

Life's Big Questions

Part 2 – Why did God create the universe?

Genesis 1:1-2:14

The univocal witness of Scripture is that God created the universe for his own glory. He made the stars to shine for his glory. He made humanity to bring him glory. He saves and judges for his glory. We may rightly paraphrase the first question in our shorter catechism: Q – “What is the chief end of *the universe*?” A – The chief end of *the universe* is to glorify God.”

The first two chapters of Genesis introduce us to Eden. It was a place where the man and woman enjoyed fellowship with God and each other without the corruption of sin and decay. It was where the man and woman walked with God for he was with them. If the entire cosmos is the arena of God's glory (and it is) then Eden was the temple of God's presence with his people. No wonder the tabernacle and later the temple were designed to reflect the verdant nature of Eden. And no wonder the New Jerusalem will bear the same sorts of features. All of this points to the fact that God made everything for his glory and for the gladness and fullness of his people.

Main Idea: In glorifying himself God satisfies his people's longings for relationship, purpose, and satisfaction.

1. God created the universe for his glory.

Isaiah 48:11; Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:15-16

- The Hebrew word for *glory* (kabod) means “weighty.”
- God's glory is the display of his divine nature, his perfections, and his extraordinary power.
- Worship is the most immediate and appropriate response to God's glory.
- When man seeks God's glory he is satisfied. When man seeks his own glory he is doing something fundamentally disordered and so the results are always disastrous. Therefore, there is perfect harmony between God being glorified and man experiencing his highest good.

2. God made Eden to be his earthly temple.

Ezekiel 28:13-18 – The prophet Ezekiel calls Eden a temple, the “garden of God,” the “holy mountain of God,” containing “sanctuaries,” and an Adam-like figure wearing the garments of a priest.



God's presence in his temple fills the longings of his people for relationship, purpose, and satisfaction. The opening chapters of Genesis point us toward how God intends those longings to be satisfied. Specifically, Eden teaches us how God intends to dwell among, give dignity to, and satisfy his people. Since God made us for himself we should not be surprised that “our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him.” We should also expect that God's answer to human longing is precisely the opposite of what the world prescribes.

A) Eden as the dwelling place of God.

Eden is presented as a sanctuary where God dwells among his people. He is described as walking with them. The tabernacle and later the temple were to be understood as that place where God dwelled in the midst of his people. The land had been defiled by sin so the people were instructed to build a tabernacle which would become sacred space among them. During the Exodus God commanded his people to keep their camp holy because he “walks” in their midst” (Deut. 23:14).

Later it would be through his incarnate Son that God would “tabernacle” among his people (John 1:14). Jesus is the true and better temple. He is the answer to our longing to once again walk with God in his sanctuary.

B) Eden and the longing for purpose.

God created the man and woman to work; to be productive. This is part of mankind’s inherent dignity as image-bearers of God. God placed them in the garden to keep it (Gen 2:15). This was man’s original “priestly” work. He was to cultivate the garden so that it might grow and expand to eventually cover the face of the earth.

Immediately after giving Adam “the creation mandate” God called to obey his commands. Adam, as a priest, guards the Garden-temple of Eden by keeping God’s commands. Obedience to the word of God is essential to fulfilling the purpose of God.

C) Eden and the longing for satisfaction.

Eden is described with verdant imagery reflecting the abundance of provision for the man and woman. That verdant imagery will later be reflected in the tabernacle and temple (lampstand, basin of water, bread of the presence).

- The Tree of Life (2:9)

The tree of life stood in the middle of the garden producing fruit that would give life forever. This tree of life served as the model for the lampstand outside the Holy of Holies. The lampstand was fashioned to resemble a tree trunk with seven branches of flowering branches (Ex 25:31-40; 37:17-24). This served as a picture of the life-giving fruitfulness to be found in God’s presence.

- The River of Life (2:10-14)

In Revelation, a river flows from the new Jerusalem, with “the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month” and “the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1-2). This river of life flows out from God’s presence toward the nations. From Eden the river flowed out toward the rest of the earth where the nations would gather. From both Eden and the temple there was a gradation of holiness as the presence of God flows from the innermost place (Eden/Holy of Holies) outward to all the earth.