

# OpenTheo

## January 2nd: Genesis 2 & John 1:29-51

January 1, 2020



### Alastair Roberts

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Genesis chapter 2. 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. and the heavens. When no bush of the field was yet in the land, and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground, then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land

of Havala where there is gold, and the gold of that land is good.

Bedellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush.

And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.

Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.

But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man. And while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Genesis 2 begins with the establishment of the Sabbath.

Now it might seem a little strange that the story of creation has seven days when the final day is a day of rest. No creation seems to be done on that day at all. But when we look through the pattern of creation what we see is that temporal patterns are a very important part of it.

The first day is the establishment of a temporal pattern, the beat of evening and morning as the light is separated from the darkness, the period of the day from the period of the night. On the fourth day, the middle day of creation, the sun, moon and stars are established for signs, for seasons, for days and for years. And all of these things have a significance beyond the initial work of creation.

What they do is they establish enduring patterns that will continue into the future. And in the seven day pattern, six days of work and one day of rest, God sets the pattern of the week for all the years that follow, for the entirety of human history. God does the work

week first and then we're supposed to follow his pattern.

The day, the year and the seasons, they've been entrusted to the sun, moon and the stars to maintain. But the Sabbath is implicitly given to man. It's a cycle of labour and rest that belongs first to God that characterises God's own activity and is then entrusted to man to uphold.

It's also a day that is holy and set apart, a principle from which other holy days develop, as we'll see as we get into the law. In this sense, it's a principle of blessedness as well. It's a day that's been set apart as particularly blessed by God as something that is a time of enjoyment of the good gifts of his creation, resting in our labours, not just working non-stop but enjoying the fruits of our labours.

These are the generations, as we see in Genesis 2 verse 4. It's a common refrain in the book of Genesis. It's almost invariably used as a heading. So you'll see key figures have a series of generations and then it begins a cycle of the story.

And Matthew alludes to this at the beginning of his gospel, the book of the generation of Jesus Christ. The question of whether Genesis 2 verse 4 is a heading for what follows or a summation of what preceded is not one that scholars are entirely settled upon. It could in fact be both and maybe it's best to allow it to be open enough to include both of those possibilities.

I'm inclined to take it in some ways as a heading primarily, that it expresses these are the generations of the heavens and the earth. The generations of the heavens and the earth are the creatures of the earth, human beings and the animals that arise from the heavens and the earth. And the creation of man being the first great example as heaven, God's activity, and the earth, the dust taken from the earth and fashioned into a human frame, these things brought together are what forms humanity.

Many have argued that Genesis 2 gives us an alternative creation narrative. It could perhaps be seen better as the street view to the satellite view of chapter 1. And if we read through chapter 2 we'll see a very similar pattern play out. So first of all we see this initial situation where things are formless and void.

There's no one to till the ground. There's no real order upon the earth. There's this indiscriminate body of water, this surge or this mist that's covering the whole face of the earth as the deep covered the whole face of the earth in chapter 1. And then in the creation days a similar pattern follows out.

So the first day was the creation of light. The creation of light to rule the day and the night and the first day of the new creation narrative is the creation of man who is supposed in some sense to be the light of the world, to maintain moral standards, to provide light in that sense. The second day is the division of the heaven from the earth,

the waters above from the waters beneath with the establishment of the firmament.

On the second day of this second account God establishes a firmament garden, a realm in which he will walk in the midst of his people and provide a model for the way that the rest of the world should be. On the third day there is the creation of vegetation and the separation of land and sea. In the second account we have waters going out from the garden, vegetation growing up, the lands being divided by these rivers that are going out and then on the fourth day the lights are placed in the firmament, sun moon and stars and on the fourth day as it were the man is placed in the centre of the garden to rule and to divide, to divide between what should be eaten or what should not be eaten, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which should not be eaten from.

The fifth and sixth days the animals and the fish are created and the animals are formed and brought to the man to name and in the climactic action of the sixth day in the first creation account humanity is formed. Here the woman is formed and so it's a very similar pattern playing out and if we follow this pattern all the way through what we end up with is that the establishment of the rest of marriage is something that is paralleled with God's own rest on the Sabbath. As we go through the scripture it would seem obvious that these things do go together.

The final rest is described as a wedding feast, bringing together a bride and bridegroom. Now the creation of the man is the creation of an Adam from the Adamah, an earthling from the earth. There is a connection between the two.

The Adamah is feminine and the Adam is masculine and one is formed from the other to have a particular duty to uphold and to serve the earth that he was born from. Now the Garden of Eden is a miniature world model. It's a training ground for labour in the wider world.

God establishes a temporal pattern for man's labour in the sixth days of creation and the one day of rest but he also establishes a spatial pattern. This one particular realm that's bounded off from the rest of the creation. It's a realm that has been tamed and domesticated.

The order has been established within it and this is the context within which man will learn how to act within the wider world. The themes of the Garden are also taken up in later sanctuaries. Waters flowing out into the world.

Seven days of creation represented in the establishment of the tabernacle. Many of the same words used. The serving and the guarding that the man is commissioned to do in the Garden is the same task that is commissioned for the Levites.

And so it's a sanctuary realm. It's a realm where God is dwelling in the midst of his

people. God walks in the midst of the Garden.

There are cherubim later on to guard the entrance to the Garden just as there are cherubim drawn or embroidered onto the certain of the curtains of the tabernacle. And then you see other things that would connect the two. Fruit trees and other images of Garden in the temple and elsewhere.

So the man is learning the task within the Garden. He's learning the priestly task here and then later on he'll have to be a king within the wider world. God is teaching his son his trade and then later he brings him a wife.

Adam names the creatures as God named his creations on days one to three. And the Garden is just the beginning. The implicit message of Genesis chapter 2 is that man's labour will later on flow out into the entire wider creation.

The gold in the land of Havilah needs to be mined. It needs to be brought into the Garden to dress up the Garden and make it glorious as we'll see at the very end of Revelation where there's a Garden city. It's also a world of particular things, of trees, animals, men and women, particular lands and precious stones and rivers, each with their own meaning.

Now we tend to think in terms of great big ideologies that are abstracted from reality, concrete reality, but the story of Genesis is very much an on the ground story where specific particular things are charged with significance. And when we read this it will make a bit more sense of why we have things like the sacrificial system in the book of Leviticus. It's working with the particular meanings of these variegated aspects of a diverse and beautiful creation where things are dancing with each other, where there are analogies between different levels of reality and connections and homologies, ways in which things are associated or governed by the same logic.

The woman is created because the man needs a helper. The man is particularly charged with heading up the mission. He's been given the task, he's created for the task of tilling the ground and he's commissioned with the task of upholding the order of the Garden, the rule concerning the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But the woman is not created as the man's sidekick or his understudy or his secretary. The statement that it's not good for the man to be alone isn't primarily about the man's subjective state of loneliness, that this is a lonely bachelor who needs some company. No, it's about his insufficiency for the purpose for which God was establishing humanity.

Mankind needs womankind and without man and woman together they will not be able to form and fill the world as God has designed. The woman needs to be not merely a helper, the animals can be helpers, but a true counterpart to the man, one that can stand alongside him as his equal but yet one who is truly different from him. The man

breaks forth in poetry when he sees the woman.

Just as he was called the Adam in a way that connected him with the earth, the Adamah, now he recognises himself as man, Ish, when faced with woman, Ishah. It's not primarily that we are individuals but we are sexuate persons. At the heart of humanity is a sort of magnetic polarity that is to be experienced as beautiful and good and the first time that was ever experienced it elicited poetry and within the story of Genesis this provides the model of what is good about this relationship and this difference as well in relationship.

A man should leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they should become one flesh. Now later on in Ephesians 5 Paul says that this is a mystery but it's about Christ and the church. Now what he might be saying is not just that he's talking in that particular passage about Christ and the church but that this statement in Genesis itself is anticipating something of the mission of Christ and the establishment of the church.

So even in this statement concerning the establishment of marriage it's already looking towards what Christ is going to accomplish even before the fall if this is the case and that is quite a startling and stunning statement and worth reflecting upon. Notice then the Sabbath themes as marriage and Sabbath are both periods of rest that are brought together in these same sort of patterns. Some questions to think about.

What is the significance of the deep sleep that God places Adam in? And also why the change from referring to God as God in chapter 1 to speaking of him as Lord God or Yahweh God in chapter 2? John chapter 1 verses 29 to 51. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me because he was before me.

I myself did not know him but for this purpose I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed to Israel. And John bore witness, I saw the spirit descend from heaven like a dove and it remained on him. I myself did not know him but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God. The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, Behold the Lamb of God. The two disciples heard him say this and they followed Jesus.

Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, What are you seeking? And they said to him, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying? He said to them, Come and you will see. So they came and saw where he was staying and they stayed with him that day for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and follow

Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, We have found the Messiah, which means Christ. He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, You are Simon the son of John, you shall be called Cephas, which means Peter.

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, Follow me. Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Nathaniel said to him, Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and said of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit.

Nathaniel said to him, How do you know me? Jesus answered him, Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. Nathaniel answered him, Rabbi, you are the son of God, you are the king of Israel. Jesus answered him, Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.

And he said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Each of the gospels in their own way begins with the ministry of John the Baptist. But perhaps above all the others it is John's gospel that emphasises the witness of John the Baptist.

In the other gospels we read about the baptism of Christ and the events that occurred at that time as the spirit descended upon Christ and later brought him out into the wilderness testifying to his true identity. But yet within the gospel of John it is in the witness of John that this event is recalled. Not within the objective narrative voice of the gospel writer but within the witness of the character of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist also is the one who introduces Christ as the Lamb of God. He is the Lamb of God, he is the one who is perhaps the Passover Lamb. He is the one who is pure, without defilement or spot and he is prepared for the sacrificial task of bearing the weight of the world's sin.

Now it is interesting that we are talking about the sin singular of the world. This is something that is more characteristic of the world as a whole. It is not just an assortment of great big bag of sins but it is the hostility and the enmity and the division and opposition that exists between the world and God.

And Christ comes to deal with that. This is something that occurs on the next day. As you go through John 1 and chapter 2 as well you will see a series of days that play out.

And given the creation themes that are prominent from the very beginning of this

chapter it would seem natural to think about these in terms of creation days. Peter Lighthouse has suggested that verses 1 to 18 begin with the light of the world. That is the first day of creation, the establishment of light.

And then the baptism of John is described in verses 19 to 28. That is the division of the waters above from the waters beneath. And then in Christ's baptism in verses 29 to 34 there is the emergence of dry land from the water.

The dove descending like the dove descended upon the land after the flood. Day 4 is John pointing the disciples to Jesus in verses 35 to 39. And then the multiplication of the disciples as the disciples bring their brothers as the creatures swarm in the seas in verses 40 to 42.

And then in day 6 Jesus and Nathaniel the true man, the Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile. That happens on the following day verses 43 to 51. On the seventh day, the Sabbath, there is rest.

Nothing occurs there. And on the third day we have the wedding at Cana in chapter 2 and that is day 8. It is the start of a new week pattern. And so I think that is a reasonable suggestion.

There are other suggestions out there and I think there is more reason to believe that there is a creation pattern playing out here than there is to believe any single one of these suggestions. These suggestions are worth reflecting upon though. John the Baptist is sent that he might be the means by which Christ is revealed to Israel.

It is in the baptism and the witness that he bears to what happens to Christ in his baptism that John bears his witness to who Christ is. The one on whom the spirit descends and remains. That this happens in the form of a dove would, as I have already suggested, draw our minds back to the flood and the story of Noah.

On the next day again John introduces his disciples to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Now these themes of Jesus as the Lamb of God continue throughout the book in different ways and play out even more prominently within the book of Revelation. There's this introduction of the disciples of John to Jesus and they follow Jesus and then they bring their brothers, they bring their friends and they tell others.

Philip tells Nathaniel and Andrew tells Simon Peter and in each of these cases we're seeing the expansion, the multiplication of the number of disciples already taking place. When Philip is encountered, Philip is someone who goes and tells his friend Nathaniel. Nathaniel is wondering can anything good come out of Nazareth? Once again we're seeing that Nazareth is a place that does not have great connotations as a place like Bethlehem would have, as the city of David.

Nothing seems to be auspicious or significant about this place of Nazareth but yet it's



from Nazareth that Christ comes and as we look in Matthew he shall be called a Nazarene. Maybe there's a suggestion there that this is a root out of dry ground, this is a Messiah who comes from a site that's not of any human significance at all but yet that's part of what the Messiah is prophesied to do. He's prophesied to come from a situation where although he's associated with Bethlehem he's also associated with not really having a profile or a status that would cause him to be admired and recognised by human beings.

He's despised and rejected by men. He's someone who comes from Nazareth rather than from the centre of Jewish society in Jerusalem or somewhere else like that or a place that has great pedigree and significance such as the city of David. Nathaniel when Jesus speaks to him recognises that this one actually is someone special.

He's the son of God, he's the king of Israel, these royal titles that he applies to Jesus at this point. And when Jesus speaks to him he speaks to him as one who is a representative as it were of Israel, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile. Now the original Israelite is Jacob.

Jacob is defined in part by his witnessing of the angels ascending and descending upon Jacob's ladder. And here we have the angels ascending and descending upon the son of man. We begin the chapter with Christ coming, tabernacling among us.

Then the spirit comes down upon Christ. And now there's the statement the angels of God will ascend and descend upon the son of man. It's like a full-fledged invasion.

First you have the initial landing party, then you have the descent of the spirit upon Christ and then you have the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man. Jesus is Jacob's ladder. And Jacob is like Nathaniel, this righteous man, he is this man in whom there is no guile who witnesses the son of man and bears witness to the son of man.

If you want to think about this passage a bit more I would recommend reflecting upon the numbering of the days. Are these days significant? What sort of parallels can we draw between the events of the particular days and what happens on the corresponding day of creation? Why is the statement, what are you seeking, such an important one within this chapter? It's another question worth reflecting upon.