

# What is Man?

LESSON  
ONE

IN THE BEGINNING



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# What is Man?

## Lesson One

### In the Beginning

#### INTRODUCTION

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Have you ever come into a conversation in the middle? Or arrived at a performance after it already started? Or maybe you showed up late to a sporting event? Well, if you have, you understand that when we miss the beginning of something, it can be very confusing. When we don't know how the story starts, we have trouble understanding why certain details are important, who the heroes and the villains are, and what the whole point of the story is. Something similar is true when we consider the human race. Knowing how we got here, how our circumstances came to be, and what we're supposed to be doing is a huge help when it comes to understanding and managing the details of our lives.

This is the first lesson in our series, *What is Man?*, and we've entitled it, "In the Beginning." In this lesson, we'll explore what human beings were like when God first created us, and placed us in the Garden of Eden. The title of this series — *What is Man?* — should be familiar to most Christians, since it appears several times in Scripture. For example, Psalm 8:4 says:

**What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:4).**

Every time biblical characters or authors asked, "What is man?" they were wondering about the nature of humanity. They wanted to know things like: who we are in relation to God, what our role on earth is, and what sort of moral capacities we have. To put it in formal theological terms, they were asking questions about anthropology. The word "anthropology" comes from two Greek roots: *anthropos* meaning "man" or "human being"; and *logos*, meaning, "study." So, "anthropology" is:

**The study of humanity**

Or in the case of theology:

**The doctrine of humanity**

In secular studies, "anthropology" focuses on things like the society, culture, biology and development of human beings. But theological anthropology is much narrower. Louis Berkhof, who lived from 1873 to 1957, defined it this way in part 2, chapter 1 of his work *Systematic Theology*:

**Theological Anthropology is concerned only with what the Bible says respecting man and the relation in which he stands and should stand to God.**

In other words, when it comes to theology, anthropology is the study of humanity in *itself* and in its *relationship* to God.

Our lesson on what human beings were like in the beginning will divide into three parts. First, we'll look at the creation of humanity. Second, we'll describe the composition of our beings. And third, we'll look at humanity's initial covenant relationship with God. Let's begin with the creation of humanity.

## CREATION

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In the ancient Near East, where Moses wrote the book of Genesis, creation stories were extremely significant. In cultures outside the Bible, creation stories typically explained what the world was supposed to be like in its ideal state. They described how the gods had originally intended the world to work, and assigned various roles to its creatures. And Scripture uses creation accounts in similar ways.

Of course, in the cultures around ancient Israel, the creation stories were lies. They attributed the works of creation to false gods. And they used their invented stories to promote improper social and political structures, and to twist the relationships between humanity and other creatures.

By contrast, the Bible relates the true story of creation in order to explain how humanity was actually designed to function within the world. This is why many other parts of the Bible appeal to the creation accounts to prove how the world is supposed to work and what role human beings are morally obligated to play. Theologians often refer to these obligations as "creation ordinances" because they are:

### **Moral requirements established by God's works of creation**

The idea is that God's works are perfect, and therefore, they're the standard for our own behavior.

Sometimes creation ordinances are explicit, such as God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" in Genesis 1:28. But others are implicit, such as our obligation to keep the Sabbath holy. The creation accounts don't say explicitly that human beings should rest every seventh day. But in the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20:11, Moses clarified that God's pattern of working six days and resting on the seventh obligated human beings to do the same. So, as we think about the significance and role of humanity, it's both natural and helpful to start with our creation.

We'll explore the creation of humanity in three steps. First, we'll summarize the biblical accounts of creation. Second, we'll consider the historicity of Adam and Eve. And third, we'll look at their superiority among God's creatures. Let's look first at the biblical accounts.

## BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS

The book of Genesis contains two accounts of creation. One is in Genesis 1:1–2:3, and the other is in Genesis 2:4–25. Together these accounts give us a general picture of how and why God created us.

**The creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2, I think, are really complements to each other in that they look at the same reality — they look at the first human culture that is made by God in which the only occupants at this time are two human beings — it looks at their culture from two different aspects... Really, we have the creation narrative of chapter 1, and it speaks about the whole process, but we have kind of a window into day 6 of the creation of human life in chapter 2, beginning in chapter 2, and it's really going to talk more about their relationship to one another. And so we're getting a kind of a different film shot of the same picture in both of those, and we need to be able to read that and not look for contradiction necessarily, but I think we're seeing really complement and enrichment happening.**

— Dr. Mark Saucy

In the first creation account, in Genesis 1:2, we're told that the creation was originally "formless and empty." Then, in the rest of the chapter, we're told that God spent six days forming and filling the universe.

During the first three days, he dealt with the fact that it was formless by giving shape to its various realms. On the first day, he separated the dark from the light. On the second day, he formed the sky and atmosphere to separate the waters above from the waters below. On the third day, he separated the dry land from the seas.

During the next three days, he dealt with the fact that creation was empty. On the fourth day, he filled the light and the darkness with heavenly bodies, like the sun and stars. On the fifth day, he put birds in the sky and sea creatures in the oceans. On the sixth day, he filled the dry land with all sorts of animals. And he created human beings to rule over the entire creation on his behalf. As we read in Genesis 1:27-28:

**God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:27-28).**

At this point in the biblical account, humanity was clearly distinguished from the rest of creation. Human beings were created in God's image, and given authority over his other creatures. We'll talk about this in more depth later. So for now, we simply want to point out that not only was humanity *part* of creation; it was also its pinnacle.

The second creation account, in Genesis 2:4-25, contains more details related to God's work on the sixth day, when he created the land animals and humanity. Here,

we're told that God formed the animals by molding them from the dust of the earth. And he made the first man, Adam, in largely the same way, also molding his body from the dust of the earth. But, it's interesting to note that only Adam is said to have received his breath by God breathing it into him.

Next, the animals were paraded before Adam, so that he could try to find a suitable helper — one that would assist in him with the tasks God had assigned him. During this process, he named the animals, demonstrating his authority over them. Not surprisingly, none of them turned out to be a suitable helper.

So, in order to give Adam the helper he needed, God created the first woman, Eve, to be Adam's wife. But rather than creating her from the dust of the earth, God created Eve from Adam's rib. This made Eve unique among all the creatures God had made. As Adam said in Genesis 2:23:

**She shall be called “woman,” for she was taken out of man (Genesis 2:23).**

The act of naming demonstrated Adam's authority over his wife. But the name he gave her — *ishshah* in Hebrew, which we translate “woman” sounded like Adam's own name — *ish*, which we translate “man.”

The equivalence of these names implied that while Eve was under Adam's authority in their marriage, she was equal to him in the tasks God had assigned them as a race. Both were created in God's image. Both were to fill and subdue the earth. And both were given authority to rule over creation on God's behalf.

With these biblical accounts of humanity's creation in mind, let's turn to the historicity, or historical authenticity, of Adam and Eve.

## **HISTORICITY**

In recent years, many theologians have treated the biblical accounts of humanity's creation as metaphors or allegories, rather than as factual history. But Scripture itself has a very different perspective. According to many other passages in the Bible, Adam and Eve were real people. At the time of their creation, they were the only human beings on the planet. But they went on to produce real offspring, who eventually multiplied into the human race, as we know it today.

**Of course Adam and Eve were historical people. That's how the Bible has recorded it, and we believe in the Bible because it's inspired by God. As we understand this world and history, we can use archeology, historical documents, and all sorts of accounts passed down by various traditions, but the most firm basis on which we prove Adam and Eve to be historical figures is that we believe what the Bible has told us.**

— Rev. Xiaojun Fang, translation

In order to show the historicity of Adam and Eve, we'll look at three strands of biblical testimony. First we'll consider the broader context of Genesis itself. Second, we'll examine the Old Testament books beyond Genesis. And third, we'll look at the New Testament. Let's begin with the broader context of Genesis itself.

## Genesis

The record of Adam and his immediate family in Genesis 2–4 gives every appearance of an account intended to describe actual history. Some literary genres tend to be highly figurative and metaphoric, like poetry and parables. Others tend to be very straightforward, such as historical narrative. Most of the book of Genesis is unarguably historical narrative, such as the early patriarchal histories found in chapters 11–37, and the history of the later patriarchs, like Joseph, found in chapters 37–50. And the literature of Genesis 2–4 matches these other passages very closely. In fact, Genesis 2 is introduced by the same literary marker that introduces many other historical accounts throughout the book. Listen to the formulaic words Moses wrote in Genesis 2:4:

**This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created (Genesis 2:4).**

The phrase “this is the account” — *elleh toledoth*, in Hebrew — can be literally translated “these are the generations.” This same phrase introduces lists and accounts of human generations throughout Genesis. It introduces the descendants of Adam in 5:1, Noah in 6:9, Shem in 11:10, Terah in 11:27, Ishmael in 25:12, Isaac in 25:19, Esau in 36:1, 9; and Jacob in 37:2.

Moreover, Genesis gives biographical details about Adam's life. For instance, we're told Eve became pregnant, and we're told the names of three of their children: Cain, Abel and Seth. We're also told how long Adam lived, that he was 130 years old when Seth was born, and that he died when he was 930. This life span is much longer than human beings live today, but it's still obviously presented as historical data.

So, in light of the narrative literary form of these chapters, the generational formula that introduces them, and the details of Adam's life, we can be certain that Moses intended Genesis 2–4 to be read as history. In other words, he intended his readers to believe that Adam and Eve were real, historical people.

Now that we've seen the historicity of Adam and Eve in Genesis, let's turn our attention to other books of the Old Testament.

## Old Testament

Eve isn't mentioned by name anywhere else in the Old Testament. But Adam is mentioned twice. And in both places, he's presented as a historical figure. The genealogy beginning in 1 Chronicles 1:1 lists him as the historical father of Seth. This genealogy traces the generations from Adam to the time surrounding Israel and Judah's return from

the Babylonian exile, near the end of the sixth century B.C. For the returning exiles, an accurate, historical genealogy was important because it helped them establish their proper roles and inheritances in the Promised Land. A genealogy based in myth wouldn't have accomplished this purpose, and therefore, wouldn't have been persuasive to the Chronicler's original audience.

The other mention of Adam appears in Hosea. This verse compares the sins of the historical people of Israel to the sin of Adam. Listen to Hosea 6:7:

**Like Adam, they have broken the covenant — they were unfaithful to me there (Hosea 6:7).**

Some interpreters believe this is a reference to a city called Adam, mentioned in Joshua 3:16. But there is no reference in Joshua to that city sinning. So, it would be odd for it to be used in Hosea as a byword — especially when the sin of our first father was so well-known and had such terrible repercussions for humanity. Others might suggest that Adam need not be a historical figure in order for this comparison to work. But as we'll see in the New Testament, the covenant with Adam is only significant if it was historical.

Now that we've explored the historicity of Adam and Eve in Genesis and the rest of the Old Testament, let's turn our attention to the New Testament.

## New Testament

The New Testament speaks of Adam several times, and the New Testament authors frequently attached a great deal of theological significance to his history. For instance, in Romans 5:12-21, Paul insisted that Adam's sin is the reason human beings die. Further, he taught that Jesus saves his faithful people from the curse we suffer in Adam. Similar statements can be seen in 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45. So, if Adam wasn't a historical figure, then from what does Jesus save us? If no historical Adam existed to sin against God, then we would have no need for a historical Jesus to die on the cross.

Paul also confirmed Adam's historicity in 1 Timothy 2:13, 14 where he said that Adam was created before Eve, and that Eve sinned before Adam. Likewise, Jude 14 treats Adam's genealogies as reliable when it counts Enoch as the seventh generation from Adam. And in fact, there isn't a single place in either the Old or the New Testament that suggests that Adam *wasn't* a real historical figure.

**I think to reject the historicity of Adam and Eve has huge implications for what we believe that Jesus Christ came to do. So, if Adam and Eve were simple myths or a story that was made up — there was no real historical Adam and Eve — it would seem really foolish of God to come and die for a myth that never actually existed, and I think, by default, we'll be undermining also the historicity of Jesus Christ, because when you read the apostle Paul, for example, he always likes to use the metaphor that all died in Adam, but the new Adam, who is**



**Jesus Christ, gives us life. So, if Adam never really existed, should I trust the new Adam?**

— Rev. Vuyani Sindo

Now that we've looked at humanity's creation by summarizing the biblical accounts and defending the historicity of Adam and Eve, let's turn our attention to the superiority of humanity.

## **SUPERIORITY**

As we mentioned earlier, the Bible clearly teaches that Adam and Eve were created to be superior to the rest of God's earthly creatures. There may be hints of this in the fact that Genesis 1:27 lists humanity's creation on the sixth day as a separate act from the creation of the animals, as a sort of culmination of creation. And in fact, it's only after the creation of humanity that, in Genesis 1:31, the narrative switches from calling creation simply "good" to calling it "very good." There may also be hints of humanity's superiority in Genesis 2:7 where only Adam is explicitly said to have had his life breathed into him by God.

But the real proof of Adam and Eve's superiority over the rest of creation is found in the fact that God created them *in his image* and appointed them to rule over creation on his behalf. Listen again to Genesis 1:27-28:

**God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:27-28).**

This same idea is stated in places like Genesis 9:2 and Psalm 8:6-8.

God created humanity to reflect his glory and his attributes in ways that other creatures couldn't. In a later lesson, we'll explore the concept of the image of God in great detail. But for now, it will suffice to say that to be God's image is to be like a picture of God. In the ancient Near East, kings would erect images of themselves around their kingdoms in order to remind their citizens of the benevolence and greatness of the king. In a similar way, human beings are likenesses of God. Our very existence points to God's power and goodness. And because no other earthly creature is God's image, no other creature carries this much honor or so much inherent dignity.

Beyond this, God appointed our first parents to rule over every other creature he had made. So, humanity isn't just inherently superior; we've also been given a superior role. It's *our* job to administer God's rule over the earth. God has delegated the administration of his creation to *us*, and not to any of the animals. And we see confirmation of this idea in Genesis 2:20, where Adam exercised authority over the

animals by naming them, and where no animal was found that could help him carry out his appointed task.

Later, the Scriptures confirm humanity's superiority by putting us almost on the level of the angels in the present, and superior to the angels in the future. As we read in Psalm 8:5:

**You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor (Psalm 8:5).**

**One of the great things about Psalm 8 is it kind of echoes what goes on in Genesis 1:26-28. On the one hand, there's many things in the Bible that tell us about how great God is, about how vast the universe is, and even verses that tell us, the universe is great; you are a small thing compared to the universe. But, both Genesis 1:26 and 28, Psalm 8, they tell us about the distinction of humans being given a particular position in God's world, well, really in God's cosmos, as those who are created in his image. Now, the language "being created in his image" isn't specifically there in Psalm 8, but there's language about being created "a little lower than the angels" but also "crowned with glory," and then certainly restating the language about humans being given the dominion over creation — dominion as in good stewardship of the creation — this is what is repeated in Psalm 8. So, Psalm 8 helps us to see, or reminds us that, when God created us, he created us with great significance and purpose.**

**— Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.**

Unfortunately, many people today have tried to destroy the distinction between humanity and animals. For example, many believe that the human species is an accident of evolution. For them, the difference between human beings and animals is primarily historical, explained by a few bits of DNA. And while this view may still recognize that human beings are mentally superior to the animals, it denies the fundamental dignity we have as God's image, and undermines our authority as creation's rightful rulers.

Evangelicals have responded to these claims in many different ways. On one end of the spectrum, some of us believe that God created the world in six solar days. And many believe that Adam and Eve may have been created as few as six thousand years ago. On the other end of the spectrum, some of us believe that creation took much longer, and that Adam and Eve were created tens of thousands of years ago, if not more. But, regardless of which view we take, we should all agree that humanity was created to be superior to the rest of creation in both dignity and authority.

So far, our study of what humanity was like in the beginning has focused on the creation of our first parents. Now let's turn our attention to the composition of our beings.

## COMPOSITION

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When we speak of our “composition,” we have in mind the different parts that make up a human being. Scripture uses a wide variety of language to describe our constituent parts. It talks about our bodies, flesh, hearts, minds, spirits, souls, and many other things. But throughout the centuries, theologians have generally agreed that all those parts can be summarized in terms of two things: a physical part, usually called our “body”; and an immaterial part, typically called our “soul” or “spirit.”

Most evangelical theologians agree that human beings consist of the physical body and the immaterial soul, and that these parts are unified in one person. But Scripture’s teaching on these points is complicated by the diverse vocabulary it uses to describe us, especially when it comes to our immaterial souls. Even so, when the Bible summarizes our human nature in terms of the physical and the immaterial, it very frequently uses a single term for our physical part, and another single term for our immaterial part. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul wrote:

**Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 7:1).**

In this verse, Paul indicated that our human nature can be summarized in terms of two parts: the physical body and the immaterial spirit. And we find similar constructions throughout Scripture, including: Romans 8:10; 1 Corinthians 7:34; Colossians 2:5; James 2:26; and 1 Peter 4:6.

**The Bible teaches that humans consist of both a material part called the body and an immaterial part called soul, spirit, heart, a variety of terms like that. And both of these parts of human nature are essential and will be part of our initial nature in creation and will eventually be a part of our nature in the resurrection, so we don’t eventually become only a soul or only a spirit. Eventually the body will be resurrected. So, both of these are parts of human nature that have both a present and a future significance.**

— Dr. John Hammett

In line with these understandings, our discussion of our human composition will divide into two parts. First, we’ll see that each human being has a physical body. And second, we’ll address the fact that we also have an immaterial soul. Let’s turn first to our physical body.

### PHYSICAL BODY

Scripture uses a number of terms to refer to the physical or material aspects of our human nature. Most frequently, it uses the word “body” to say that human beings are made of real, physical substance.

As Jesus said of our human nature in Matthew 10:28:

**Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).**

In this verse, Jesus used the term body to refer to our physical qualities in distinction from our soul, or immaterial qualities.

Besides using the term “body,” the Bible also speaks of our physical qualities as “flesh,” in places like Colossians 1:24; “flesh and blood,” in 1 Corinthians 15:50 and Hebrews 2:14; and “flesh and bone” in Genesis 2:23. And the term “strength” refers to our physical capacities in Deuteronomy 6:5, and Mark 12:30.

Obviously, the body consists of many different parts. At times, the body is referred to collectively as the sum of its parts, as in the term “members” in Romans 7:23. But the Bible also identifies many parts on their own, like hands, arms, feet, eyes, and so on. But while we could create a very long list of every body part that Scripture mentions, it would serve little purpose. Following Scripture’s lead, theologians have been content to understand each of these parts as belonging to the larger whole we identify as our physical body.

Now, it’s important to recognize that our physical bodies aren’t just temporary; they’re necessary aspects of our existence, and important parts of our human nature. Our bodies begin when we’re conceived, and they remain with us throughout our earthly lives. And even though our physical bodies are separated from our immaterial souls at death, they continue to be part of us. This is one reason that Scripture often speaks of the dead as existing in their graves, and identifies dead bodies as the same people they were in life. We see this with regard to Jehoiada, who was said to be buried with the kings in the City of David in 2 Chronicles 24:15, 16. And in Acts 13:36, Peter spoke of David being buried with his fathers. Jesus’ friend Lazarus was also said to be personally in his tomb in John 11:17. And Jesus himself was said to lie in the grave before his resurrection in Acts 13:29, 30.

Furthermore, in the general resurrection at the end of the age, the body of every person that has ever died will be raised to face God’s judgment. At that time, our souls and bodies will be reunited, and they will never be separated again. The redeemed will rise to new life in the new heavens and new earth. But the wicked will rise to condemnation and everlasting bodily torment. Listen to Jesus’ words in John 5:28-29:

**A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the Son of Man’s] voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28-29).**

With this understanding of our physical body in mind, let’s address a second aspect of our composition: our immaterial soul.

## IMMATERIAL SOUL

As with the body, Scripture uses a variety of terms to refer to the immaterial aspects of our human nature. One of the most common terms is “soul,” which often translates the Hebrew word *nephesh* or the Greek word *psuché*. These words generally refer to the entirety of humanity’s immaterial nature, but they sometimes refer to an entire human being, including the physical body. For example, Genesis 2:7 tells us that when God breathed the breath of life into Adam, Adam became a “living soul,” or *nephesh*. In this instance, it means he became a living, breathing human being. And in John 15:13, Jesus used the word *psuché* to refer to our bodily lives when he explained that the greatest love is to lay down our *lives* — *psuché* — for our friends.

Another of the most common terms for our immaterial parts is “spirit,” which typically translates the Hebrew *ruach* or the Greek word *pneuma*. Both terms often refer to the entire immaterial aspect of human nature, and in this sense, they’re relatively synonymous with the words for soul. However, “spirit” can also refer to a variety of other things, such as “breath,” “wind,” or even an attitude or demeanor, as in the phrase “spirit of timidity” in 2 Timothy 1:7.

Besides these terms, Scripture has many words for various aspects of our immaterial being. For instance, “mind” commonly identifies the seat of our moral, intellectual, and rational thought, as in Romans 7:23. And “heart” sometimes identifies our inner lives, or the immaterial source of our thoughts, will, feelings and emotions, as in 1 Samuel 16:7, and 2 Timothy 2:22. Even the Hebrew term *me’eh* normally translated bowels, womb or inward parts, refers to our immaterial being in places like Psalm 40:8.

And of course, the Bible also has many other terms for various parts of our immaterial being, including our conscience, desires, reason, thoughts, mind, and a wide variety of emotions. In general, as with our bodies, theologians have understood all these parts as belonging to the larger whole we identify as our immaterial soul or spirit.

**We have descriptions in the Bible about how the human being is described with a soul and mind and the heart and spirit, and some of these terms are synonymous, they’re overlapping, but they do have different functions. So, the heart is a metaphor of the spiritual core and the center of the person. Mind can be part of the heart, will can be part of the heart, emotions are in the heart. So, the heart thinks, the heart chooses, the heart believes, the heart feels. Spirit and soul are also sort of overlapping. So, the heart would be like the center of the spirit and the center of the soul, but there is not quite interchangeable use between spirit and soul. They’re similar. From what I can tell, “spirit” is used for the immaterial part of the human being; and then angels are spirits, God is a spirit. So, it’s non-physical entity. “Soul” is used to refer to the whole being including the spirit and the body. And so, even when somebody’s died, they can be called a soul, but they’re usually not called a spirit after death. So, it’s an overlapping usage. I don’t think it’s indicating that spirit is one part and soul is a different part. It’s just different ways of talking about**

**the same deep spiritual reality that a human being is, and the point to be that there's more to us than the body and there's complexity even though it's a spiritual, invisible, non-physical kind of thing. So, it's a little complicated.**

— Dr. John McKinley

With this basic introduction to our immaterial soul in mind, there are three related ideas that deserve closer attention: the origin of our souls, the immortality of our souls, and an alternate view of our immaterial composition known as “trichotomy.” Let's begin with the origin of the soul.

## Origin

There are several views regarding the origin of the human soul. Some theologians — called “creationists” — believe that God creates an individual soul for each human being when the person is conceived. This view draws support from passages like Zechariah 12:1, which says that God forms the spirit of man within him. Creationists also cite passages like Isaiah 42:5, and Hebrews 12:9, which indicate that God is the creator of our souls.

Other theologians, called “traducianists,” believe that human beings inherit their souls directly from their parents. In this view, the souls of our parents beget our souls in much the same way that their bodies beget our bodies. Traducianism is often used to explain why people are born with sinful souls, since it's hard to explain why God would create a soul that was already sinful. Traducianists rely on passages like Romans 5:12, which implies that we inherited our sinfulness from Adam through ordinary or natural generation, and Hebrews 7:9, 10 which teaches that Levi was seminally present in his ancestor Abraham.

We can be certain that our souls come from God. But how that happens isn't quite clear. So in these lessons, we won't take a firm position on either side of the argument.

**A lot of people expect the Bible to tell us about the origin of our soul and how it came and how it was made. The Bible doesn't clarify these questions, but it tells us that man is not just a physical body; he does have a non-physical part. Man has a body, a spirit and a soul. The Bible says that when God created man, he blew into him and he became a living spirit. That's the spiritual part. The Bible does not tell us how it came, but that it's present, and that we need to take care of it. This part of man is not satisfied by bread or normal physical things. Augustine explained it this way: We have a need to have Jesus in our life to fulfill us in both the physical and spiritual lives.**

— Dr. Riad Kassis, translation

Having spoken of the origin of our immaterial soul, let's briefly address its immortality.

## Immortality

The Bible teaches that our souls continue to exist after our bodies die. While our bodies lie in their graves, the souls of the wicked suffer temporary punishment in hell, and believers enjoy temporary blessings in heaven. This occurs in what theologians call the "intermediate state," or the time between our lives on earth now and the general resurrection when Christ returns. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:8:

**We ... would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).**

Paul's point was that the immaterial aspect of our human nature survives death. And if we're believers, our soul goes to be with the Lord. Scripture speaks in similar ways in Luke 23:43; Acts 7:59; Philippians 1:23, 24; and Revelation 6:9.

Something similar is true for unbelieving souls. But instead of enjoying the Lord's presence in heaven, they suffer in hell. As Jesus taught in Luke 12:4-5:

**Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more... Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell (Luke 12:4-5).**

Although hell is a place of death, it's important to recognize that death in Scripture isn't a matter of ceasing to exist. Rather, it's a matter of falling under God's condemnation. So, from the perspective of punishment and blessings, the souls in hell are dead. But from the perspective of existence, those souls continue forever.

After the intermediate state of temporary punishment and blessing, our souls will be reunited with our bodies in the general resurrection. At that time, we'll go to our final, permanent destinations. The wicked will suffer bodily and spiritually in hell. But as believers, when our resurrected bodies are united to our immortal souls, we'll live bodily and spiritually with Christ in the new heavens and the new earth forever.

Now that we've considered humanity's immaterial soul in terms of its origin and immortality, we should mention the doctrine of trichotomy.

## Trichotomy

As Christians, we know that human beings aren't merely *physical* creatures. After all, Scripture talks about our immaterial souls in a wide variety of ways. The most common view among evangelical theologians and scholars is the one we've already described, which is called "dichotomy," or the bipartite view. This is the doctrine that says human beings are composed of *two* fundamental parts: body and soul.

Even so, not all evangelical theologians believe that our composition is best described in terms of a physical body and an immaterial soul. Some theologians instead affirm the doctrine of “trichotomy” or the tripartite view. This view says human beings consist of *three* parts: body, soul and spirit. Trichotomy primarily appeals to a small number of verses that distinguish between the human soul and spirit. For instance, Hebrews 4:12 says:

**The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12).**

Trichotomists argue that this verse presents the soul and spirit as distinct immaterial parts of human beings. Similar arguments are made from 1 Corinthians 15:44, and 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

Based on verses like these, trichotomists argue that the spirit and soul are not the same thing. Our soul is typically identified with our lower immaterial functions, such as those that animate our body, and create our desires and appetites. By contrast, our spirit is associated with our higher immaterial functions, including those that connect us to God.

But whether we affirm dichotomy or trichotomy, we should acknowledge that many evangelicals hold the other view in good conscience. And we should emphasize that both dichotomists and trichotomists agree that human beings are partly physical and partly immaterial.

**Bipartite and tripartite views of the human being have been discussed for a long time, and both have some exegetical authority... So, we shall not war over that, and it's not significant enough a question to hold one as orthodox and the other as heterodox.**

— Dr. Ramesh Richard

The composition of our beings tells us that both our bodies and our souls are important. Sometimes we can be so focused on spirituality that we fail to care for our own physical needs, or for the physical needs of those around us. Or, more often, we emphasize the importance of physical life on earth to the point that we fail to give proper attention to our spiritual development. But our composition as body-soul beings encourages us to recognize the importance — and the interrelatedness — of both. If we're truly spiritually minded, then we'll honor God with our bodies in the physical world, and we'll care for the physical needs of others. And if we truly seek to use our bodies to glorify God and do his work, it will produce spiritual growth in our hearts and souls.

So far in our lesson on what human beings were like in the beginning, we've looked at the creation of humanity and the composition of our beings. Now let's turn to our last major topic: humanity's initial covenant relationship with God.



## COVENANT

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When God created Adam and Eve, he didn't just set them free on the earth and let them run wild. He created them for a purpose: to build his earthly kingdom. He gifted them with the abilities and the help they needed to accomplish the task. He set rules requiring them to be loyal and to work diligently. He explained the blessings they'd receive if they obeyed him, and the punishments they'd endure if they didn't. In theological terms, we can say that God established a covenant relationship between himself and humanity.

Throughout the history of the Old and New Testaments, God entered into formal relationships with his people. The terms of these formalized relationships were often written down in what Scripture calls "covenants," translated from the Hebrew word *berîth* and the Greek word *diatheke*. These covenantal relationships resembled ancient international covenants, especially treaties between great emperors or "suzerains" and the vassal kingdoms that served them.

These ancient treaties shared three features: the suzerain's benevolence toward his vassal, the loyalty the suzerain required of his vassal, and the consequences that would result from the vassal's loyalty or disloyalty. And these treaties, or covenants, continued throughout the generations, so that the successors of the vassals would continue to serve the successors of the suzerains. In a similar fashion, God's covenants record his benevolence toward his people, explain the requirements of the loyalty they owe him, and describe the consequences for loyalty or disloyalty to those requirements.

Now, in the record of humanity's creation, in Genesis 1–3, the Hebrew doesn't use the term *berîth*. And the Septuagint, the early Greek translation of the Old Testament, doesn't use the word *diatheke* there, either. As a result, some theologians deny that the relationship between God and Adam can rightly be called a covenant. Even so, Scripture strongly suggests that God made a covenant with Adam, and with the rest of humanity through Adam.

For one thing, God's relationship with Adam contained all the normal covenant elements. God was clearly a sovereign, superior king over Adam. And, as we saw earlier in Genesis 1:28, God appointed humanity as his vassal or servant kings and instructed them to rule over creation on his behalf.

Additionally, God's relationship with Adam included God's benevolence, the requirement of Adam's loyalty, and the consequences for Adam's obedience or disobedience. We'll look at these covenant elements more closely in a moment. So, for now we'll simply point out that the presence of these elements demonstrates the existence of a covenant relationship.

For another thing, God's covenant relationship with Adam is assumed later in Genesis in the account of Noah. In Genesis 6:18, God told Noah:

**I will establish my covenant with you (Genesis 6:18).**

Here, the word "establish" translates the Hebrew verb *qum*. This is the normal word for confirming an *existing* covenant. The normal verb for creating a new covenant is *karath*.

So, when God said that he would “establish” his covenant with Noah, he meant that he would confirm with Noah a covenant relationship that already existed. And God’s relationship with Adam is the only relationship in Genesis that would appear to be in view here. This interpretation is confirmed by Hosea’s reference to Adam’s covenant. You’ll recall that Hosea 6:7 says:

**Like Adam, they have broken the covenant — they were unfaithful to me there (Hosea 6:7).**

Beyond this, Jeremiah 33:20, 25 refer to a covenant that binds creation itself. This covenant appears to have been made during the creation week, and so it would naturally include Adam and Eve as God’s vassals.

Another proof that God made a covenant with Adam is that God’s relationship with Adam paralleled God’s relationship with Christ. Paul wrote about this extensively in Romans 5:12-19. And God’s relationship with Christ was a covenant. This fact appears repeatedly throughout Hebrews 7–13. And Jesus himself mentioned it at the Last Supper. In Luke 22:20, Jesus told his disciples:

**This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (Luke 22:20).**

Admittedly, as we said before, Moses didn’t use the word *berîth* to describe God’s relationship with Adam. But regardless of what we call it, we can be confident that the arrangement between God and Adam shared all the characteristics of a covenant. And historically, theologians have tended to agree. For instance, theologians have often referred to the relationship between God and Adam as the “Adamic covenant,” because Adam was the head over his people, and the first human administrator of the covenant. They’ve also referred to it as the “covenant of life,” because it would have resulted in everlasting life if Adam hadn’t broken it. They’ve called it the “covenant of creation,” because it was made during the creation week and carries implications for the entire created order. And they’ve called it the “covenant of works,” because it promised life on the condition of humanity’s works of obedience.

**“Covenant of works” refers to an administration in the early chapters of Genesis in which God came to Adam and told him in Genesis 2 not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day that he ate of it he would surely die. The covenant of works held out to Adam life and death. If Adam disobeyed God then death would be the result. Had Adam obeyed God, continued in obedience to God, which he didn’t, then confirmed life would have been the result. And Adam was a representative person, as Paul teaches in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. And what that means is that when Adam obeyed or disobeyed, and in this case he disobeyed, he did so as the representative of his posterity, so that when he sinned, and death**

**came into the world, his sin was reckoned to his posterity and so death to them.**

— Dr. Guy Waters

We'll consider God's covenant with Adam in terms of the three primary features of covenants we mentioned earlier. First, we'll look at God's divine benevolence toward humanity. Second, we'll examine the human loyalty God required from Adam and his race. And third, we'll consider the consequences for humanity's obedience and disobedience. Let's begin with God's divine benevolence.

### **DIVINE BENEVOLENCE**

God's benevolence is the goodness and kindness he expresses toward his creatures, like the good things he did for Adam and Eve in Genesis 1, 2. For example, God created Adam and Eve in his image, and elevated them to a position of authority over the rest of creation. David wrote of this benevolence in the familiar words of Psalm 8:4-6:

**What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet (Psalm 8:4-6).**

When David asked, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" he was acknowledging that humanity didn't deserve the kind of attention we'd received from God. And David was particularly impressed by God's benevolence in giving Adam and Eve, and their descendants, authority over creation.

Another way God expressed benevolence in his initial covenant with humanity was by providing shelter and sustenance. In particular, as we learn in Genesis 2:8, he allowed Adam and Eve to live in the Garden of Eden, and he also supplied them with all the food they needed. In Genesis 1:29, God told Adam:

**I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food (Genesis 1:29).**

God's covenant benevolence was on full display after Adam fell into sin. In Genesis 2:17, God had warned Adam that humanity would die if they transgressed his law by eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But when they ate it, they didn't die — at least not physically. Instead, God provided a way for them to be redeemed, and poured out saving grace on them. And he continued to show that grace to generation after generation of his people, to everyone that repented of sin and turned to God for salvation.

**In Genesis 1 and 2, God created everything for the sake of mankind; not just for Adam and Eve, but for all of their descendants. [Indeed], after the Fall, all of mankind continues to enjoy that initial creation. What’s even more amazing is that when [our] Lord Jesus Christ walked the earth, many of the things he announced, preached on, and used as examples are [also] in Genesis 1 and 2, [such as] the stars he saw [in the sky] that also led the wise men to worship him. And when he preached in the fields, he especially mentioned the birds that neither sow nor reap. All of these became excellent preaching parables. This also leads us to think that when the Lord comes again in the future, the glorious light that will appear in the new heavens and the new earth was already recorded wonderfully in Genesis, [because] God created it in the beginning. I believe that one of the reasons God created these things in the beginning was to serve this very special purpose.**

— Rev. Peter Liu, translation

With this understanding of God’s divine benevolence in mind, let’s turn to the human loyalty his covenant requires.

## **HUMAN LOYALTY**

To demonstrate God’s requirement of human loyalty, theologians have often pointed to Genesis 2:17, where God commanded Adam not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And while it’s true that this was part of the loyalty God required, his commandments went well beyond this one point of prohibition.

Theologians have different ways of describing these obligations, but many say that Adam received the full moral law from God, which was later summarized in the Ten Commandments. For example, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, completed in 1647, describes Adam’s obligations this way in chapter 19, sections 1 and 2:

**God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience ... This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments.**

In this lesson, we’ll limit our investigation to two types of human loyalty God required. First, God placed priestly obligations on Adam and Eve. And second, he gave them royal obligations over the rest of creation. Let’s look first at humanity’s priestly obligations.

## Priestly Obligations

Adam's priestly role in the Garden of Eden is apparent both because the Garden served as an earthly sanctuary, and because Adam and Eve did the work of priests. As a sanctuary, the Garden was the precursor to the tabernacle and later the temple. In fact, the furnishings and decorations of the tabernacle lead many theologians to conclude that it was intended as a replica of the Garden of Eden. The tabernacle's lampstand resembled the Garden's tree of life. The cherubim that decorated the curtains of the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant recalled the cherubim that guarded the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:24.

And just as the Garden of Eden was a precursor of the tabernacle and temple, Adam and Eve were precursors of the priests that ministered in those sacred buildings. For example, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. According to Leviticus 16, God later manifested his presence only to his high priest, and only in the most holy place of the tabernacle and temple. The tasks Adam was assigned in the Garden also point to his priestly work, because they're described with the same technical language as the work of the priests in the tabernacle. In Genesis 2:15, we read:

**The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it (Genesis 2:15).**

The Hebrew verbs *avad*, meaning “work,” and *shamar*, here translated “take care,” are both rather common and can mean many things. But together they form a technical phrase describing priestly work. For example, in Numbers 3:8, we read:

**[The Levites] are to take care of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle (Numbers 3:8).**

**In the creation account, Adam and Eve are created in God's image not only to rule and subdue, but also to represent. They are supposed to, just like the priestly role in Israel — the priests were representations or go-betweens, mediums, between God and mankind — so Adam and Eve are made to do the exact same thing. They are to rule, to serve, to obey, and thus represent God on earth, which is the exact same thing that, when you move throughout the patriarchs, when you move into the nation of Israel and the Torah, when you move into the New Testament and the Great Commission or the Spirit coming upon us in Acts 1:8 to go be witnesses, all that is rooted in Adam and Eve's creation as image-bearers and being made in the likeness of God, not only to rule like him, but also to show what he is like, which is the primary role of a priest.**

— Prof. Jeffrey A. Volkmer

God's covenant with Adam was, and still is, binding on all humanity. So, humanity is still responsible to God for fulfilling the moral obligations that flow from these priestly duties. For example, we're all called to serve God and worship him, to cultivate and guard the creation, and to turn the whole world into a sanctuary that's fitting for God's presence. And in the church, God has given us additional obligations, such as rendering sacrifices of praise and obedience to him, and proclaiming his goodness to the world. As Peter told the church in 1 Peter 2:5, 9:

**You ... are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices ... [Y]ou are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:5, 9).**

Having explored human loyalty in terms of Adam and Eve's priestly obligations, let's discuss their royal obligations.

## **Royal Obligations**

As we saw earlier in this lesson, God appointed Adam and Eve to rule over creation on his behalf. And he commanded them to increase the human race in order to spread its rule over the whole earth. This was humanity's royal obligation. Listen again to God's command to humanity in Genesis 1:28:

**Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground (Genesis 1:28).**

**So, one of the most common ways of understanding what "image" and "likeness" language means in Genesis 1 is that God created us to be his representatives and to stand in as his rulers in creation. And we draw that from the broader cultural context when Moses was writing, where "image" and "likeness" was often used to describe pharaohs and kings, and so to say that pharaoh is made in "god's image" is to say that he is God's representative ruler in that particular context... I think it's really important to notice that God doesn't place Adam and Eve in the Garden in Genesis 2 and then tell them to just lay in the grass and count the clouds and, I don't know, watch the sheep nearby. Right? He gives them a task and a purpose in the Garden, right? He places them there to tend and keep the Garden so that this vocation of working with creation, to help tend and shape and mold creation so that it becomes the kind of creation that God wants it to be, a**

**creation, really, in which all of creation flourishes. That's part of what it means to be human. That's how God has created us is to exercise this representative function in this creation that God has placed us.**

— Dr. Marc Cortez

The great King of heaven ordained humanity as his royal vassals to expand his kingdom beyond the initial borders of their dwelling in the Garden of Eden. His goal was for them to multiply, to spread out, and to care for the whole earth in the same way they cared for the Garden. Ultimately, humanity was to turn the *entire* planet into God's earthly sanctuary as an extension of his heavenly kingdom. And this is still our obligation today. In the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:10, Jesus taught us to pray:

**Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).**

It's always been humanity's task to help God extend his heavenly kingdom to earth. Jesus' instructions for our prayers reflect that. And this task falls especially on his faithful people in the church. We ought to view each of our vocations as aspects of the dominion that God has given us over the earth. And we ought to use our skills and our resources to care for and govern his creation. Whether we're in our homes, at our jobs, in the church, or anywhere else, we're called to represent and to serve our great King in everything we do.

Now that we've looked at God's divine benevolence in his covenant with Adam, and at the requirement of human loyalty, let's consider the consequences of humanity's obedience and disobedience.

## CONSEQUENCES

God's covenant with Adam promised blessings for humanity if they showed him loyalty, and curses if they showed him disloyalty. And as we've mentioned, the consequence for disobedience was death. In Genesis 2:17, God told Adam:

**You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die (Genesis 2:17).**

Now, ancient Hebrew legal texts normally stated the maximum penalty that *could* be imposed, rather than mandatory penalties that *had* to be applied. But whether God's words in Genesis 2:17 meant the maximum penalty or the mandatory penalty for disobedience, humanity's disloyalty to God's covenant carried dire consequences. Clearly, our first parents were deserving of death.

One consequence of Adam and Eve's sin was that they fell under God's condemnation, suffering the type of judicial death we mentioned earlier. And Paul's teaching about spiritual life and death in Romans 8:10 indicates that they died spiritually,

and condemned all their natural descendants to the same fate. Further, as we read in Genesis 3:22-24, God cast them from his presence in the Garden of Eden. And because of their sin, creation itself was put in bondage to corruption.

**What the effect of Adam's sin was, is fundamentally to open the door for evil. Their sin let evil into the world, and as a result of that, everything is infected by evil, everything is undermined by evil, and in particular, the purposes of God are derailed by evil. So, it affects humanity, our bodies, our minds. It affects the very fabric of creation so that it is subject, as Romans 8 says, to frustration, longing for its own restoration. And of course, relationally, it affects our relationships with one another as humans, but most significantly, our relationship with God... And so, evil becomes the problem that needs to be solved. And while it just took one act of disobedience to open the door for evil, it's a little bit like unscrambling an egg. It's a big job to undermine evil, which has seeped in so deeply into the created order. That's why the act of Adam and Eve's sin takes just a few lines in the Bible, but the act of undoing it takes well over a thousand pages.**

— Dr. Tim Foster

Despite all the terrible consequences of humanity's sin, God didn't kill our first parents outright; he left them physically alive. And more than this, God extended benevolence to them in their new state of sin. For instance, he implicitly restored them to spiritual life, as evidenced by his assumption that they would raise their children in faith, and by Eve's expressions of faith in Genesis 4:1, 25. Beyond this, God promised to send a redeemer to rescue them from *all* the consequences of their sin. This promise appears in God's curse against the serpent, who had tricked Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. Listen to God's words to the serpent in Genesis 3:15:

**I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Genesis 3:15).**

The Redeemer would ultimately be Christ, who would keep the covenant perfectly, earn God's covenant blessings, and graciously share his blessings with those he redeemed.

Now, the history of Adam and Eve in Genesis doesn't explicitly describe all the blessings of the Adamic covenant. But Genesis 1:22, 28 implies that multiplying and ruling over the earth were themselves blessings of obedience. This idea is confirmed by later Scriptures that point to the blessing of progeny, such as Deuteronomy 7:14, and the blessing of rule over the earth, such as 2 Timothy 2:12.

Further, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden in Genesis 3:22-24 was intended, at least in part, to prevent their access to the Tree of Life. If they had remained obedient, they would have been able to eat its fruit, allowing them to live forever in God's fellowship and immediate presence. So, we can conclude that everlasting life



would also have been a blessing of their obedience. And this conclusion is strengthened by Romans 5:12-19, which teaches that Jesus obtained life for us by succeeding where Adam had failed.

Moreover, because Adam was the covenant head of the human race, the consequences of his loyalty and disloyalty were matters of life and death for all humanity. Tragically, Adam and Eve were disloyal to God, so that they and all their ordinary or natural descendants were subjected to sin, corruption and death. But God's divine benevolence still held sway, and provided a way of escape through his promised redeemer Jesus Christ.

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson on what human beings were like in the beginning, we've looked at the creation of humanity in terms of the biblical accounts and their historicity, and the superiority of humanity over the rest of creation. We've also described our composition as beings with physical bodies and immaterial souls. And we've considered humanity's initial covenant relationship with God in terms of his divine benevolence, the human loyalty he requires, and the consequences of obedience and disobedience.

It's astounding to think about the dignity and honor God invested in humanity at creation. Obviously, sin has caused tremendous problems for us. But knowing God's design for human beings is a critical first step towards understanding his plans for overcoming that sin, and for restoring humanity and the rest of creation to its intended glory.

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