

# In the beginning

## Part 6 – Why did God give humans rulership over this world?

Genesis opens with a scene of formlessness and emptiness, into which God then brings all sorts of “forms,” like days and nights, the sky above and oceans below, dry land that produces fruit-bearing trees and vegetation, and the sun and moon to control the passage of time and seasons. He then fills the emptiness that existed before with all sorts of creatures that can fly in the sky, swim in the oceans, and roam the land.

The formlessness and emptiness, therefore, are now gone. In their place is a beautiful and fully functioning world, into which God introduces humans, and the world is such that it can support these humans perfectly. And there we could leave it, with humans happily living off the land, along with all the other land creatures and birds, and no more needs to be said. We can close the book on this happy scene, of a fully functioning planet that needs nothing more to keep it going. The world is at peace.

So why would God mess it all up by having humans take on the role of rulership over the planet? And why would the Earth need any sort of rulership in the first place when it was already functioning perfectly without it? One has to suppose, then, that the act of human rulership would bring something to the Earth that it would not have without it. But what, pray tell, would that be?

We have two clues in **Genesis 2**, the first one being the garden God created and the man he put into it “to work it and take care of it” in **verse 15**.

So God designed a garden that **under human care** could be developed into something MORE than what was growing quite naturally on its own. And he also wanted this one human to do more than just living off the land and what it was producing naturally - like other creatures were doing - because God had deliberately filled the creation with all sorts of hidden treasures that **only humans** could discover. What animal or bird, for instance, would understand the value or significance in **Genesis 2:12** of the “gold of that land being good,” or the purposes that “aromatic resin and onyx” in that same verse could be put to? Humans, however, could, because that’s what God designed **humans** for.

So here's our first clue as to why God gave humans rulership over the Earth. Rulership meant discovering and nurturing what God had tucked away in his creation, starting with the secrets of the soil in the garden, but with hints already in Genesis 2 of other useful and wonderful resins, metals and minerals to be discovered in the rocks and trees as well. In other words, God was taking humans deeper into his creation on a marvelous voyage of discovery to bring to light, or bring to the surface, what he'd already placed in his creation **just for humans** to discover - like "**bronze and iron** for tools" in Genesis 4:22.

He equipped humans alone, therefore, with the gift of curiosity to see what was over the next hill, or under the next rock, and to humans alone that he gave an interest in the natural resources he'd created and how they could be used and developed. That's why it comes so naturally to us humans, and not to tigers and giraffes, to be interested in botany, biology, geology, chemistry, agriculture and metallurgy and all sorts of other **Sciences** (as we call them today) because that's what rulership of this planet needed - it needed scientists.

**Science** by definition is "the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment." And wasn't that exactly what God had in mind when he created a garden for a man to work on and care for? To properly care for that garden so everything flourished, the man would need to know "the structure and behaviour" of the various plants and trees. He'd need to observe which plants flourished in sunlight and which in the shade, for instance, and which plants grew well on sandy soil and others in rich, loamy soil.

But with God at his side, like a father teaching and guiding his child, the man could experiment to his heart's content to find out which plants could be developed into a food source, and which plants were just beautiful to look at or smelt nice. And God was in no hurry. The man could take all the time he needed to find out what God had created each plant and tree for, because this is what God had **equipped the man for**. In time, therefore, the man would become an expert in the classification of plants and trees according to their use and purpose. He would pioneer the whole process of scientific method and discovery.

What we see in Genesis, then, is the making of the first scientist, who, "through observation and experiment" kicks off the "systematic study" of the physical, natural world he finds himself in, because that's how **God** wanted the rulership of this planet done, by humans learning about nature first.

And if the man had concentrated on that, think what might have happened. The more the man studied into what God had created the more he would have learnt about God. And he had God right there with him as well, to help him see the qualities and personalities of each plant and tree, so the man would soon become a genius in the workings of the natural world. And because the man had been made in God's own likeness, he would also sense the **love** God had for his creation, and he would pick up on that so he too would have felt a deep love and appreciation for it, bringing him closer and closer to God.

And according to Scripture, God looked upon this man as his own son, so this was more than just a command from a superior God to a lowly man to look after a garden, it was meant to be a joy for both God and man in a father and child relationship as they both delighted in uncovering the secrets God had tucked away in his creation. How wonderful things **could** have been, then, as the garden began to flourish and blossom into a highly productive and beautiful oasis under the shared love and care of God and man together.

And think of the fun they would have had discussing the personalities of each plant and tree too. Some trees, for instance, are real bullies and will push other trees out of the way. Others, like oak trees, prefer to show off and look grand by standing alone, whereas other trees, like birches, prefer to grow in clumps close together. But all this was why God made man in his image and equipped him to care for a garden, so that, bit by bit, by discovering "the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world," the man would love what God had given him to do, and his love and respect for God would grow as well.

It was through this process of rulership by scientific method and discovery, therefore, that God was revealing himself, or as Paul put it in **Romans 1:20**, "By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see the mystery of his divine being" (The Message). And isn't that what God was after from the very beginning in Genesis, that by creating a man in his likeness capable of taking "long and thoughtful looks" at his creation, the man would come to marvel at the mysteries unfolding before his eyes, and realize how amazing God was and want to work closely with him?

It helps explain the willingness of the man to go along with what happened next in **Genesis 2:19**, when God brought "all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever name the man called each living creature, that was its name."

Have you ever wondered why God did that, and what it had to do with man's rulership over the planet? Clearly, God was adding to the man's education, because he'd started off with a garden for the man to learn about plants and trees, and now he's moving on to animals and birds - but why separate them from the plants and trees as if they're in a different category? Is there a separate and **second clue** in this verse, then, about the KIND of rulership God was setting up over the planet through humans?

If so, then why DID God introduce animals and birds to the man separately? Well, God himself explains what led up to it in **Genesis 2:18**, that it wasn't good for the man to be alone, so, God said, "I'll make him a helper, a companion" (The Message). So that's the context and the reason why God had now moved on to animals and birds. It had everything to do with the man himself, which in the hindsight of history and knowing what men are like, is easy to understand.

The man on his own, for instance, would probably have done a splendid job of looking after the garden. He would have sunk himself into his work, like men do, and he could very well have become a brilliant scientist and an expert on the uses and needs of plants and trees, and taken his knowledge beyond Eden into the surrounding countryside with enormous enthusiasm. Think of the men all through history who have dedicated their lives to exploration and discovery, and loved every minute of it, thoroughly fulfilling what God intended humans to do in their rulership of the planet as far as making known what he'd tucked away in his creation - but - it's also noticeable how odd these men can be. They spend months and years away from their families on voyages of discovery, or in libraries and laboratories, and they become terribly boring and self-centred because of their inability to talk about anything outside their own interests.

If rulership of the planet was left to just men, therefore, we'd have a world full of great explorers and great naturalists, like Charles Darwin, but most of them would be so eccentric or single-minded that they could not relate to or respond to the needs of everyday life or to people, as our own history has shown. Men in our world have done a great job of being scientists, yes, but it's clear from what God did in verse 19 that humans being scientists was **not all** he had in mind for how this planet should be ruled. God now turns to something far more intimate in verse 19, by bringing animals and birds to the man personally for the man to give them names, and also to see if there's a "suitable helper" or companion for the man among these creatures too. So again, is there a clue here that helps us see what GOD meant by "rulership," and how it was supposed to be done?

It seems so, because what's happening in verse 19 is quite different to what God gave the garden to the man for. God did not ask the man to name the plants and trees, nor did he talk about trees and plants being suitable helpers or companions for the man. So there's something different going on here that God is adding to the meaning of rulership. It's more than just scientific research to learn about his creation, it hints more of how humans should view and treat his creation, as something very personal and intimate, because this too would reveal what God is like, and the kind of rulership he meant for humans to practice.

Knowing this helps explain why God brought only animals and birds, and not fish and lizards. Animals and birds, as **Genesis 2:19** explains, were "formed out of the ground" just like the man in verse 7, meaning, of course, that animals and birds were far closer in make up and nature to the man, so it was far more likely that a companion would be found from one of them, rather than a king cobra or an octopus. In our day now as well we're still more inclined to make pets and companions out of mammals and birds, rather than ocean creatures and reptiles.

Does it mean that God brought every bird and mammal in existence to Adam while he sat on a rock scratching his head trying to come up with thousands of different names while the sun kept getting lower in the sky and the animals started getting restless and the birds decided to head off back to the trees to roost for the night? Or was God simply bringing the animals and birds from that region of the world, since they'd be the ones the man was already familiar with?

Either way, it was **the act of naming** that gives us our second clue as to the **type** of rulership that God had in mind for humans, and why that type of rulership was - and still is - so important for the planet. It helps, therefore, if we read this verse through the eyes of an Israelite to whom it was originally written, because an Israelite knew the significance of naming in the culture of that time, so he'd have no trouble understanding why naming was so important to God.

The Israelites had lived in Egypt for centuries by the time Genesis was written, so they were already very familiar with why the Egyptians named their birds and animals. Ancient Near Eastern people had three main reasons for naming an animal or bird. First of all, a name revealed a creature's function or personality. Was the animal or bird just meant to be beautiful like an ibis, or regal like a lion, or could it be domesticated for human use like a cow or a horse, or was it simply meant to be a lovable pet, like a cat or a dog? All such birds and animals existed in Egypt at the time Genesis was written, and all were valued for these reasons.

A name gave an animal or bird recognition for what it had to offer, which led to it being valued and cared for, which is clearly what God had in mind as well when he personally brought birds and animals into the garden for the man to name, because what the man needed was a companion. This was more than just identifying each creature's function or personality, then; it involved knowing the animal or bird so intimately it would stir a real affection for it.

And the Israelites would have understood that, because the Egyptians they'd grown up with were hugely attached to their animals and birds. Cats were especially prized for their company, and every Egyptian household had at least one pet cat, and if the house caught fire the Egyptians would save their cats before they'd save their family. If you killed a cat you were put to death, and if cats were smuggled out of Egypt a special government cat department sent out agents to get the cats back. And when a cat died the family members shaved off their eyebrows as a sign of grief, and the cat was then mummified in the belief that death was only a temporary separation and one day owners and their pets would be reunited and live happily ever after together in the next world.

Dogs were just as highly prized as companions and pets too. Egyptian tombs, monuments, temples and literature all reveal the intimate relationship between dogs and their masters. It was the Egyptians who invented the dog collar, and many of the mummified remains of Egyptian dogs still have their leather collars inscribed with their names, like Brave One, Reliable, Good Herdsman, Blacky, and even Useless, all terms of obvious endearment. The Egyptians loved their dogs and often had them buried alongside them so they could continue their companionship in the afterlife. There was even a special cemetery just for dogs.

So, just as scientists through the ages have very much fulfilled God's first lesson in rulership, by taking long and thoughtful looks at what God has created, the ancient Egyptians very much fulfilled God's second lesson in rulership. They deeply cared for their animals and pets, and in many cases fed them and cared for them better than their own family members. There's even evidence that their care for their animals improved through the years as they learnt about the needs and natures of each creature. And billions of people since then have also treated their pets and livestock with equal care and affection, and also given them names that clearly demonstrate their deep attachment to them.

Such things come easily to us so, even without realizing it we've been living the first two steps in rulership as God wanted it done.

But we've only been scratching the surface, because we haven't had God alongside us to guide us. What would have happened instead if we'd included God all along as well? He could have shortcutted all sorts of discoveries for us, things like uranium and lithium that took **us** nearly 6,000 years to discover. And we're still only nibbling at the power of magnetism and solar power. Think what else we've missed out on, then, or haven't discovered yet, **without** God's help.

Who really knows, for instance, what God has programmed into a dog, or a dolphin, or a chimpanzee? We are amazed at what we already know they are capable of, but what other secrets has God tucked away in these creatures that we haven't even tapped into yet? And why did God bring birds to the man if there wasn't something remarkable to be discovered in them too? We marvel at how birds can migrate to an exact spot thousands of kilometres away, and how homing pigeons can find their way home, and we still don't know how they do it, or **how it would help us and the planet if we did know**. God has so much in store in his creation, and by giving the man rulership (AND his personal guidance) it would have brought humans into closer and closer companionship with the birds and animals as their amazing personalities and capabilities blossomed and grew under human care and affection.

So that's two reasons why animals and birds were given names in Ancient Egypt, first of all to identify or classify the function and purpose of a creature, and secondly, as a way of expressing affection, just like parents have affectionate nicknames for their children. There was also a third reason for naming, and that was authority, because if you gave something a name, or changed its name (like God changed Jacob's name to Israel), it meant you were in a position of power and authority over what you named. So when God brought animals and birds to the man to be named, he was giving the man authority over what he named, and God backed up the man's authority too, by accepting the names the man chose.

The man could've got a big head, of course, thinking he now had the power to do whatever he liked with God's creation, but in **Genesis 2:20** this is also the occasion when the man is given a name too. Up to this point he's just "the man," but now for the first time he's called **Adam**, and who else but God could have named him that? In naming the man, then, God was stating HIS authority over him. Adam, therefore, was **not** free to do as he wished with the creation.

But was this authority in the sense of "you'd better obey or else," or was it tied in with the other two reasons for naming?

That's an important question to answer, because it has everything to do with rulership of the planet and how God wanted it done by humans. The first two reasons for naming, for instance, were about coming to know a creature so well that you feel a real affection for it, and the name you give it reflects that. It has nothing to do with lording it over the creature, or making it your slave, or treating it like a dumb animal. Instead you feel a deep responsibility for the creature's well-being, and for the rest of its life you want only the best for it.

And that's how the Egyptians viewed their authority over the animals and birds. Rather than lording it over them they actually made several birds into gods, like Thoth the ibis goddess, and Horus the falcon god. They made animals into gods too, like Bastet the cat goddess, Anubis the jackal god, Apis the bull god, and Sebek the crocodile god. All these animals and birds were treated like royalty. Sacred crocodiles were fed better than most humans, on choice cuts of meat and honey cakes. And the Nile River goose, despite its vile temper, was allowed free run of the house and garden, because it was the sacred bird of the god Geb. Geese had their own sacred lakes too, where they were well looked after.

It all sounds somewhat extreme, but the Egyptians treated their animals and birds well, because they believed they were sacred. And the Israelites would have picked up on that in Genesis when God brought the animals and birds to Adam to name. They could see in the naming of the animals and birds that God valued them as something very special - exactly like the Egyptians did, and for the same three reasons too - for their function, their personality, and their well-being. All three points, then, would open their Israelite eyes, and ours too, as to what God meant by rulership. It meant valuing what he has created, and in particular those birds and animals that provide us with companionship and help - **and** with their beauty and personality that tell us so much about what God is like too.

All three points would then have formed Adam's response when God then moved on to the next stage of the man's education in rulership, when God brought a woman to him in **Genesis 2:22**. By this time Adam's mind was well-tuned to what rulership meant, so when God presented him with a woman, he was eager, I imagine, to not only share his scientific knowledge with her, he was also pumped up and ready to value and love her for her beauty, her personality, her companionship and her help.

Imagine, then, what such a man would have done for this world with this woman he adored, the God he loved, and a creation he was fascinated by.



What we've got is a man of lovely child-like innocence being taught by a God who loves him dearly as the means by which he can immensely bless this world he's created and reveal the kind of God he is. It's all in the make up of this one man and the marvelous voyage of discovery that he and the man, and now his woman as well, and all the other creatures they value, can share together.

And through the centuries there have been men who understood this vision of rulership in Genesis, who in child-like humility looked to God to open their eyes to his purpose and to his creation, and to the value of the woman that God created for him (and probably brought to him personally as well), and to the responsibility God has given humans to care for the creation, believing, just like the Egyptians, that it is sacred because it was designed specifically by God to fill human life with beauty, endless fascination and depths of understanding about God himself that enable us humans to love him dearly in return.

It's at this point in Genesis, then, that we leave the man waxing eloquent about his woman, unhampered by weird ideas about sexuality or gender equality, or wanting to see how much money they can make from chopping down the trees in the garden of Eden. I see a picture of what some people have managed to create today, of a farmer and his wife setting up home with Daisy the cow, Nuisance the goat, a stable of horses all called Faithful, free range chickens and geese, and much loved cats and dogs of course, and inside their home are shelves of books about animal husbandry and animal behaviour, and elsewhere on the farm experiments are going on with plants and trees, and what the soil needs to make them flourish. It's a picture of why God gave humans rulership over this world: He gave us rulership to make this world a wonderful place of learning, caring, valuing and companionship with animals and humans alike.

And because of Jesus Christ such a world is coming - but - a taste of which we can also have **now** as the Spirit of Christ inspires us in our own little training ground in rulership to keep learning, caring, valuing and enjoying companionship with animals and humans alike, knowing one day we'll get the chance to rule the world as God intended Adam to rule it. And God's faithfully tuning our minds to that right now, so we're ready to go when Jesus returns as the second Adam to get rulership of this planet right at last.

And getting it right isn't difficult, because God already built these things into us by making us in his image, but there was one more step to go in the man's and woman's education, and that's the one they failed on, so we'll get into that next...