

Genesis 1:26: Image of God

John Nordin revised, Jan. 2008

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind¹ in our image, according to our likeness;

image **צֶלֶם** tselem {tseh'-lem} Gen 1:26, 27 (2), 5:3, 9:6, etc.
icon **εἰκόνα**

- Numbers 33:52 you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their figured stones, destroy all their cast images (**בְּשִׁכָּרֹת**, **χρῶματα**), and demolish all their high places.

likeness **דְמוּת** demuwth {dem-ooth'} Gen. 1:26, 5:1, 5:3, etc.

- Isaiah 40:18 To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?
- James 3:9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God (**ὁμοίωσι θεοῦ γεγονότας**).

"Humankind" – a collective noun

"Image and likeness" – how are these two different, if they are?

"Male and female" – difference? both required for the full image?

Possible meanings

- Spiritual qualities and capabilities (memory, intellect, will)
- External form (but splitting up person is foreign to OT)
- God's counterpart
- God's representative
- Sarna, p. 12: "... the added dimension of his being the symbol of God's presence on earth. While he is not divine, his very existence bears witness to the activity of God in the life of the world."
- Jesus as the fulfillment of the image
- Some unknown attribute

This image is not extensively developed in rest of Bible

Genesis 5:1-2 This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind,¹ he made them² in the likeness of God. ² Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them "Humankind"¹ when they were created.

Psalms 8:3-8 ³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; ⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? ⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. ⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, ⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

How has the fall changed the image & likeness?

What counts as evidence for the meaning of these terms?

and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the

dominion **רָדָה** radah {raw-daw'} Gen 1:26, 28, Numb. 24:19, etc.

- 1 Kings 4:24 For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphshah to Gaza, over all the kings west of

birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,² and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." ²⁷ So God created humankind¹ in his image, in the image of God he created them;² male and female he created them.

- the Euphrates; and he had peace on all sides.
- Wisdom 9:1-3 "O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy, who have made all things by your word, ² and by your wisdom have formed humankind to have dominion (δεδουλεύειν) over the creatures you have made, ³ and rule the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul,
- Sirach 17:1-4 The Lord created human beings out of earth, and makes them return to it again. ² He gave them a fixed number of days, but granted them authority over everything on the earth.^{1 3} He endowed them with strength like his own,¹ and made them in his own image. ⁴ He put the fear of them¹ in all living beings, and gave them dominion (κατακυριεύειν) over beasts and birds.²

"Having charge." "Humans are responsible." The content of the rule must be found in other passages.

subdue κατακυριεύσατε

dominion ἄρχετε

Qur'an 2:30: Remember, when your Lord said to the angels: "I have to place a trustee (khalifa) on the earth," they said: "Will You place one there who would create disorder and shed blood, while we intone Your litanies and sanctify Your name?" And God said: "I know what you do not know."³¹ Then he gave Adam knowledge of the nature and reality of all things and every thing.

Qur'an 38:26: "O David, We have made you trustee (khalifa) on the earth. So judge between men equitably, and do not follow your lust least it should lead you astray from the way of God."

"Image" seems to be explicated by "dominion"

"fruitful" – to what extent is sexuality involved?

This command to be done while still in Eden?

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Context & Issues

- Ecology and Stewardship vs. Domination and use of nature
- Image of God: "It presents an inverted view of God, not as the one who reigns by fait and remoteness, but as the one who governs by gracious self-giving." Walter Brueggemann.

Sources:

Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, (Interpretation), John Knox, 1982,
 Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, Eerdmans, 1990.
 Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary, Jewish Publication Society, 1989.
 W. Sibley Towner, *Clones of God: Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible*, Interpretation v59:4, October 2005, p. 341-356.