Point 3 - Genesis 3: The Fall of Humanity

## Closing Reflection

Genesis 1-3 lays the groundwork for the entire biblical narrative. It shows a perfect world created by a perfect God, where humanity was in complete harmony with its Creator, itself, and creation. The tragic turn in chapter 3 highlights the reality of free will and the devastating consequences of choosing independence from God. Yet, even in judgment, God offers a glimmer of hope and a promise of future redemption through the "seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15).

These chapters aren't just about origins; they set the stage for all history, revealing that while sin entered, God's loving, ordering, and redeeming work began immediately and continues, promising ultimate restoration and the overcoming of chaos by His good Word.

## Takeaway Challenge

Reflect on a current area of your life where you might be operating in "autonomy" from God—making decisions based purely on your own understanding rather than seeking His guidance. Challenge yourself to surrender that area to God's authority and trust in His "good" design for your life, acknowledging that true life is found in dependence on the Creator, not independence from Him.