

# 1. Introduction

## Prayer

Blessed Lord,

*who has* caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning;

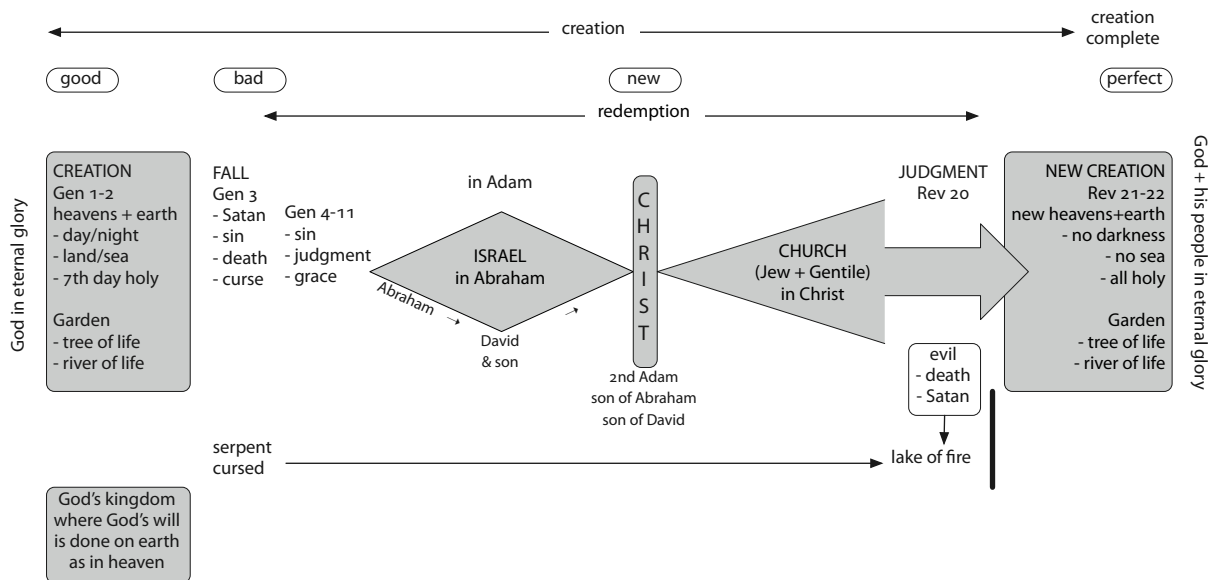
*Grant that we may* in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,

*that* by patience and comfort of your holy word, *we may* embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent, *Book of Common Prayer* (1662)

## 1. Biblical Theology

The Bible, which contains many stories, tells a single grand story.



**Fig. 1.1 The Bookends of the Bible**

The story of redemption takes place within, and is “bookended” by the larger story of creation.<sup>1</sup>

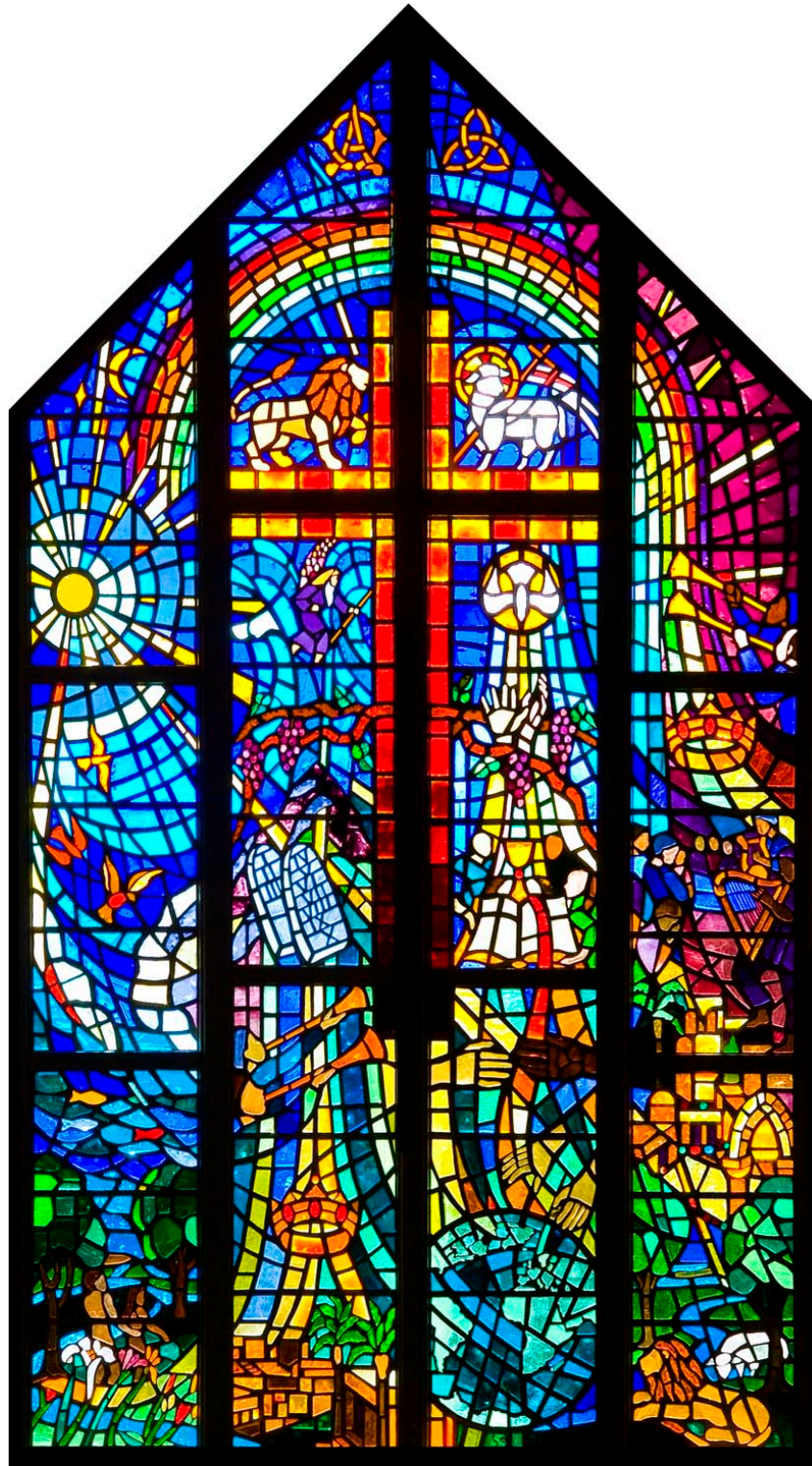
The story begins with God in eternal glory and ends with God and his people in eternal glory.

The story can be summarized in various ways:

- 4-part: the good, the bad, the new, the perfect, in which the new is the story of redemption.
- 5-part: creation, Israel, Christ, church, consummation, in which Israel-Christ-church=redemption.

The story is also depicted in a window I designed for PBCC.<sup>2</sup>

1. A modified version of this Bookends diagram, which I have been drawing since the early 1990s, appears as “The ‘Bookends’ of Biblical Theology,” in the *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 2495, at Revelation 21.  
 2. Bernard Bell, “The Big Picture,” sermon preached at PBCC, 2007.



The four vertical bays depict Creation, Israel, Church, Consummation.

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## 2. Israel's Scriptures

What we call the Old Testament is Israel's Scriptures, written for Israel.

### 2.1 The Canon

The Hebrew canon (תנ"ך *Tanakh*) contains 24 books in 3 sections:

תּוֹרָה <i>Torah</i> (5)	נְבִיאִים <i>Nevi'im</i> Prophets (8)	כְּתוּבִים <i>Ketuvim</i> Writings (11)
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges Samuel Kings Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel The Twelve (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)	Psalms Proverbs Job <i>Megillot</i> /The Scrolls (5): Song, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther Daniel Ezra-Nehemiah Chronicles

The Septuagint (LXX, Greek translation of Hebrew Bible, ca. 250-150 BC) rearranged books chronologically into a canon of 39 books. Vulgate (Latin) and English followed. The 39 books are informally divided into four sections:

Pentateuch (5)	Historical (12)	Wisdom (5)	Prophets (17)
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges Ruth 1 & 2 Samuel 1 & 2 Kings 1 & 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon	Major Prophets (4): Isaiah, Jeremiah, [Lamentations], Ezekiel, Daniel  Minor Prophets (12): Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

### 2.2 The Primary History

The Torah and the Former Prophets form a continuous 9-volume history of Israel, stretching from Creation to Exile: the Primary History. Deuteronomy is the key book, serving as the hinge between two halves of this history:

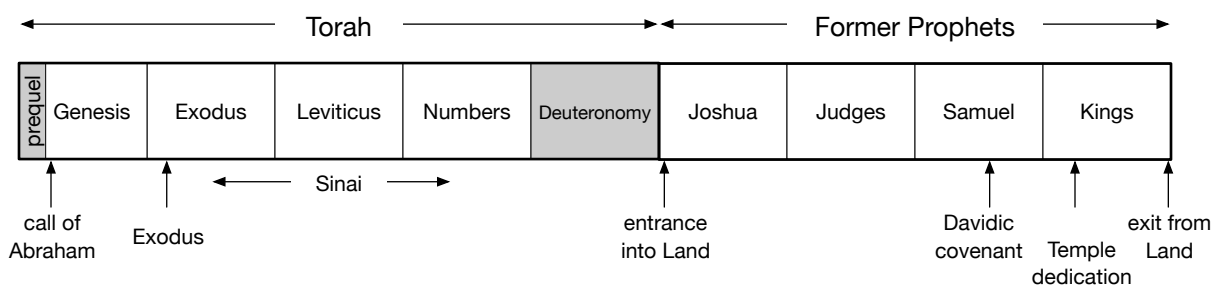


Fig. 1.2 The Primary History

Genesis 1–11 is the prequel to Israel’s story, which begins with the call of Abraham (Gen 12). Israel’s story recapitulates Adam’s story in the garden.

### 2.3 The Structure of Genesis

Divided into ten accounts, each with the heading אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת, trad. “these are the generations (*toledot*) of...” Each account gives a “family history.” The first five accounts cover primeval history; the second five cover the patriarchal history.

Primeval History		Patriarchal History	
	<i>the generations of...</i>		<i>the generations of...</i>
2:4–4:26	the heavens and the earth	11:27–25:11	Terah
5:1–6:8	Adam	25:12–18	Ishmael
6:9–9:29	Noah	25:19–35:29	Isaac
10:1–11:9	the sons of Noah	36:1–37:1	Esau
11:10–26	Shem	37:2–50:26	Jacob

The *toledot* of X is an account of X’s descendants, not of X himself; e.g. the *toledot* of Adam gives the story of Adam’s descendants, not of Adam himself; the *toledot* of Terah gives the Abraham story.

Gen 1:1–2:3 is set apart from the rest of the book as a Prologue.

## 3. Creation (Gen 1:1–2:3)

### 3.1 Stage-setting (1:1-2)

The narrative action begins in v. 3. Vv. 1-2 summarize and/or set the stage.

#### 3.1.1 The Beginning (1:1)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

*In the beginning God:*

- God is pre-existent. There is no theogony (creation of god(s)). There is only one God.
- God is Love (1 John 4:8). Love is relational, but how can a singular God be relational? God is triune, three-in-one, each coinhering in the other = perichoresis, the divine dance. Love has three components: the lover, the beloved, and the love itself. The Father loves the Son, his beloved, and the Son returns that love to the Father. The Spirit conveys that love, even is that love.
- God in eternal glory: the mutual love expressed between Father and Son through the Spirit is glory (cf. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*).

*God created:*

- no need to create: God was fulfilled in his triune self (aseity). He created a realm beyond himself out of love and generosity.
- fundamental divide between Creator and his creation, between infinite and finite, between uncreated and created.
- God created through his two “hands”: the Word and the Spirit (Irenaeus).

*the heavens and the earth:* totality (merism). Either a summary statement of ch. 1, or creating a blank “earth” which God will subsequently form.

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### 3.1.2 The initial State (1:2)

Three clauses describe the initial state of the earth prior to the first narrative action of v. 3

1. The earth was “formless and void” (NASB, תהו וָבוהו *tohu wa-bohu*); chaos (in the classical Greek sense of blank, unstructured); uninhabitable and uninhabited; a blank slate.
2. Darkness was over the face of the deep: the only things present were darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ *hoshek*) and the deep (תְּהוֹמוֹת *tehom*), both representative of a lack of formation and function, i.e. absence more than presence.
3. The רוּחַ רֵיחַ *ruah* (Spirit, breath, wind) of God was hovering, as a bird over its nest (cf. Deut 32:11), ready to act.

### 3.2 The Six Days of Creation (1:3-31)

1:3-31 is highly structured. It is narrative not poetry, but it is rhythmic: each day follows a pattern.

	Phrase	Day						Σ
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Word:	וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים “then God said”	1	1	2	1	1	4	10
Creative act:		1	1	2	1	1	2	8
Fulfillment:	וַיְהִי־כֵן “and it was so”	1	1	2	1	—	2	7
Naming:	וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים “then God called”	1	1	1	—	—	—	3
Evaluation:	וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב “then God saw that it was good”	1	—	2	1	1	2	7
Conclusion	... וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם “and there was evening and there was morning, day <i>n</i> ”	1	1	1	1	1	1	6

God’s speech: “then God said” 10×. Things happened by divine fiat: God commanded: “let there be light” (Lat. *fiat lux*), and it was: “and there was light”; thereafter “and it was so” 6×.

#### 3.2.1 Two Triads of Days

The six days are arranged in two parallel sets of three, one of forming, one of filling. God adds function (days 1-3) and functionaries (4-6).

- a) **Forming:** the first set rectifies the *tohu* formless, uninhabitable condition.
- day 1: light. Partially restrains the darkness; establishes the function of time, the rhythmic cycle of daylight and darkness. God names the “light” “day” and the “darkness” “night.”
  - day 2: הַרְקִיעַ (*raqia*) the expanse (NASB, ESV, CSB), vault (NIV), dome (NRSV). Vertical separation, creating a functional living space.
  - day 3a: waters gather themselves together and God calls them Seas. This enables the previously unseen dry ground to become visible; God calls it Land/Earth.
  - day 3b: the dry land now sprouts vegetation of two sorts: seed-bearing plants and fruiting trees, each according to its kind, providing the function of food.

There is now a functional, ordered cosmos. By dividing (בָּרַל *badal* 5×), God imposes order on an

undifferentiated world: between light and darkness (1:4, 18), day and night (18), and between waters above and waters below (6, 7).

b) **Filling:** the second set rectifies the *bohu* empty, uninhabited condition.

- day 4: two great lights in the expanse to serve as lights and time-keepers. Though they are located in the expanse, they are the functionaries for the function enabled on day 1.
- day 5: living creatures: fish in waters below, flying creatures above (realms of day 2); each according to its kind.
- day 6a: land animals of 3 types: wild animals, domesticated animals, creepy-crawlies, each according to its kind.

A total of 7 categories (2× vegetation, fish, birds, 3× land animals), each according to its kind 10×. After 7 acts, the cosmos is formed and filled. It seems complete.

### 3.2.2 Mankind

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over...”

So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them. (1:26-27)

#### The Pattern Broken

The creation of mankind is the climax of the six days, as indicated by the breaking of the pattern:

- Divine deliberation not fiat: “Let us make...” (נִעְשֶׂה cohortative) not “Let there be...” (יְהִי jussive).
- Divine creative act: God made (עָשָׂה *asah*) the animals, but he created (בָּרָא *bara*) mankind.
- Divine image: “in our image, in our likeness” (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ) not “according to its kind” (לְמִינֵו) etc, 10× in 1:11-12, 21, 24-25). Image: the human represents God on earth. The human is the image in God’s temple!
- Differentiated: male (*zakar*) and female (*neqebah*). These are physiological terms, necessary for fulfilling the command, “Be fruitful...”
- God speaks to the human.

This breaking of the pattern emphasizes that mankind is the pinnacle, the climax of God’s creation.

#### Commission:

- Be fruitful and fill the earth (28a).
- Subdue the earth.
- Rule over the living creatures in their three domains (28b): vice-regent (vice-ruler) on behalf of God
- Eat the vegetation provided on Day 3b.

### 3.3 The Seventh Day

On the seventh day, God did four acts:

1. **Completed:** he brought creation into a state of completion. But had it reached its telos, its end?
2. **Rested:** he entered into his rest.
3. **Blessed:** endows with fruitfulness to enable flourishing.
4. **Sanctified:** declares it holy, transferring it from the secular, ordinary, profane, common to the sacred, extraordinary, holy. Otto (1923) defines holy as that which is Other. God designates the

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seventh day as “other,” as specially his, as a “sanctuary in time” (Heschel 1951, 29). The first thing sanctified is not space but time. Beyond the very good (טוֹב וְיָאֵד, 1:31) lies the realm of the Other. The seventh day is the goal, the *telos*, of creation. Does God intend to pull all his creation into this teleological state of the other?

Genesis 1:1–2:3 is an ancient cosmology, addressing the three big questions ancient people had: the nature (-logy) and origins (-gony, from “genesis”) of the three major components of life: God, cosmos, humanity. Genesis gives very different answers than other ANE cosmologies.

1. Theology/Theogony: only one God; has no genesis (i.e. eternal); sole Creator.
2. Cosmology/Cosmogony: Creation is well-ordered and good.
3. Anthropology/Anthropogony: all humanity represents God in the world.

### **Other reading strategies**

Many treat Genesis 1 as a science text:

- Young Earth Creationists (YEC), e.g. Ken Ham (Answers in Genesis; the Creation Museum): tries to fit science to a “literal” reading of Gen 1. Difficulty in doing so creates a tension between faith and science.
- Old Earth Creationists (OEC), e.g. Hugh Ross (Reasons to Believe): tries to fit the Bible to science.

We need to start with a robust theology of God and of creation.