365 DEVOTIONAL READINGS FROM MARTIN LUTHER DAY by DAY IN GENESIS
INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther viewed himself first and foremost as a professor and teacher of Scripture. It was his calling from God, which he had received through the Church. Because of his certainty of this call and his faith in the truth of God’s Word, he confidently challenged the false teachings of the Roman Church; in fact, it was his sworn duty to do so, one part of the formal oaths he took on October 19, 1512, when he received degree and title: “Doctor of Bible.”

For the final ten years of his life, Luther expounded the Book of Genesis in the classroom, moving through every chapter and almost every verse and word. He called Genesis “an exceedingly evangelical book” because it is “made up almost entirely of illustrations of faith and unbelief, and of the fruits that faith and unbelief bear” (Luther’s Works 35:237). Along with his detailed commentary on Galatians and Romans, Luther’s work on Genesis reveals his firm belief that every word of Scripture is to be read, meditated upon, and inwardly digested so that the Holy Spirit can continuously strengthen us in faith in Christ, our Savior.

To that end, these devotional thoughts have been gathered by my colleague Mrs. Dawn Mirly Weinstock in her typical masterful fashion, from the eight volumes of the English translation of Luther’s Lectures on Genesis (1535–45). The best way to use this book is in concert with reading the Book of Genesis. Before reading Luther’s commentary, read the whole chapter of Genesis (or at least the section in which
the focus verse is included). While we think we know the accounts of creation, the flood, Abraham’s wanderings, or Joseph’s dreams, Luther often picks out small details for emphasis—and the broader context will prove helpful. Sometimes reading all the devotional thoughts on a particular chapter at once, then going back to individual devotions in sequence may prove helpful.

Luther’s comments on Genesis encompassed a wide variety of themes throughout the ten years of his lectures: vocation, marriage, prayer, the theology of the cross, the Trinity, the two natures in Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, God’s two ways of governing, the Law and the Gospel, to name only a few. But the most consistent message by far is the promise of the Savior, which the patriarchs believed as a future event and thus were saved. Again and again, Luther reminds his hearers (and now us as readers) that we have the inestimable blessing of reading Genesis in the sure knowledge that the promise has been fulfilled, that the Seed, Christ, has come, was crucified for our sins and was raised for our justification, and now lives and reigns to all eternity. And because the Holy Spirit has called us through the Word to faith in Christ Jesus, we have the same sure promises of forgiveness and eternal life given to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, and at our death, we also will be gathered to our people.

Let me use Luther’s own words by which he introduced his lectures on Genesis so long ago, now to commend this book to you: “I hope that this work be of some benefit to the godly, and that it will please them” (Luther’s Works 2:235).

— Rev. Paul T. McCain
In the beginning, God created
the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

Created by God

The first chapter [of Genesis] is written in the simplest language; yet it contains matters of the utmost importance and very difficult to understand. It was for this reason, as St. Jerome asserts, that among the Hebrews it was forbidden for anyone under thirty to read the chapter or to expound it for others. They wanted one to have a good knowledge of the entire Scripture before getting to this chapter. . . . God has reserved His exalted wisdom and the correct understanding of this chapter for Himself alone, although He has left with us this general knowledge that the world had a beginning and that it was created by God out of nothing. . . . The very simple meaning of what Moses says, therefore, is this: Everything that is, was created by God.
In the beginning...  
Genesis 1:1

The Beginning

With these words] I have the conviction that Moses wanted to indicate the beginning of time. Thus “in the beginning” has the same meaning as if he said: “At that time, when there was no time, or when the world began, it began in this wise, that heaven and earth were first created by God out of nothing in an unformed condition.”... What will you assume to have been outside time or before time? Or what will you imagine that God was doing before there was any time? Let us, therefore, rid ourselves of such ideas and realize that God was incomprehensible in His essential rest before the creation of the world, but that now, after the creation, He is within, without, and above all creatures; that is, He is still incomprehensible. Nothing else can be said, because our mind cannot grasp what lies outside time. God also does not manifest Himself except through His works and the Word, because the meaning of these is understood in some measure.
The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said . . .

Genesis 1:2–3

The Mystery of the Trinity

Moses teaches that on the first day the heaven and the earth were created, but an unformed heaven, that is, without any separation of the waters, without luminaries, and not yet raised up; likewise an unformed earth, without animals, rivers, and mountains. . . . Water and abyss and heaven are used in this passage for the same thing, namely, for that dark and unformed mass which later on was provided with life and separated by the Word. . . . Indeed, it is the great consensus of the Church that the mystery of the Trinity is set forth here. The Father creates heaven and earth out of nothing through the Son, whom Moses calls the Word. Over these the Holy Spirit broods. As a hen broods her eggs, keeping them warm in order to hatch her chicks, and, as it were, to bring them to life through heat, so Scripture says that the Holy Spirit brooded, as it were, on the waters to bring to life those substances which were to be quickened and adorned. For it is the office of the Holy Spirit to make alive.
And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

Genesis 1:3

The Speaker and the Word

For the first time Moses mentions the means and the instrument God used in doing His work, namely, the Word. . . . God is, so to speak, the Speaker who creates; nevertheless, He does not make use of matter, but He makes heaven and earth out of nothing solely by the Word which He utters. Now compare with this the Gospel of John (1:1): “In the beginning was the Word.” He is in proper agreement with Moses. He says: “Before the creation of the world there was not a single one of the creatures, but God nevertheless had the Word.” What is this Word, or what did He do? Listen to Moses. The light, he says, was not yet in existence; but out of its state of being nothing the darkness was turned into that most outstanding creature, light. Through what? Through the Word. Therefore in the beginning and before every creature there is the Word, and it is such a powerful Word that it makes all things out of nothing. From this follows without possibility of contradiction what John expressly adds: “This Word is God and yet is a Person distinct from God the Father, just as a word and he who utters a word are separate entities.” . . . These are difficult matters, and it is unsafe to go beyond the limit to which the Holy Spirit leads us. . . . This, therefore, is sufficient for the confirmation of our faith: that Christ is true God, who is with the Father from eternity, before the world was made, and that through Him, who is the wisdom and the Word of the Father, the Father made everything:

January 4
“Let there be light.”

**Genesis 1:3**

**Reality Brought into Being**

The words “Let there be light” are the words of God, not of Moses; this means that they are realities. For God calls into existence the things which do not exist (Romans 4:17). He does not speak grammatical words; He speaks true and existent realities. Accordingly, that which among us has the sound of a word is reality with God. Thus sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you, etc.—we are all words of God, in fact, only one single syllable or letter by comparison with the entire creation. We, too, speak, but only according to the rules of language; that is, we assign names to objects which have already been created. But the divine rule of language is different, namely: when He says, “Sun, shine,” the sun is there at once and shines. Thus the words of God are realities, not bare words. Here men have differentiated between the uncreated Word and the created word. The created word is brought into being by the uncreated Word. What else is the entire creation than the Word of God uttered by God? . . . Thus God reveals Himself to us as the Speaker who has with Him the uncreated Word, through whom He created the world and all things with the greatest ease, namely, by speaking.
“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so.

**Genesis 1:9**

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**Our Passage on Dry Land**

He calls the earth dry because the waters had been removed. So we see the ocean seething miraculously, as if it were about to swallow up the entire earth. . . . Thus it happens through divine power that the waters do not pass over us, and until today and until the end of the world God performs for us the well-known miracle which He performed in the Red Sea for the people of Israel. At that time He displayed that might of His in a unique manner by an obvious miracle, in order that He might be worshiped with greater zeal by the small nation. For what is our entire life on this earth but a passage through the Red Sea, where on both sides the sea stood like high walls? Because it is very certain that the sea is far higher than the earth, God, up to the present time, commands the waters to remain in suspense and restrains them by His Word lest they burst upon us as they burst forth in the deluge. But at times God gives providential signs, and entire islands perish by water, to show that the sea is in His hand and that He can either hold it in check or release it against the ungrateful and the evil.
And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind.”

Genesis 1:11

A Splendid Home

prefer that we reflect on the divine solicitude and benevolence toward us, because [God] provided such an attractive dwelling place for the future human being before the human being was created. Thus afterward, when man is created, he finds a ready and equipped home into which he is brought by God and commanded to enjoy all the riches of so splendid a home. . . . There is a similar beneficence of God toward us in His spiritual gifts. Before we were brought to faith, Christ, our Redeemer, is above in the Father’s house; He prepares mansions so that when we arrive, we may find a heaven furnished with every kind of joy (John 14:2). Adam, therefore, when he was not yet created, was far less able to concern himself with his future welfare than we are; for he was not yet in existence. We, however, hear these promises given us by the Word of God. Therefore let us look upon the first state of this world as a type and figure of the future world; and so let us learn the kindness of God, who makes us rich and gives us wealth before we are able to concern ourselves with ourselves.
Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.”

Genesis 1:26

By God’s Special Plan

Moses employs a new expression. He does not say: “Let the sea be set in motion,” “Let the earth bring forth herbs,” or “Let it bring forth.” He says: “Let Us make.” . . . Here Moses points out an outstanding difference between these living beings and man when he says that man was created by the special plan and providence of God. . . . Therefore the image of God, according to which Adam was created, was something far more distinguished and excellent, since obviously no leprosy of sin adhered either to his reason or to his will. Both his inner and his outer sensations were all of the purest kind. His intellect was the clearest, his memory was the best, and his will was the most straightforward—all in the most beautiful tranquility of mind, without any fear of death and without any anxiety. To these inner qualities came also those most beautiful and superb qualities of body and of all the limbs, qualities in which he surpassed all the remaining living creatures. . . . Therefore my understanding of the image of God is this: that Adam had it in his being and that he not only knew God and believed that He was good, but that he also lived in a life that was wholly godly; that is, he was without the fear of death or of any other danger, and was content with God’s favor.
“Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.”

**Genesis 1:26**

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**In the Image of God**

The Gospel brings it about that we are formed once more according to that familiar and indeed better image, because we are born again into eternal life or rather into the hope of eternal life by faith, that we may live in God and with God and be one with Him, as Christ says (John 17:21). And indeed, we are reborn not only for life but also for righteousness, because faith acquires Christ’s merit and knows that through Christ’s death we have been set free. From this source our other righteousness has its origin, namely, that newness of life through which we are zealous to obey God as we are taught by the Word and aided by the Holy Spirit. But this righteousness has merely its beginning in this life, and it cannot attain perfection in this flesh. Nevertheless, it pleases God, not as though it were a perfect righteousness or a payment for sin but because it comes from the heart and depends on its trust in the mercy of God through Christ. Moreover, this also is brought about by the Gospel, that the Holy Spirit is given to us, who offers resistance in us to unbelief, envy, and other vices that we may earnestly strive to glorify the name of the Lord and His Word, etc. In this manner this image of the new creature begins to be restored by the Gospel in this life, but it will not be finished in this life. But when it is finished in the kingdom of the Father, then the will will be truly free and good, the mind truly enlightened, and the memory persistent.
So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:27

A World in Miniature

In the remaining creatures God is recognized as by His footprints; but in the human being, especially in Adam, He is truly recognized, because in him there is such wisdom, justice, and knowledge of all things that he may rightly be called a world in miniature. He has an understanding of heaven, earth, and the entire creation. And so it gives God pleasure that He made so beautiful a creature. But without a doubt, just as at that time God rejoiced in the counsel and work by which man was created, so today, too, He takes pleasure in restoring this work of His through His Son and our Deliverer, Christ. It is useful to ponder these facts, namely, that God is most kindly inclined toward us and takes delight in His thought and plan of restoring all who have believed in Christ to spiritual life through the resurrection of the dead.