

One

Setting the Son in the Garden: The Covenant with Adam

Suggested Reading: Genesis 1–2

What Is the Meaning of Life?

What is the meaning of life? Isn't that the question everyone wants answered?

When I was a teenager, my friends and I were hilariously entertained by Douglas Adams's book series *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. The main character in that series, Arthur Dent, eventually discovers that the meaning of life is "42." The author Adams was being cynical—a staunch atheist, he didn't think there *was* any meaning to life. To ascribe a random number to the question was his clever way of making the point. At the time, I thought Adams's books were funny because—as a Christian—I didn't take them seriously. Had I *really* thought there was no better answer to the meaning of life than "42," it wouldn't have been funny. It would've been depressing.

The search for meaning in life is related to the search for our origins. “Why are we here?” is tied up with “Where did we come from?” People have always been fascinated with genealogies—at least with their own. I remember the amazement I felt when my oldest uncle gave my family a copy of the Bergsma genealogy he had constructed—a narrow roll of paper several feet in length, tracing our ancestors back to strange-named and long-forgotten Dutch farmers and merchants of the 1700s. There was even a hint that we might have some blood in common with the Dutch royal family.

Nowadays, the Internet boasts several sites that will help you trace your ancestry, and they do brisk business. Why? Why do people even care who their forefathers and foremothers were?

Somehow, knowing where we came from helps us figure out where we ought to go. Knowing one’s ancestors gives meaning to one’s life here and now.

Maybe that’s why the Bible devotes a fair amount of space telling us about our first father, Adam, and his wife, our first mother, Eve. The Bible is pretty specific about the reasons Adam was made and what his role in the universe was to be. Moreover, Adam was and is a model for all of us. The purpose (or meaning) of his life remains the purpose of each of our lives.

Before we take a look at the purpose (or *purposes*) of Adam’s life, bear with me for a moment while we sketch in some background. After all, Adam wasn’t the first thing God created.

The Creation Week: Building a Temple

Everyone knows about the “six days of creation” described in the book of Genesis. Usually the subject comes up nowadays when people discuss “Creationism” versus “Darwinism,”

or when local or statewide school boards have to decide on science texts and standards for the public schools. People naturally want to ask, “Are these six days literal?” “Is the earth really so young?” “How does this story square with the Big Bang and evolution?”

Those are all good questions, but we need to put them on the back burner for the moment because those are not the primary questions the writer of Genesis wanted to answer. Instead, the inspired author wanted to teach us something about the purpose for which God made the world in the first place. The Bible begins with a summary statement: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gn 1:1). Then it gets into the specifics of how God went about it.

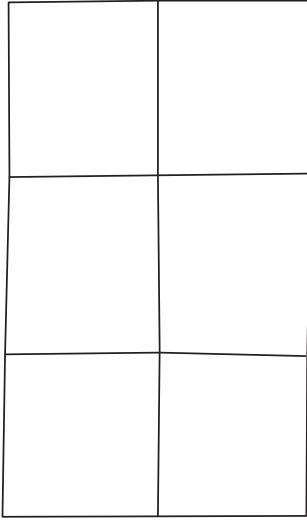
The next verse says, “And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the face of the waters” (Gn 1:2). The picture here is of a world—or universe—that exists, but is not finished yet. It has two problems: it is “formless” and “void.”

Genesis was written in Hebrew, and in Hebrew the words “formless and void” make the fun phrase “tohu wabohu”—it is a rhyming phrase that describes a situation of chaos, like our phrase “higgledy-piggledy.” More specifically, “tohu” means “formless,” that is, “unformed” or “unshaped.” “Bohu,” on the other hand, means “void” or “empty.”

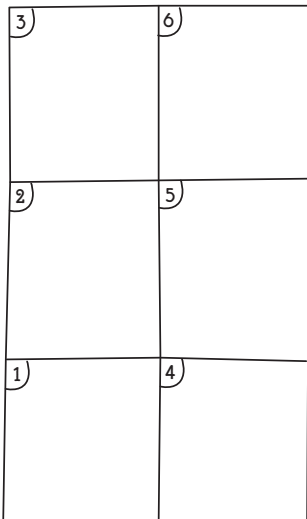
So, God calls the cosmos into existence, but it has two “problems”: it is unformed and empty. It needs to be formed and filled. That is what God sets out to do in the following six days.

It’s not too hard to draw this out. Drawing helps us remember things and makes it easier to explain it to others, like your kids, a catechism class, or even your spouse. (By the way, when you draw the sketches in this book yourself, it’s best to use something that erases, because sometimes the figures change as they’re being filled out.)

To illustrate the days of creation, let's draw a tall box and divide it into six squares. Make the box as big as you can because we'll need to draw inside each square:

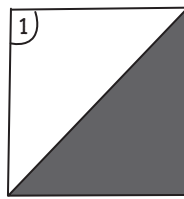


Now number the squares one through six starting in the bottom left-hand corner, like so:

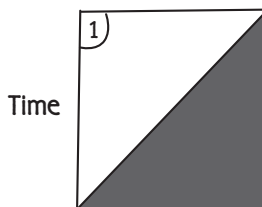


Now, the squares on the left-hand side (boxes 1-3) represent the first three days of creation, in which God addresses the “problem” of formlessness. He is going to form and shape the creation, starting on the first day, when he creates the light and the darkness, calling the one “day” and the other “night.”

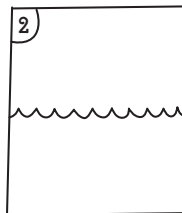
This is easy to illustrate. Just cut square one in half diagonally. Fill in the bottom half with the side of your pencil.



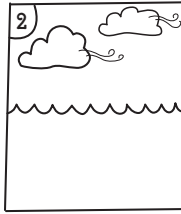
There. You have just illustrated the first day, the creation of light and dark, day and night. This is the creation of “Time,” so write the word “Time” to the side of your diagram like so:



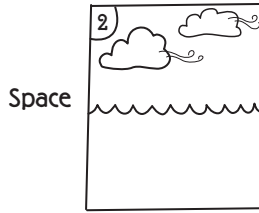
On the second day, God creates the great expanses of space, the skies, and the seas. These are not difficult to sketch. For the sea, make a squiggly line like so:



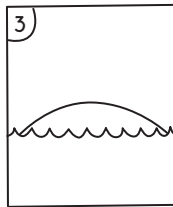
And for the sky, a cloud or two will work:



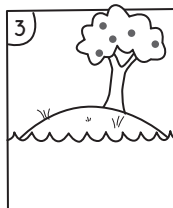
God has now formed “Space,” so write “Space” to the side like so:



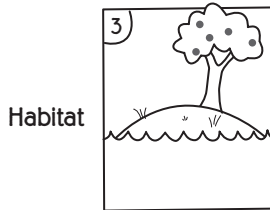
On the third day, God creates the dry land and the vegetation. Let’s make an island in the “sea” with a simple curve.



A tree and a few blades of grass will represent the vegetation.



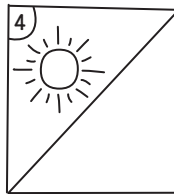
Let's write "Habitat" to the side. The dry land and vegetation will provide a home for animals and eventually for humans.



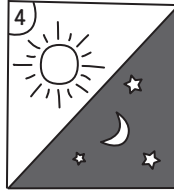
At the end of the three days, God has solved the issue of "formlessness." The cosmos is formed, but it remains "bohu" or "empty." The next three days (days 4–6) address this issue.

First, the realm of "Time"—the day and night—is filled with inhabitants: the sun, moon, and stars. These are set in place to mark the passage of time and to indicate the "seasons," in Hebrew *mo'ed* ("Moe-AID"), which means specifically "liturgical seasons." In other words, the sun, moon, and stars mark the passage of time so people on earth will know when to worship. The sun and moon are there to tell you when to go to Mass!

The sun can be a simple circle with some radiating lines:

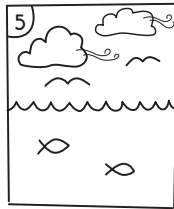


The moon is a basic crescent, and the stars are easy enough to draw:

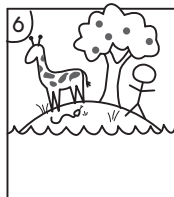


The realm of “Time” is now inhabited.

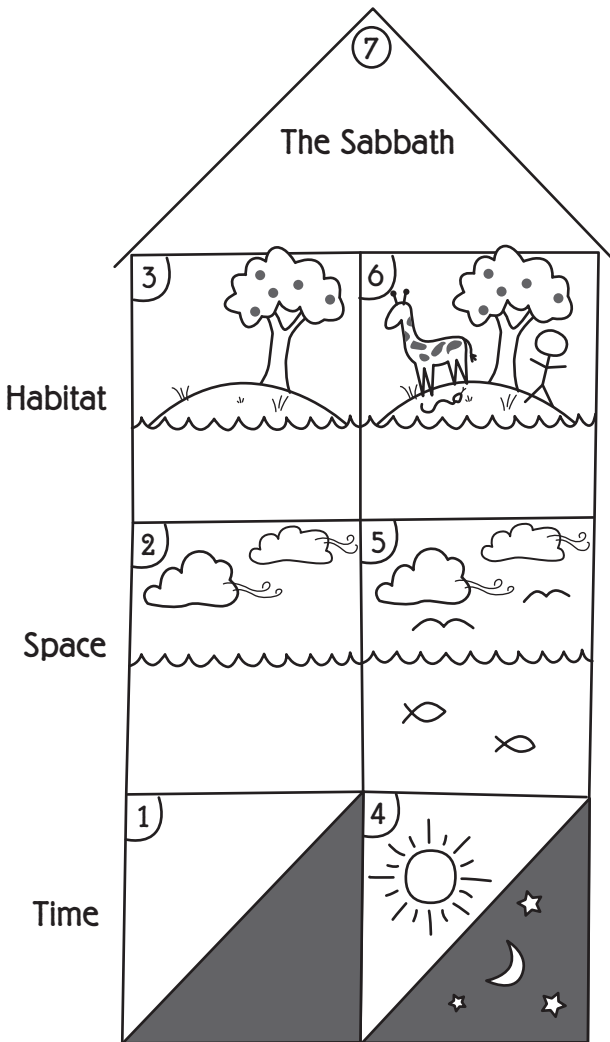
On the fifth day, God moves on to filling the great spaces with the birds and the fish. A few well-placed curves can serve as fish and fowl:



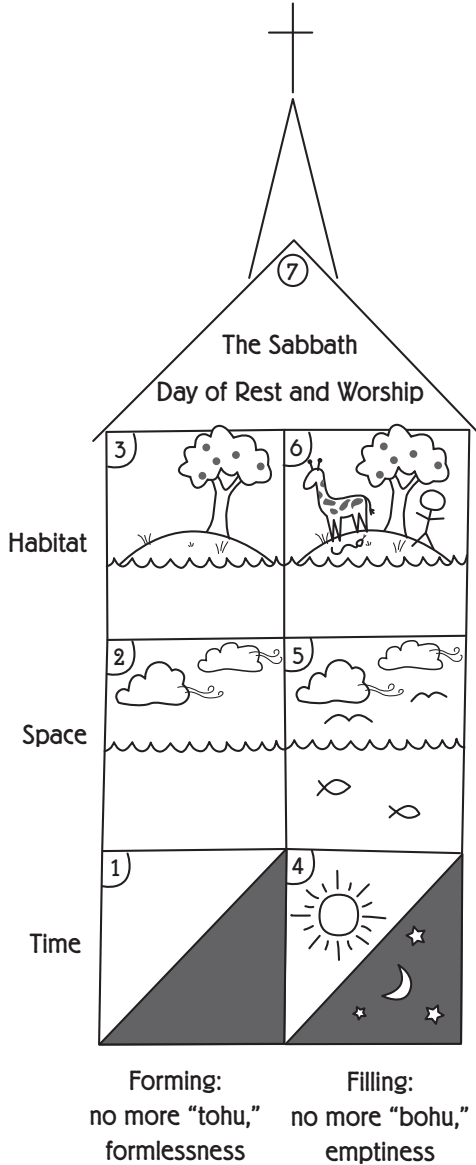
Just the “Habitat” remains now. On the sixth day, God makes the animals and man (Adam). For the animals, do the best you can. I like to make a snake and a giraffe. For Adam, a stick figure will do:



Creation is almost complete—except for the climax, the “roof” on the whole building. That’s the seventh day, the Sabbath, the day of rest and worship. Let’s mark that by putting a roof on top:



The structure we've been building is a temple. As Christians, we mark a house of worship with a cross, so if you want to put a steeple and cross on the top, go ahead:



Congratulations! You've just drawn a picture of the temple-universe that God built in seven days. You may ask, how do we know this "building" of creation is a temple? Here are some reasons:

1. The language of creation resembles the language of Moses building the Tabernacle in the wilderness. (Compare Genesis 2:1–3 with Exodus 39:32, 42–43.)
2. Some scriptures speak of the creation as a temple (Ps 78:69; Ps 148).
3. In other ancient writings from about the same time as Genesis, it is clear that people considered the whole universe a kind of temple for worship of God (or the gods). It was a common idea in ancient times.



So, now we can return to asking our questions about the creation of Adam. What was the purpose of his life? The first thing the Bible tells us about Adam is that he was created "in the image and likeness of God." What does that mean? If we fast-forward to Genesis 5:3, we get a clue as to what it means to be "made in the image and likeness." In Genesis 5:3 we read, "When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own *likeness*, after his *image*, and named him Seth." So what does "image and likeness" mean? It means *to be a son*. The fancy theological term is *divine filiation* (*FIL-ee-AY-shun*)—we're talking about being a child of God.