

“IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE CREATED THEM”

*How Genesis 1:26-27 Defines the Divine-Human
Relationship and Why It Matters¹*

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INTRODUCTION

Genesis 1:26-27 has long generated a tremendous amount of lay and scholarly interest, and rightly so. Not only does it hold pride of place, with the rest of Genesis 1, as the introduction to the Bible, but it also describes the creation of the first humans in relation to God himself using the unexpected terms *image* (*šelem*) and *likeness* (*dāmūt*):

God said, “Let us create humanity² in our image, according to our likeness. Let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and over the beasts, and over all the earth, and over everything that creeps on the earth.” So God created humanity³ in his image. In the image of God he created them.⁴ Male and female he created them. (author’s translation)

¹A version of this chapter appears in my book *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humanity in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in Light of the mis pī pīt pī and wpt-r Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

²The Hebrew noun is *ʾādām*. In this context, it refers to humanity as a whole, as indicated by the plural verb *wəyirdū* (“let them rule”) and the reference to male and female in the following verse.

³Here, the noun is paired with the definite article (*hāʾādām*). This phrase refers specifically to the man Adam in Gen 2:7-8, 15-16, 18-23, 25, and Gen 3:8, 9, 12, 20, 22. However, it refers collectively to humanity (as opposed to the plant and animal orders) with singular verbs in Gen 6:1-2, 4. The same is true in Gen 6:5, where, presumably, both men and women had become increasingly wicked. Further, the possessive suffix in the phrase “his heart” (*libbō*) in Gen 6:5, as the ESV renders it, is grammatically masculine and singular because its antecedent, *hāʾādām*, is grammatically masculine and singular, not because “his” refers to the man Adam. The NIV attempts to make the meaning clear by translating the phrase as “the thoughts of the human heart,” although this is a bit wordy in English.

⁴The object of the verb is the masculine singular pronoun *ʾōtō*, “him” or “it,” because its antecedent, *hāʾādām*, is a third-person masculine singular noun. Here it refers, as does its antecedent, to human-

What the terms *image* and *likeness* mean has been debated for centuries. In this chapter I will suggest that to be created in God's image is to be God's kin, specifically, "son," with all the responsibilities and privileges sonship entails. I will then examine how Israel's status as "created in the image" was embodied in the law and what this can teach us about bearing the image of God in our world today.

INTERPRETATIONS OF GENESIS 1⁵

The dominant view throughout the history of interpretation has been that these terms refer to a spiritual or mental similarity to God with which humans were endowed at creation. One early proponent of this view is the first-century Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria. Philo argued that because God is a spiritual, nonmaterial being, to be created in his image and according to his likeness *must* refer to an immaterial, spiritual correspondence. This was the prevailing view during the first two centuries of the church. It continued in popularity with Augustine, who claimed that human likeness to God consists in human memory, intelligence (or understanding) and will, all of which are necessary for knowing, understanding and loving God.⁶

Martin Luther agreed. He concluded, "When Moses says that man was created also in the similitude of God, he indicates that man is not only like God in this respect that he has the ability to reason, or an intellect, and a will, but also that he has a likeness of God, that is, a will and intellect by which he understands God and by which he desires what God desires."⁷

ity as a whole. The *ESV* translates the object pronoun as "him." This may be faithful to the grammar (unless "it" is intended—see below), but can be misleading in terms of meaning. The *NIV* and *NRSV* opt for the plural object pronoun "them." This captures accurately the sense of the Hebrew but does not convey the underlying masculine singular Hebrew pronoun. We could translate the second part of Gen 1:27, "In the image of God he created it," where "it" refers to the singular *hā'ādām* (humanity) earlier in the verse. This preserves both the Hebrew grammar *and* its meaning, but it is a bit awkward in English. I choose to follow the *NIV* and *NRSV* for grammatical reasons: *hā'ādām* in 1:27a is a collective; therefore its object pronoun is best rendered in English as a plural.

⁵What follows is only a cursory introduction to some of the major interpretations of *image* and *likeness* in Gen 1:26-27. For a summary of the history of interpretation of this passage, see Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research*, trans. Lorraine Svendsen (Lund: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1988); Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 147-58; and Edward Curtis, "Man as the Image of God in Genesis in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Parallels" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1984), 1-60.

⁶Augustine, *The Trinity* 10.12, as quoted in Jónsson, *Image of God*, 13n21.

⁷Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan,

This was also a common understanding among German scholars during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. August Dillmann argued that because God is spirit, image and likeness simply could not refer to a corporeal resemblance. The likeness, he inferred, must consist in humanity's mental capacity and desire for the eternal, true and good.⁸ Samuel Rolles Driver agreed, claiming that the image of and likeness to God was manifest in the human ability to reason and to comprehend moral and religious truth.⁹ Although there are many nuanced views within the broader category of a nonmaterialistic interpretation of the *imago*, it has been and remains the most popular category for explaining image and likeness in Genesis 1:26-27.

There is much to commend this interpretation. Although God has appeared in anthropomorphic form, both in theophanies and visions of the Old Testament and in Christ himself (Col 1:5; 2 Cor 4:4), many argue that the incorporeality of God is implied by the fact that God exists as Spirit (Gen 1:2; Num 24:2; 1 Sam 10:10; 19:20; Ezek 11:24; Mt 3:16; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 2:11), by prohibitions against image making (Ex 20:4; Deut 5:8), by direct references to divine formlessness (Deut 4:12, 15; Jn 5:37) and, perhaps most overtly, by John 4:24 ("God is spirit").¹⁰ I argue, however, that God's spiritual nature does not preclude divine self-revelation in other forms. While commands in Exodus 20:4 and Deuteronomy 5:8 forbid the creation of idols, they do not claim that God has no form. Similarly, Deuteronomy 4:12, 15 (compare Jn 5:37) states that Israel saw no form of God at Horeb, not that God is formless. Finally, the statement in John 4:24 does not mean that God is manifest only as Spirit. As noted above, the incarnation belies this conclusion. And while it is true that human beings are endowed with godly qualities and capacities and with gifts of reason, these should be understood as *results* of being created in God's image and likeness rather than as *definitions* of the terms. In sum, I suspect the

Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 337, as quoted in Nathan Jastram, "Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68 (2004): 12-13. However, Luther also understood the image of God to have a physical dimension. He believed that prelapsarian humanity was physically superior, having sharper eyesight and greater strength. The *imago*, according to Luther, referred to humanity's original righteousness, which was lost at the fall. Post-fall, humanity bears the image of sinful Adam.

⁸August Dillmann, *Genesis Critically and Exegetically Expounded* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 1:81-82.

⁹Samuel Rolles Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen, 1907), 32.

¹⁰I am not suggesting that Jn 4:24 defines God in his metaphysical being, only that this verse has been used, rightly or wrongly, to do so.

nonmaterial interpretations of image and likeness have more to do with Philo and Greek philosophy than with Genesis 1 and the biblical and ancient Near Eastern contexts, which are crucial for understanding these terms.

Despite the popularity of nonmaterial views of image and likeness, the idea that God has a form, and that the human body resembles it, is a prominent idea in rabbinic theology. The premier work on the subject remains Arthur Marmorstein's *Essays in Anthropomorphism* (1927), in which Marmorstein credits the followers of Rabbi Akiva and their literal reading of the biblical text with the development of an anthropomorphic understanding of God.¹¹ The argument, in short, is that God has a body because the Bible says so. At many points in the Old Testament, God is described in anthropomorphic terms: he redeems Israel with his outstretched arm (Ex 6:6), he smells the pleasing aroma of a sacrifice (Gen 8:21), his eyes run to and fro throughout the earth (2 Chron 16:9), the cry of the afflicted reaches his ears (Ps 22:24; Job 34:28), and so on. Further, the Old Testament reports theophanies in which God appears in human form. Ezekiel describes the Ancient of Days as having "a likeness with a human appearance" (Ezek 1:26 ESV). Daniel refers to God's clothing, the hair of his head and his being seated on a throne (Dan 7:9). In Daniel 7:13, the prophet describes the glorified Christ, ruler of God's kingdom, as "one like a son of man"—that is, with a human form.

Building on the idea that image and likeness refer to corporeality, Nöldeke relates the Hebrew term *image* (*šelem*) to its Arabic cognate (*šalama*), which means "to cut" or "to cut off" in reference to sculpture. He concludes that *image* in Genesis 1 thus refers to physical representation. This idea seems to be supported by Genesis 5:3, where Adam's fathering of Seth in his own likeness and after his image is analogous to God's creation of humanity in God's likeness (*damût*).¹² The German form critic Hermann Gunkel commented,

¹¹Arthur Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, vol. 2, in *Essays in Anthropomorphism* (New York: Ktav, 1968), 1-157, esp. 9, 32-35, 37, 56, 71. On the body of God see Meir Bar-Ilan, "The Hand of God: A Chapter in Rabbinic Anthropomorphism," in *Rashi 1040-1990: Hommage a Ephraïm E. Urbach*, ed. G. Sed-Rajna (Paris: CERF, 1993); Alon G. Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 171-95. On precise measurements of God's divine body see Martin S. Cohen, *The Shi'ur qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), and *The Shi'ur qomah: Texts and Recensions* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985).

¹²T. Nöldeke, "šelem und šalmawet," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 17 (1897): 183-87.

"God created Adam in his image; Adam begot Seth in his image. The second statement is very clear: *the son looks like the father; he resembles him in form and appearance. The first statement is to be interpreted accordingly: the first human resembles God in form and appearance.*"¹³

This material interpretation of image and likeness may seem far-fetched to those of us accustomed to thinking of God only in spiritual terms. Is not anthropomorphic language applied to God simply a poetic way of rendering, within the limits of human language, an indescribable reality? Can we reasonably conclude from these texts that God has a physical form? The proponents of the material view are right, however, to insist that we interpret Genesis 1:26-27 in light of Genesis 5:1-3. Image and likeness in Genesis 5 must have something to do with these same terms in Genesis 1. The primary weakness of the material view is that it interprets the terms too narrowly. Indeed, image and likeness can refer to physical similarity, but they are not limited to it.

A third view is that of interpreting image and likeness in terms of relationship. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth perhaps best represents this idea.¹⁴ This view notices that, when contrasted with the animals, humans are unique in their capacity to relate and respond to God, and, unlike the animals, they can enter into a covenant relationship with God. Two features of the creation account define this relationship. The first is the plural in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make," which Barth—following many others before him—interprets as a reference to the triune plurality of the one God. The second feature is the creation of humanity in two distinct genders (Gen 1:27). In being created male and female, humanity is both plural and differentiated and thus reflects relationship within the godhead.¹⁵ In short, according to Barth, image in Genesis 1 does not refer to qualities or characteristics; neither is it about physical form. Rather, it consists in the "analogy of relation": the relationship between male and female is in some way analogous to the relationship among the persons of the Trinity.¹⁶

¹³Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 113 (my emphasis). However, he did not fully exclude the notion that the likeness includes a spiritual component (113).

¹⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), III/1, 182-206; hereafter cited as CD III/1. See also F. Horst, "Face to Face: The Biblical Doctrine of the Image of God," *Interpretation* 4 (1950): 259-70.

¹⁵See CD III/1, 197; see also Jónsson, *Image of God*, 72-73.

¹⁶C. Westermann also understood image and likeness to refer to the divine-human relationship. He comments, "The uniqueness of human beings consists in their being God's *counterparts*. The relationship

One strength of this view is that it recognizes the relational component that the terms *image* and *likeness* imply. However, it falls short in that it fails to ground its case *in the text* and within its biblical and ancient Near Eastern contexts. The result is that implications (i.e., an intimate relationship that humans enjoy with God but that animals do not) are mistaken for meaning.

A fourth and final view of the image is that of the “royal representative.” In 1915, Johannes Hehn published an article explaining image and likeness in Genesis 1 in light of Babylonian and Egyptian parallels, which defined the king as the image of the god.¹⁷ He concluded that, like their Babylonian and Egyptian counterparts, these terms in Genesis are royal designations for humanity—that is, human beings are God’s royal representatives on the earth. Hehn’s work and the work of those who have developed his ideas¹⁸ have had a powerful influence in *imago Dei* studies. This view now prevails among biblical scholars,¹⁹ although regrettably it does not seem to have made its way into the church in any significant measure.

The strength of the “royal representative” view is that it seeks to interpret the terms in their ancient Near Eastern context. I suggest, however, that this is another case of mistaking implication for meaning. Humanity’s royal status is, rather, derived from its identity as defined by image and likeness—that is, humans are endowed with royal status *because* they are created in the image and according to the likeness of God. Thus, while understanding these terms in their ancient Near Eastern context was certainly an interpretive breakthrough, the royal status and representative function result from—rather than define—the image of God. The primary question of what it means that humanity is created in God’s image remains unanswered.

to God is not something which is added to human existence; humans are created in such a way that *their very existence* is intended to be their relationship to God” (*Genesis*, 156, my emphasis).

¹⁷J. Hehn, “Zum Terminus ‘Bild Gottes,’” in *Festschrift Eduard Sachau zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1915), 36-52.

¹⁸G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 58; H. Wildberger, “Das Abbild Gottes. Gen. I, 26-30,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (1965): 255, 488; W. H. Schmidt, *Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-Verlag, 1964), and *The Faith of the Old Testament: A History*, trans. John Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 194-98.

¹⁹For example, D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53-103; and Phyllis Bird, “‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 129-59.

IMAGE AS CORRESPONDENCE, KIND AND KIN

Genesis 5:1-3. In Genesis 5, image and likeness express correspondence:²⁰

This is the book of the generations of humanity. When God created humanity, he made it in the likeness of God.²¹ Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them humanity when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. (Gen 5:1-3, author's translation)

Seth is in some way similar to his father, yet he is not Adam, just as Adam and Eve are like God in some way, yet they are not God. The author gives no explanation of what constitutes the likeness, but the plain reading of the text suggests that Seth resembles his father simply because his father begat him. By analogy, humans correspond to God because God creates them. Thus, this correspondence is intrinsic to the relationship between Creator and created.²² When read in light of Genesis 1:26-27, to which Genesis 5:1-3 refers, the correspondence the author may have had in mind seems to be that of class. Seth is a human being, not a fish or a sheep, because his father is a human being. In short, to be created in Adam's likeness and according to his image means that Seth was created according to Adam's kind.

²⁰This same pairing of terms appears in a bilingual Aramaic-Akkadian inscription on a statue of an Assyrian provincial official from the ninth century BC. The statue, found at Tell Fakhariyeh in Syria, is referred to in the Aramaic text as both "the likeness (*dmwtj*)" (line 1; "this likeness" [*dmwtj zjt*] in line 15) and "the image (*šlm*)" of Hadad-yis'i, the governor of Guzan. The Akkadian version renders both Aramaic terms with *šalmu*, suggesting, as many others have noted, that "image" and "likeness" may be synonyms, both here and in Gen 5:3. See A. R. Millard and P. Bordreuil, "A Statue from Syria with Assyrian and Aramaic Inscriptions," *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982): 135-41; Randall W. Garr, "'Image' and 'Likeness' in the Inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh," *Israel Exploration Journal* 50 (2000): 227-34nn8-11.

²¹The traditional translation of this verse is, "This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created him he made him in the likeness of God." This is certainly possible, and it may be the correct translation. However, is it equally possible, and perhaps more so given the context, that *'ādām* here refers to humanity as a whole? The object pronoun *'ōtō* would thus be rendered "it," referring to the human class. This seems to make better sense of Gen 5:1 in its context, especially in relation to the following verse (5:2) and Gen 1:26-27 (see footnote 4 above). Note that the *ESV* renders the first *'ādām* as "Adam," but the next *'ādām*, four words later, it translates as the collective "man," as it does again in v. 2. We must mention that all but one (Gen 10:1) of the other nearly identical genealogical notices in Genesis refer to the lineage of one person: Noah (Gen 6:9), Shem (11:10), Terah (11:27), Ishmael (25:12), Isaac (25:19), Esau (36:1, 9) and Jacob (37:2). However, even this does not preclude the translation of Gen 5:1 I have suggested, as the term *'ādām*, even when "humanity" rather than "Adam" is intended, is also a singular (albeit collective) noun. Thus if *'ādām* in Gen 5:1a refers to "humanity," it does not depart from the structure of the genealogical notice in Genesis.

²²Westermann states that correspondence "is something given to humans by the very fact of existence" (*Genesis*, 356).

Genesis 9:5-6. In Genesis 9, the *imago Dei* appears as justification for the punishment of those who shed human blood:

And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning [demand an accounting]: from every beast I will require it. And from each human being I will require a reckoning for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed, because in the image of God he [God] made humanity. (Gen 9:5-6 NIV, adapted)

The reason for requiring the life of the murderer is “because in the image of God he made humanity” (Gen 9:6), with “in the image of God” fronted for emphasis. What is it about the nature of humanity as created in God’s image that requires the death of the murderer?

Genesis 9:6 states that when one pours out the blood of another, the Lord requires that the offender pay with his own lifeblood.²³ Second Chronicles 24 records one case in which this requirement is applied. As Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest dies, he cries out for the Lord to avenge his unjust death at the hand of the evil King Joash. God sends the Syrian army and even Joash’s own servants to execute divine vengeance. Joash is killed “because of the shed blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest” (2 Chron 24:25, author’s translation). Although God uses human agents, Zechariah understands that he is the divine avenger of Zechariah’s blood, as revealed in his dying words: “May the LORD see and avenge!” (2 Chron 24:22). The psalmist ascribes this same role to God, proclaiming:

Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion!

Tell among the peoples his deeds!

For he who avenges shed blood [*dōrēš dāmīm*]²⁴ is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted. (Ps 9:11-12 [Heb 9:12-13], author’s translation)

To avenge a kinsman’s blood was the role of the *gō’ēl*, often translated as “kinsman redeemer.” The term is better rendered “to act as a kinsman,”²⁵ the

²³Cf. Gen 42:22; Ezek 33:6, 10.

²⁴The term for “blood” in Ps 9:13 is the plural *dāmīm*, referring to dispersed blood—that is, blood that has been shed, spilled or poured out. See Gen 4:10 and P. Jouion and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), §136b; Wilhelm Gesenius, E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), §124n; and B. K. Waltke and M. P. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 7.4.1b.

²⁵Frank M. Cross, “Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel,” in *From Epic to Canon: History and*

duties of which included not only defending and maintaining the welfare and rights of one's relatives but also avenging the blood of murdered family members (Num 35:19, 21, 24, 27; Deut 19:6, 12; Josh 20:3, 5, 9; 2 Sam 14:11). The specific title given to the avenger was "the *gō'ēl* of the blood" or "the kinsman of blood," usually rendered "the avenger of blood" in English Bibles. Nowhere in the Old Testament is God referred to explicitly with this title. However, Zechariah's cry for the Lord to "see and avenge" and the psalmist's identification of the Lord as the one who avenges shed blood indicate that God was understood as fulfilling this role.

What does this reveal about God's relationship to humanity? If God is indeed the divine blood avenger, then God is humanity's *nearest kin*. Human beings are members of God's clan and are therefore kin to one another. For this reason, shedding human blood is fratricide.²⁶ Furthermore, to murder one's kinsman is to slay a member of *God's* family. "One who touches you," says Zechariah, "touches the apple of [the Lord's] eye" (Zech 2:8). As the divine blood avenger, the Lord may rightly take the life of the offender, whether he does so directly through divine judgment or through an appointed human agent.

To summarize, in Genesis 5:1-3 *image* and *likeness* are terms that *classify*. Seth's being created in Adam's image and likeness identifies him as a human being. Seth is Adam's "kind." In Genesis 9:6, "kind" is also further specified as "kin." The Lord demands the life of a murderer because humans are made in God's image. Humans belong to God's family; and God, as the divine kinsman and therefore blood avenger, avenges their lives. How does this inform our understanding of image and likeness in Genesis 1?

Literature in Ancient Israel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 4.

²⁶Gordon Wenham observes that Gen 9:5 "is the first time *'āḥ* 'brother' has been used since Gen 4, where the term is harped on to highlight the incongruity of Cain's action." He concludes, "*'āḥ* in Gen 9:5 is an allusion to Cain's murder of Abel" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* [Dallas: Word, 1998], 193). Kenneth Mathews also concludes that *'āḥ* in Gen 9:5 alludes to Cain's murder of Abel, and the reason he gives for the allusion is compelling: to demonstrate that "murder is fratricide by virtue of the inherent covenant all people have with God as created in his 'image.' We are to that fundamental degree all brothers and sisters in that we are all human" (Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996], 404). Whether *'āḥ* in Gen 9:5 refers to brotherhood and/or kinship rather than a fixed idiom meaning "each human being" or "one another," I think we are on firmer ground to suggest that humanity is a family based on the phrase *baṣelem ēlōhīm* in the following verse, Gen 9:6.

HUMANITY AS GOD'S "KIND"?

In Genesis 1:11-12, God creates vegetation, plants and fruit trees, all of which reproduce "each according to its/their kind." Three times in these two verses the phrase "according to its/their kind" is used to describe the correspondence between the plants and fruit trees that God created and the next generation of plants and fruit they produced. God also created the sea creatures and birds "according to their kinds" (Gen 1:21 ESV). He saw that it was good and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply in their respective domains.²⁷ God then made all the living creatures that inhabit the earth, each "according to its kind" (Gen 1:23-25), and saw that this, too, was good. In total, the phrase "according to its/their kind" is repeated ten times in these seven verses alone (Gen 1:11-12, 21-25).

Clearly, Genesis 1 emphasizes the creation and reproduction of each species according to its own distinctive type or class.²⁸ However, in the next two verses, the creation of the first human pair is not described as "according to its kind," as might be expected, but as "in the image of God." This juxtaposition of the repeated "according to its/their kind" with "in the image of God" suggests at least two things. First, Genesis 1 draws a sharp distinction between humanity (male and female) and the other created beings; second, just as the plants and animals were created according to their own type, humanity was made according to *God's kind*, metaphorically speaking. The author could have said this using the same words and grammatical construction (*lā + min*) as he did with the plants and animals, but he did not. Rather, he expressed human relationship to the divine using the terms *image* and *likeness*, terms that we know (Gen 5:1-3; 9:6) are *kinship* terms. Specifically, in Genesis 5:1-3 the terms denote the father-son relationship between Adam and Seth. Thus, it seems that to be created in the image of God is to be created as a "son" of God the Father.²⁹

²⁷The phrase "according to their kind" does not appear in Gen 1:22, but the implication is that the sea creatures and birds would respond to the command to be fruitful and multiply by reproducing according to their kind.

²⁸See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 2:577; and G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 8:289. To translate *lā + min* as "every kind," as the NRSV and NJPS do, misses the point that the plants and animals reproduce *within their own species*.

²⁹This is not to say that humanity is in any way divine. Keep in mind that Genesis 1 is more liturgy

YAHWEH AS FATHER

The notion of God as father is well attested elsewhere in the Old Testament, where it denotes Yahweh's relationship to corporate Israel, referred to explicitly as Yahweh's child. In Deuteronomy 32:6, Yahweh is named as Israel's father who created, made and established them. Twice in Jeremiah Yahweh identifies himself as Israel's father (Jer 3:19; 31:9), and elsewhere Israel is described as Yahweh's firstborn son (Ex 4:22-23) whom he will carry, nurture and comfort (Is 66:12-13). Israel refers to Yahweh as father in Isaiah 63:16 and 64:7; in Malachi 2:10, God is identified both as Israel's father and as their creator,³⁰ indicating that Yahweh is deemed Israel's father because he created them.³¹

God is also identified as the father of the Israelite king. In 2 Samuel 7:14, God says in reference to Solomon, "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (NIV).³² The psalmist goes further, using explicit birthing language to define the divine-royal relationship. Yahweh proclaims to the king, "You are my son; today I have begotten you" (Ps 2:7).

We must keep in mind, however, that humanity as a whole is nowhere explicitly described in the Old Testament as "God's son" or even "like God's son." However, the use of "image" and "likeness" to define the father-son relationship in Genesis 5:3, the comparison between the plants and animals as made "according to their kinds" and humanity made "in the image and according to the likeness of God" in Genesis 1:11-27, and the connection between the Israelite king as the son of God and humanity as God's appointed king over creation in Genesis 1 suggest that Genesis 1:26-27 may indeed define the divine-human

than genealogy (in contrast to Gen 5:1-3) and that, unlike Gen 5:1-3, it employs these terms *as a metaphor*. Further, this metaphor of sonship is not limited to males, as Gen 1:27 makes explicit. To describe the divine-human relationship in father-son terms is to employ a culturally significant metaphor; the weight of this metaphor would be lost if the text defined the woman separately as child or daughter. In other words, *in its ancient Near Eastern context the language of image and likeness implied sonship, and sonship entailed privilege and status that "child" or "daughter" did not*. By defining both male and female as created in the image and according to the likeness of God, and, hence, applying the metaphor of sonship to both male and female, Genesis 1 makes a most remarkable statement: *at creation, male and female shared equally in the status of "son" as it was defined in the biblical world*.

³⁰See also Ps 27:10; 68:6; Prov 3:12.

³¹See also Hos 2:1; 11:1. This idea of divine parentage is also attested in Jer 2:26-28, where both the people and the leadership of Judah are condemned for considering other gods and goddesses as their parents.

³²See also 1 Chron 28:6 and Ps 89:27-28.

relationship using the metaphor of father and son. The biblical evidence supports this theory, and it is reinforced by several extrabiblical references to the king as both the image and the son of the god.

IMAGE, LIKENESS AND SONSHIP IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The divine sonship of the king in the ancient Near East is an enormous topic. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the link between image and likeness language and sonship: an ancient hymn about the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta, a few lines from the Babylonian creation story known as *Enuma Elish*³³ and a Tenth Dynasty wisdom text from Egypt.

Beginning with Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BC) the divine-royal relationship in Assyria was expressed in terms of statue manufacture and divine birth.³⁴ In the hymn from the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, the king's body is likened to "the flesh of the gods," a phrase known elsewhere in the Assyrian Erra Myth as referring to the wood from which divine statues were made. He was "successfully engendered through/cast (*ši-pi-ik-šu*) into the channel of the womb of the gods" and, as a result, "He alone is the eternal image (*šalmu*) of Enlil," whom "Enlil raised . . . like a natural father, after his first-born son."³⁵ The combination of birthing and manufacturing imagery is striking. Not only is Tukulti-Ninurta's body likened to a divine statue, but the process of his creation is described both in terms of manufacture and procreation. Peter Machinist rightly concludes that here "image" identifies the physical body of the king with a divine statue.³⁶ However, in this context, "image" may have been intended as a double entendre, referring to the king both as a "living statue" of

³³On the topic of divine sonship see Peter Machinist, "Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria," in *Text, Artifact and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 166-69; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 42-43; Ivam Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri), 1945; and Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

³⁴Peter Machinist has demonstrated that these innovations were influenced by the royal theology of the Sumero-Babylonian south, where the idea of divine parentage and the king as the *šalmu* of the god is present in Sumerian hymns, royal inscriptions, rituals, personal names and legal texts ("The Epic of Tukulti Ninurta I: A Study in Middle Assyrian Literature" [PhD diss., Yale University, 1978], esp. 180-208).

³⁵Text and translation from Machinist, "Kingship and Divinity," 160-61.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 163.

the god and also as Enlil's royal son.³⁷ Although the hymn avoids explicit deification of the king,³⁸ it certainly leaves the reader with the impression that Tukulti-Ninurta I, unlike any other human being,³⁹ had a unique and special relationship—which finds its closest analogy in sonship—with the god Enlil.⁴⁰

The opening lines of the Babylonian creation story *Enuma Elish* reinforce the idea that image and likeness terminology designated sonship. The account begins with the creation of the primordial gods: Apsu and Tiamat beget Lahmu, Lahamu, Anshar and Kishar. Anshar and Kishar then beget their firstborn son, Anu, who is described as the likeness (*muššulu*)⁴¹ of his father.⁴² The following line reads, "and Anu begot Nudimmud,⁴³ his image."⁴⁴ Both examples define the father-son relationship in terms of image and likeness: Anu is the *image* (*muššulu*) of his father Anshar, and Ea is the "likeness, effigy, replica, image, resemblance, counterpart, or equivalent"⁴⁵ (*tamšilu*) of his father, Anu. Although there are additional texts to which one could appeal, the biblical and extrabiblical examples just noted are sufficient to demonstrate that image and likeness language was indeed used in Mesopotamia to define the relationship of a god to a royal or divine son.⁴⁶

³⁷Note, however, that the notion of the divine sonship of the king dates back to the late third millennium BC in the Babylonian south. See *ibid.*, 163n38.

³⁸His body is "reckoned with the flesh of the gods" but is not explicitly said to be made of divine flesh. His name is written without the divine prefix (*dingir*), and Enlil is not *the* father but is described as "like (*ki-ma*) a natural father." Machinist makes these observations and concludes, "All of these suggest, in sum, a certain hesitation on the part of Tukulti-Ninurta and his scribes as to the full deification of kings that at least the late third and early second millennia of Babylonian history offered. Evidently, the pull of a more conservative tradition . . . was still strong" (*ibid.*, 163-64).

³⁹As Machinist notes, the language of divine sonship in Assyria was, with very rare exception, exclusively reserved for the king. See *ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁰The notion that the king was born of and/or nurtured by the gods originated in the Sumero-Babylonian south and continued to appear in Assyrian royal texts long after Tukulti-Ninurta I's death and in first-millennium BC royal texts from Babylonia. See *ibid.*, 166-69.

⁴¹This term refers to likeness and, by extension, a mirror. It may mean "replica" and "representation"; see A. Leo Oppenheim and Erica Reiner, eds., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago M²* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1977), 281.

⁴²*Enuma Elish*, Tablet I, line 15. See Philippe Talon, *The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth Enuma Elish: Introduction, Cuneiform Text, Transliteration, and Sign List with a Translation and Glossary in French* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2005), 33.

⁴³Another name for Ea.

⁴⁴Talon, *Standard Babylonian Creation Myth*, 33, line 16.

⁴⁵*Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* T, 147-49.

⁴⁶On the theme of the divine sonship of the king in Neo-Assyrian royal texts, see Machinist, "Kingship and Divinity," 166-69.

In a Tenth Dynasty wisdom text from Egypt, however, it is not the king but humanity that is defined both as the image and the offspring of the creator-god. The relevant portion of the text, known as “The Instructions for Merikare,” reads:

(Well) provided is humankind, the cattle of the god. It was for their sake that he made heaven and earth and repelled the “greed” of the waters. And it was so that their nostrils might live (breathe) that he made the winds. *They are his images which have come forth from his body*, and he shines in heaven for their sake. It is for them that he made plants, cattle, birds and fish (to) nourish them.⁴⁷

While the term translated “images” (*snnw*) can refer to a statue, it also means “second,”⁴⁸ hence “likeness” and “image.”⁴⁹ In this context, however, “images” denotes offspring.

The cumulative evidence from the early chapters of Genesis, the various biblical texts that identify God as the father of Israel and of the Israelite king, and the extrabiblical examples demonstrate that image and likeness terminology was indeed used in the ancient Near East to denote the relationship between father and son. Further, the Tukulti-Ninurta hymn shows that the terms could be used as a double entendre in which the relationship between god and king was framed both as royal image/statue and as son. I contend, as others have argued for different reasons, that this is how image and likeness are used in Genesis 1. Humanity is defined both as God’s royal “son” and as living “statuettes” representing God and his rule in his macro-temple, the world. I have focused on the former because the connection between image and sonship has received far less attention in the commentaries and the secondary sources despite its fundamental importance for understanding what it means to be created in the image of God.

⁴⁷The translation is from pages 131-32 in David Lorton, “God’s Beneficent Creation: Coffin Texts Spell 1130, the Instructions for Merikare, and the Great Hymn to the Aton,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 20 (1993): 125-55 (my emphasis). See also James Hoffmeier, “Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 & 2 and Egyptian Cosmology,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 15 (1983): 39-49, esp. 47. The text is published in L. Borchardt, *Allerhand Kleinigkeiten* (Leipzig: August Pries, 1933), 43-45, blatt 15; A. Volten, *Zwei altägyptische politische Schriften* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1945); W. Helck, *Die Lehre für König Merikare* (Wiesbaden, 1977); and J. F. Quack, *Studien zur Lehre für Merikare* (Wiesbaden, 1992).

⁴⁸Hoffmeier, “Some Thoughts,” 47. See also Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1926-1961), 4:149. The Papyrus Carlsberg VI of Merikare dates to the New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty).

⁴⁹Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1962), 232.

IMPLICATIONS: LIVING AS "SONS" OF GOD

One of the purposes of this volume is to consider ways that understanding the *imago Dei* can inform and strengthen our witness. Now that we have a clearer sense of what it means to be created in the image and according to the likeness of God, we will consider how Israel's sonship status manifested itself and what relevance this holds for the church today. Select laws from Leviticus 19 will serve as examples.

Israel's missionary calling included living as God's firstborn son before the nations. They were to be what Michael Goheen calls "a showcase people," whose very lives embodied their identity as images—that is, "sons"—of God:

The nation of Israel was to be a display people, embodying in its communal life God's original creational intention and eschatological goal for humanity. He would come and dwell among them and give them his torah to direct their corporate life in his way. God's people were to be an attractive sign before all nations of what God had intended in the beginning, and of the goal toward which he was moving: the restoration of all creation and human life from the corruption of sin.⁵⁰

In many English Bibles Leviticus 19 has a title like "Various Laws" (for example, NIV). At first glance, it does indeed seem to be a somewhat random collection of legal texts. However, the first two verses and the repetition of "I am the LORD" and "I am the LORD your God" (fifteen times in thirty-seven verses!) make it clear what binds these laws together: each of them highlights a particular manifestation of God's holiness that Israel was to imitate. In doing so, they were to be a living manifestation of God's original intention for humanity.

Israel was to live as God's royal sons and representatives before the watching eyes of the nations so that others would find a relationship with God irresistible (compare Zech 8:23). God's people were to live out their identity as image (that is, son and representative) not only through what we might consider the more obvious means—sacrifice, prayer, studying the Torah, abstaining from making and worshiping idols, observing religious feasts and festivals—but by the way they lived their lives, including how they dealt with money, how they treated their employees, how they conducted business and how they used their wealth to care for the poor. Their relationship with God

⁵⁰Michael Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 25.

was to be conveyed through every aspect of Israel's life. Consider the following laws from Leviticus 19:

You shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. (Lev 19:13)

You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity. You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. (Lev 19:35-36)

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God. (Lev 19:9-10)

Yahweh reveals himself in these laws. He cares for the worker who is to be treated with dignity by being paid in a timely fashion. He is also a God of truth and honesty. These qualities are to characterize his people in all spheres of life, including business. Israelites were not to defraud their customers through dishonest means of any kind.

The gleaning laws (Lev 19:9-10) display God's care for both the poor and the wealthy: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God" (ESV). Through their labor, the poor could provide for themselves and their families without having to beg. Further, these laws enabled the poor to participate in worship, as they would have something to offer God from their gleanings. Finally, these laws could prevent landowners from becoming greedy, self-sufficient, prideful and hardhearted. Leaving some of the produce behind was both a reminder of God's mercy and an expression of gratitude to God, the divine landowner, who had redeemed his people from slavery in Egypt, given them the land and provided for their sustenance. In short, Yahweh's original intent for creation, his redemptive plan and his eschatological vision for humanity was to be proclaimed not only through the written Torah but also through the Torah lived out.

Israel failed miserably at distinguishing herself from the nations. God's people spurned their sonship status, not only through the worship of foreign gods such as Baal and Asherah, but also by their idolatry of self. This was

partially manifested in oppression of the poor and unjust business practices as reported by the prophet Amos, among others:

For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. (Amos 2:6-7 NIV)

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, "Bring us some drinks!" (Amos 4:1 NIV)

You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. (Amos 5:11-12 NIV)

"When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?" Skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. (Amos 8:5-6 NIV)

Long before Amos prophesied, in the days when the judges ruled, there was a man from the clan of Elimelek whose name was Boaz. Boaz is introduced in Ruth 2:1 as a *gibbôr hayil*, often translated "a worthy man" and understood to refer to a man of good repute. Although the story does prove Boaz to be a worthy man, this phrase more likely indicates (as the RSV, NASB and KJV translate it) that Boaz was rich! He was a wealthy landowner and businessman who adhered to God's covenant prescriptions as demonstrated in his treatment of Ruth and Naomi.⁵¹ His compliance resulted in much-needed provision for those who gleaned in his fields. His obedience, during the days when there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes, surely would have been a living testimony, an example of Torah lived out by one who was made "son" through redemption and covenant.

In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus sums up the entire Old Testament law with two commands: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as

⁵¹It is worth noting that in the case of Ruth, Boaz went well beyond what the Levitical law required.

yourself.” Now, recall those “various laws” in Leviticus 19. Perhaps the title for that collection of laws should read instead, “How to love your neighbor” or “How to demonstrate the original creational intent and God’s eschatological goal for humanity.” Treating workers fairly and with dignity, abiding by honest business practices and showing mercy to the poor are not only acts of obedience but also manifestations of love—concrete examples of how the firstborn son was to love his divine father and reflect God to the nations, which would result in love and care for neighbor.

Like Boaz, we live in a time when everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes. Imagine companies, corporations, studios, public schools, law firms, real estate agencies, small businesses and artist communities inhabited by God’s people who are living out a right understanding of their identity as images. Imagine a world in which people live as “sons of God,” who faithfully represent him in the world. By so doing, they proclaim and demonstrate in every sphere of life God’s original creational intent, his redemptive plan and his eschatological goal for humanity. This was Israel’s mission, and it is ours, for the sake of the world.