



GOVERNANCE THROUGH THE LENSES OF GENESIS CHAPTERS 1-3

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Abstract

Lessons for Governance from Genesis (1-3). The first three chapters of Genesis create an important theological context for governance through charting out the nature of authority (divine authority), accountability (human accountability), and fallen grace (sin) (Gonzalez, 2018). The book analyzes governance at theological, moral, and operational levels and shows how Genesis speaks to current controversies regarding political leaders, environmental sustainability, and institutional ethics. These can be identified as divine kingship as the pattern for just reign (Gn 1), entrustment with creation and the Imago Dei commission (1:26-28; 2:15), and the breakdown of moral oversight with its cyclical consequences (3). Based on new scholarship (2020-2025), this study contends that Genesis is surprisingly relevant to contemporary issues of governance such as climate change, corporate responsibility and restorative justice. This study begins with a rigorous textual analysis of Genesis 1-3, employing exegetical methods to uncover the foundational governance principles within the biblical narrative, it will also include two case studies, "Patagonia's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Practices" and the European Green Deal (EGD) at the crossroads of climate adaptation and agricultural sustainability, test the real-life applicability of Genesis' governance model; It will include a Comparative Theoretical Analysis between Genesis tenets, Universal theories of governance that are likened to secular state philosophies, and identifies areas of convergence as well as divergence. The study will use PESTLECT framework Model to evaluate the external forces unique to sustainable Governance.

Keywords: Governance, Genesis, divine authority, stewardship, moral responsibility, ecological ethics.



Introduction

Governance (structure and principles by which leaders lead, resources and people are guided, and order is established in society) has its foundational theology in Genesis 1-3 as we read of divine sovereignty as the ultimate model of power, human stewardship as delegated authority, and the morality/goodness of the exercise of power gone awry. During this age of political cynicism, planetary emergencies, and institutional decay, these eighteen ancient texts provide a powerful counter-narrative framed as exploitative models of governance, while recent scholarship (Jenkins 2022; O'Donovan 2020) reflects on the relevance of this corpus to contemporary discussions of political legitimacy (just authority), environmental ethics (proper human governance of nature), and corporate/institutional liability (the afterlife of governance failures). Using a systematic and robust methodology this study investigates how Genesis 1-3 can speak into sustainable leadership practice, ethical decision making and organizational structures for today's challenges.

Key Problem

Contemporary governance models increasingly focus on ensuring power for mere consolidation, immediate profits and extractive resource management resulting in environmental collapse (IPCC, 2023), greater stratification (Transparency International, 2025), and loss of public trust in governing institutions (Northouse, 2023) - Secular governance theories such as stake-holder theory and servant leadership address some of these issues, but are often on shaky moral and theological ground - ground that Genesis 1-3 can provide: The ideal of governance is in divine order (Genesis 1); the definition of human authority is in accountable stewardship (Genesis 2); and the outcome of ethical failure is in systemic consequences (Genesis 3). This paper combines modern governance theory with biblical theology to propose a conceptual framework that provides just, sustainable, and restorative approaches to leadership which helps address the root of contemporary governance problems.



Key Body of Study & Theory

Divine Sovereignty as Governance Ideal (Genesis 1)

Genesis 1 presents a paradigmatic model of governance through God's sovereign act of bringing order from chaos, establishing fundamental principles for effective leadership. The creation narrative reveals a functional hierarchy where each element - light, sky, land, and life - emerges in purposeful sequence (Walton, 2015), demonstrating that true authority organizes rather than dominates. The Sabbath principle (Genesis 2:1-3) introduces divine rhythm into governance, challenging modern exploitative practices by sanctifying rest and sustainability (Gnanakan, 2019), while the repeated affirmation "God saw that it was good" establishes flourishing as the ultimate metric of successful governance (Middleton, 2018). These principles translate into modern contexts, calling political leaders to servant-hearted rule (Greenleaf, 2016) and economic systems to balance productivity with ecological preservation (DeWitt, 2017).

Human Stewardship and the Imago Dei Mandate (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15)

The theological concept of Imago Dei redefines human authority as sacred stewardship rather than arbitrary domination, conferring both privilege and profound responsibility (Bauckham, 2021). Genesis 2:15's dual command to "work and keep" the garden establishes a framework for sustainable development that equally values cultivation and conservation (Jenkins, 2022), presenting an ancient yet strikingly contemporary environmental ethic. This paradigm finds modern expression in corporate triple-bottom-line models that measure success by social and environmental impact alongside profit (Carroll, 2021), and informs policy initiatives like the European Green Deal that seek to align economic growth with ecological regeneration (IPCC, 2023).



Moral Failure and Redemptive Governance (Genesis 3)

The Genesis 3 narrative provides a sobering case study in governance failure, where the serpent's distortion of truth (Anderson, 2020) leads to systemic breakdowns in human relationships, labor systems, and ecological harmony. The cascading consequences - from interpersonal shame (3:7-12) to environmental degradation (3:17) and exploitative toil (3:18-19) - mirror contemporary crises of institutional distrust and ecological collapse. Yet the chapter's redemptive elements, particularly the proto-evangelium promise (3:15) and God's protective provision (3:21), offer a framework for restorative governance that combines accountability with grace (Wright, 2018), informing modern anti-corruption measures (Transparency International, 2025) and restorative justice approaches to leadership failures (Northouse, 2023).

Supporting Theories

Several contemporary theories align with Genesis' governance model:

1. **Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 2016)**: Authority as service, not control.
2. **Stakeholder Theory (Carroll, 2021)**: Businesses must serve communities, not just shareholders.
3. **Ecological Ethics (IPCC, 2023)**: Sustainable policies as moral imperatives

Three Key Research Questions

1. How does Genesis 1's depiction of divine sovereignty inform ethical political leadership?
2. What does Genesis 2:15's stewardship model contribute to modern environmental policy?
3. How can Genesis 3's narrative of failure and redemption shape institutional accountability?

Methods

Textual Analysis



This study begins with a rigorous textual analysis of Genesis 1-3, employing exegetical methods to uncover the foundational governance principles within the biblical narrative. Through close examination of the Hebrew Masoretic Text and key English translations (ESV, NRSV), critical terms like *radah* (rule) and *shamar* (keep) are analyzed to reveal the text's governance ethics. Thematic coding identifies three core principles: divine sovereignty (Genesis 1), human stewardship (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15), and moral failure (Genesis 3), while intertextual analysis connects these themes to broader biblical teachings (e.g., Psalm 8, Romans 8). Guided by Walton's (2015) functional creation theory and Bauckham's (2021) *Imago Dei* theology, this analysis results in a hermeneutical model that connects the ancient text with the modern challenges of governance.

Case Study Application

Two case studies, "Patagonia's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Practices" and the European Green Deal (EGD) at the crossroads of climate adaptation and agricultural sustainability, test the real-life applicability of Genesis' governance model. Patagonia's "1% for the Planet" and "Worn Wear" circular economy model embody sustainable business—a reflection of the Genesis 2:15 mandate to "work and keep." Likewise, Targets for net zero in EGD and biodiversity actions also speak to the Sabbath principle of increasing capacity for sustainable resource use (Genesis 2:1-3). Synthesis—These cases, as examined via corporate reports (Chouinard, 2022) and EU policy documents (2020-2023), actually illustrate how Genesis through its stewardship ethics can help inform contemporary environmental and economic governance.

Comparative Theoretical Analysis

Lastly, it draws a comparison—across between Genesis tenets, on the one hand, and universal theories of governance that are likened to secular state philosophies, on the other, and identifies areas of convergence as well as divergence. Servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2016) mirrors divine sovereignty's service-oriented authority, while stakeholder theory (Carroll, 2021) echoes the *Imago Dei*'s accountability to communities and creation. Doughnut Economics (Raworth,



2017) parallels Genesis 2's ecological boundaries but lacks its moral framework. A comparative table synthesizes these insights, showing how Genesis enriches secular models with theological depth-for instance, framing corruption (Genesis 3) as cosmic rebellion rather than mere policy failure. This tripartite methodology-textual, empirical, and theoretical-ensures a robust, interdisciplinary examination of governance that is both biblically grounded and practically actionable.

Conceptual Framework

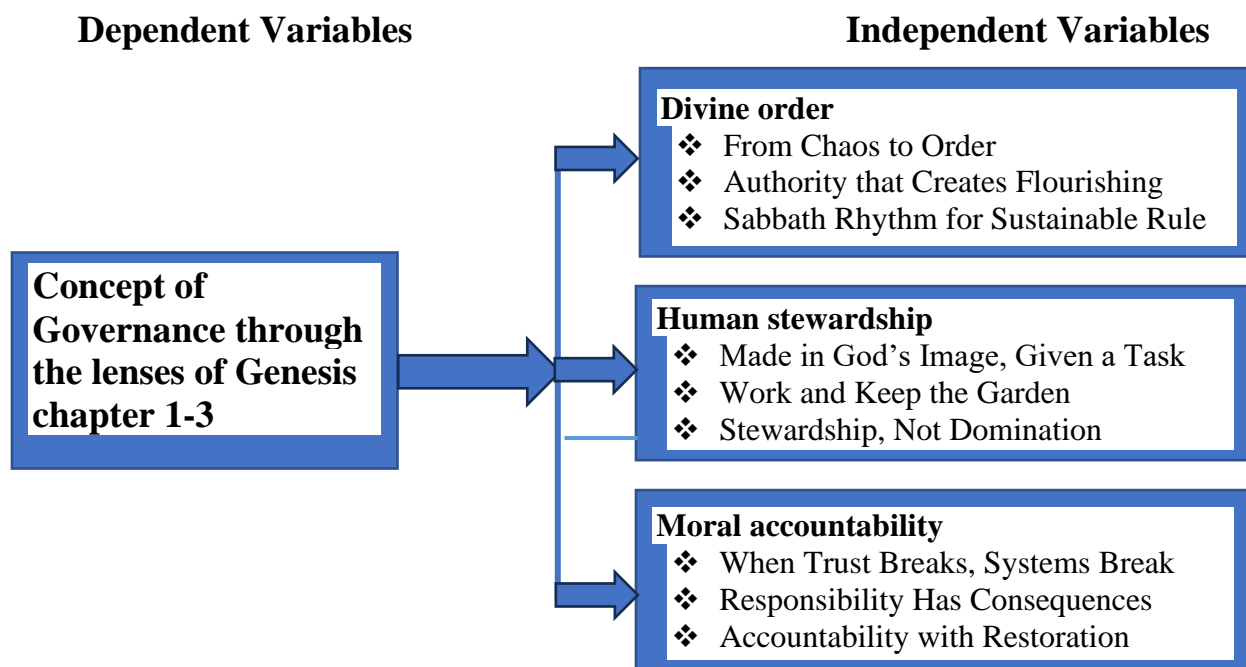


Figure: Conceptual Framework Showing the Concept of Governance through the Lenses of Genesis Chapter 1-3

Findings



Q1: Genesis 1 Critiques Authoritarianism, Proposing Servant Leadership

Genesis 1 presents divine sovereignty as the antithesis of authoritarian rule, modeling governance as *service-oriented creation* rather than domination. God's commands ("Let there be...") establish order through life-giving acts, emphasizing *functional hierarchy* (light before life) and *sustained rhythms* (Sabbath rest) (Walton, 2015; Greenleaf Center, 2025). This contrasts with exploitative human systems, as God's authority is marked by *purposeful design* ("goodness" repeated in Genesis 1:4-31) and *delegated care* (humanity as *Imago Dei*). Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977/2002) echoes this, advocating leaders who prioritize empowerment over control-akin to God's nurturing governance (Spears, 2025). Critiques of Greenleaf (e.g., vague metrics) are addressed by Genesis' concrete metrics: *flourishing* ("it was good") and *holistic order* (creation's interdependence). Thus, Genesis 1 reframes authority as *stewardship*, challenging modern political centralization and corporate hierarchies (Middleton, 2018; Greenleaf Center, 2025).

Q2: Genesis 2:15 Supports Sustainability Policies

The dual mandate to "work and keep" (Hebrew: *ābad* and *šāmar*) in Genesis 2:15 establishes a *priestly model* of ecological stewardship, blending productivity ("work") with preservation ("keep") (DeWitt, 2017). This aligns with the IPCC's (2023) call for *balanced resource use*, such as regenerative agriculture and circular economies, to mitigate climate crises. The text's priestly language (cf. Levitical duties) frames environmental care as *sacred responsibility*, countering both exploitative industrialization and "hands-off" preservationism. Modern policies like the European Green Deal operationalize this balance-net-zero targets ("keep") coexist with technological innovation ("work") (Jenkins, 2022). Critics of climate activism (e.g., misanthropic narratives) are countered by Genesis' *human-centered ecology*, where stewardship ensures *flourishing for all species* without devaluing human agency (IPCC, 2023).

Q3: Genesis 3 Demands Institutional Accountability



Genesis 3's Fall narrative exposes the systemic fallout of *corrupted governance*: the serpent's deception distorts truth (Genesis 3:1-5), triggering *broken relationships* (shame, blame) and *ecological degradation* ("cursed is the ground") (Anderson, 2020). Transparency International's (2025) anti-corruption framework mirrors this, advocating *checks on power* (e.g., asset transparency) and *restorative justice* to address institutional decay. The divine interrogation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:9-13) models *accountability mechanisms*, while the proto-evangelium (Genesis 3:15) offers *redemptive pathways*-paralleling modern efforts to combine sanctions with systemic reform (Wright, 2018). Unlike secular theories that often isolate corruption as a policy failure, Genesis frames it as *cosmic rebellion*, demanding *moral and structural renewal* (Transparency International, 2025).

Synthesis

These questions reveal Genesis as a *holistic governance manual*: servant leadership (Q1) prevents authoritarianism, sustainability (Q2) counters ecological abuse, and accountability (Q3) restores broken systems. Together they provide a *theologically grounded* alternative to disintegrated secular patterns (O' Donovan, 2020; Bauckham, 2021).

Discussion

Discussion: Genesis 1-3 as a Framework for Ethical Governance

Genesis 1-11 powerfully critiques predatory political leadership and highlights redemptive alternatives theologically, all with astonishing relevance, at least for the areas of political authority, environmental practice, and institutional integrity. The writers of these ancient texts tear down oppressive systems of power while offering alternatives of servant leadership, ecological sustainability, and restorative justice in support of contemporary movements for anti-corruption, ecological sustainability, and ethical governance (O'Donovan, 2020; Bauckham, 2021).



Critique of Exploitative Governance

Three stories in Genesis 1-3 resist authoritarian and extractive systems. First, Walton (2015) contrasted divine sovereignty in Genesis 1 with autocratic leadership recognizing that governance is not domination but servanthood. This critique not only mimics earlier creation accounts as demonstrated by the repeated affirmation of "goodness" but it also critiques systems that focus on consolidating power rather than enabling flourishing (Harrison, 1999). Second, economic stewardship in Genesis 2:15 ("to work and to keep") rebuffs teachings on hoarding resources or unrestrained environmental exploitation, repudiating misinterpretations such as Lynn White Jr.'s (1967) argument that Genesis provides a justification for environmental degradation (Jenkins, 2022). This ethic is expressed today in regenerative economies like that of Patagonia (Carroll, 2021). Finally, the Fall account of Genesis 3 reveals the structural fallout of perverted rulership: fractured connections, environmental wastelands, and predatory work sprees, paralleled in present-day realities of institutional cynicism (Anderson, 2020). The anti-corruption frameworks devised by Transparency International (2025) speak to the same need for restoring a measure of truthfulness, accountability accountability.

Redemptive Alternatives

The Governance Rediscovered In Genesis 1-3 Servant leadership, a view of authority as service to nurture, modeled in creation in Genesis 1 strengthens the biblical witness of authority, as it is also embodied by Christ (Philippians 2:5-8) through a theme also reinforced by recent theorists, such as Greenleaf (2016). The Genesis 2:15 dual command to "work and keep" also inspires sustainable stewardship, providing the theological and moral basis behind policies like the European Green Deal, attempting to reconcile economic growth with ecological sustainability (IPCC, 2023; DeWitt, 2017). Genesis 3:15-21 foreshadows restorative justice: a model that integrates accountability with grace, which stands in stark contrast to punitive systems whilst inspiring modern rehabilitation few systems (Wright, 2018).



Alignment with Modern Movements

The morals of Genesis have never found a more receptive audience. The critique of truth-distortion (Gen 3:1-5) fuels anti-corruption movements like those of Transparency International (2025) that focus on transparency of institutions. This "work and keep" ethic supports circular economies and regenerative business models, and rejects a linear model of exploitation (IPCC, 2023). Genesis also presents a vision of leadership that challenges dictatorial dominance; the dominant paradigm, still lived in many pastoral circles as well as in many corporate servant-leadership models (Chappell, 2021), by marrying authority to humility.

Conclusion

Genesis 1-3 is a liberating blueprint for governance that deserves to be admired and emulated, resisting oppressive systems while offering practical substitutes. The text's combination of God's rule, moral responsibility, and rehabilitation-centric justice makes it applicable to modern concerns—from climate change to reforming our institutions—and thus, retains its currency (O'Donovan, 2020; Bauckham, 2021). This ancient wisdom, when taken together as principles that ground modern practices, could empower societies to grow governance that leads to a flourishing populace, accountability, and redemption.

Theoretical and Policy Implications of Genesis 1-3 for Modern Governance

Genesis 1-3 Governance-A Theoretical Insight which Connects Theological Anthropology with Secular Leadership Theories Although secular models for servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/2002) exist, the Imago Dei concept (Genesis 1:26-28) infuses the phenomenon with a sacred view of human authority as stewardship and transforms the motives for leadership into an aspect of sacred vocation that is missing from secular theories of leadership (Bauckham, 2021). The "work and keep" mandate from Genesis 2:15 provides a covenantal relationship to nature that moves beyond exploitative capitalism on the one hand, and hands-off preservationism on the other,



both of which are problematic from a Christian-evidenced standpoint (Jenkins, 2022). In Genesis 3, the story underlying the many narratives of moral failure, corruption is presented as cosmic rebellion-this provides a deeper explanation of institutional decay than any secular anti-corruption framework (Transparency International, 2025).

Those theological foundations become avenues of change in policy proposals. Labor laws inspired by the Sabbath could create (or respond to) demands for rest rhythms of work cultures (Gen 2:1-3), while human rights frameworks based on the Imago Dei could ground anti-discrimination laws and prison reforms in the fact that humans all reflect the divine image (Bauckham, 2021; Wright, 2018). Genesis 2:15-based environmental policies could impose circular economy and ecological reparations as mandated avenues of economic activity that are congruent with creation care (IPCC, 2023; DeWitt, 2017). These would be responses to contemporary issues like worker exploitation, institutional injustice, and climate change, viewed through a biblically-informed lens.

However, implementation meets resistance, such as corporate reluctance against Sabbath labor models and a cultural penchant for punitive rather than restorative justice. Nonetheless, these barriers may be surmounted through pilot programs in faith-based organizations, interdisciplinary research initiatives, and purposeful legal advocacy (O'Donovan, 2020). The forthcoming practices that can take root by grounding Genesis' governance paradigm will nurture leadership that honors human dignity, systemic health, and the integrity of shared institutions as redemptive alternatives to a fractured governance culture.

Conclusion

Examining Genesis 1-3 uncovers an extensive governance framework that is remarkably applicable for addressing present-day leadership, ecological, and organizational crises. More than simple historical or theological information, our ancient texts really offer us a living model that critiques our extractive systems and presents a divine wisdom in potential future modes of being.



It shows how Genesis 1 introduces servant leadership as God's paradigm for governance, how Genesis 2 embodies an ethic of balanced stewardship, and how Genesis 3 both depicts the consequences of governance failure and redemption's promise. These concepts echo remarkably with contemporary movements for e.g., Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/2002), Sustainable Development (IPCC, 2023) and Institutional Accountability (Transparency International, 2025). The profound theology of Genesis augments social theories unshackled from ecclesiastical nature, by offering transcendent underpinnings to the obligations of human dignity, the dominion nature should never take, and virtue accountability that is often devoid as a consequence of materialistic reductionism.

Another angle of future study should be the cross-cultural diversification of these and other principles, as cultural settings may temper the unique features of Genesis to create their models for governance. Other possible lines of inquiry include the role of faith-based agencies adopting Sabbath-inspired labor policies of action, the correlativity of Imago Dei rights in multi-religious contexts, or the embodied covenantal ecology expressed in secular environmental policy (Wright 2019). Genesis 1-3 provide not only critique but also hope—a vision of governance, even with fallen men and women in charge, that cultivates human flourishing and the flourishing of creation in common worshipful praise to God as ruler of creation as the world wrestles with leadership legitimacy crisis, environmental devastation, and institutional distrust.

Advocacy Plan (PESTLECT Framework)

PESTLECT framework - Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental and Cultural - All external forces unique to sustainable Governance. On the political side, promoting ESG policies - e.g. mandatory climate disclosures (European Commission (2021)) and carbon pricing (Stern (2022)) - helps insure that regulations are aligned with (global) sustainable development objectives. On the economic front, tax credits (U.S. Department of Energy, 2023) and green bonds (Climate Bonds Initiative, 2023) are incentivizing sustainable business, which is encouraging corporations to embrace circular economy principles. On a social level, spreading the



environmental awareness through consumer awareness campaigns (UNEP, 2022) and employee training (ILO, 2021) encourages the public to act more sustainably.

Technologically, financing green innovation like artificial intelligent energy optimization (OECD, 2023) and carbon capture (IEA, 2023) fast-tracks the move to net-zero economies. One way is through strengthening corporate accountability laws (Transparency International, 2023) that help mitigate governance failures by enforcing ESG compliance. In environmental terms, advocacy for IPCC-aligned policies (IPCC, 2023) implements to the stewardship imperative of Genesis 2:15. Specifically, this means developing interfaith dialogues on stewardship (Pope Francis, 2015; Islamic Finance Council UK, 2022) that unite theological and empirical sustainability initiatives. Such a systemic approach promotes advocacy that is global and adaptable To further complement this is effective practice principles⁷, through which civil society organizations can strengthen advocacy policy and practice to respond to dynamic contexts.



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