

# The Creator Creates Creation

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[ 0 : 00 ] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Today we begin a series of sermons in the opening chapters of the Bible.

In the first 11 chapters of Genesis, we're going to begin a 10-week study in Genesis 1-11. Why? For two major reasons.

First, the rest of the Bible, Genesis 12 to Revelation 22, where most people who read the Bible spend their time, assumes that we know the story or stories told in Genesis 1-11.

The authors of both Old and New Testaments assume that we know the theology and themes of what are called primeval history. I find this especially to be the case with the fourth gospel, the letter to the Romans, and the book of Revelation.

John and Paul assume that we know the stories of Genesis 1-11, and they are working with those stories. You see, there are indeed two halves of the Bible.

[ 1 : 12 ] Not Old and New Testament, but Genesis 1-11 and Genesis 12 to Revelation 22. We cannot fully appreciate what is going on in the second half unless we know what went on in the first half.

It's like getting a new novel and beginning to read it in the middle of the book. Or it's like going to a movie and entering 30 minutes after it started.

After the first service, Curtis Finley, who plays the drums, told me that in just about every film, at the 30-minute mark, all the character development is done. And now the story begins.

And if you missed the first 30 minutes, you don't know what the story is. So the first reason we are going to do this series in the opening chapters of the Bible is to help us understand what the rest of the Bible assumes we know.

Second, our culture, or as I should say, our cultures, are struggling because they do not know or have lost touch with the story and stories of Genesis 1-11.

[ 2 : 27 ] I know that is a bold statement to make. But I make it because Genesis 1-11 has been given to us as the story that makes sense of our stories.

Without this story, we do not really understand what is happening in the world or why it is happening. Our cultures, be they pre-modern, modern, or post-modern, are disoriented, adrift, vulnerable, because we no longer have a larger story by which we can understand our lives. It's hard to function without being able to locate oneself and one's experience in light of a larger narrative, or metanarrative, as people call it.

Genesis 1-11 addresses fundamental questions which people of every era in any culture raise. Questions like, where did we come from?

Why are we here? What are we? What does it mean to be a human being? Why does it hurt to be a human being? Why can we human beings do exquisitely beautiful art and dance and build impressive skyscrapers and play sports and sing and raise families and then use one another for our own ends, abuse children, manipulate laws, exploit the earth, and kill?

[ 3 : 51 ] Why do we kill? What is wrong with us? Why do human societies rise and flourish and then slowly but surely begin to rot at the core?

Where is God in all of this? What kind of God is in all of this? Where is it all going? And so on. I so want the whole world to know the story of Genesis 1-11.

I submit to you that if our societies knew this story and took it seriously, we would experience profound healing and redemptive transformation.

In the last century, the brilliant British thinker C.S. Lewis composed a series of children's stories, which adults love to read, entitled The Chronicles of Narnia.

How many of you have read Chronicles of Narnia? About half of you. In the book, Prince Caspian, the children find their way into Narnia, and then they meet the lead character of the series, who is a lion named Aslan.

[ 5 : 00 ] Aslan looks at the children, and then he says, You came of Lord Adam and Lady Eve. And that is both honor enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth.

In Genesis 1-11, we discover both our greatness and our wretchedness. And we realize, as never before, why Jesus Christ had to come into this world, and what Jesus Christ came to do. Now, on this Sunday and next Sunday, I invite you to give your attention to the beginning chapter of the story. I invite you to focus on Genesis 1-1 to 2-3.

1-1 to 2-3. Now, I would assume most of you know that chapter and verse numbers are not part of the original text. They are not inspired. They were only added to the Bible like 800 years ago to facilitate referencing specific texts.

The content of Genesis 2-1 to 3 is not a new section. It's not a new chapter. It shouldn't have been demarcated a new chapter.

[ 6 : 17 ] Genesis 2-1 to 3 is the continuation of Genesis 1-1 to 31. The text should have been numbered Genesis 1-1 to 34.

Therefore, when I say Genesis 1, I'm going to mean Genesis 1-1 to 2-3. Alright? That's Genesis 1. So, we begin the series on the story that makes sense of our stories at the beginning.

A very good place to start. When you read, you begin with A, B, C. When you sing, you begin with Do, Re, Mi.

Do, Re, Mi. Do, Re, Mi. Fa, So, La, Ti.

Oh, let me make it a little easier for you. Do, a deer, a female deer. Re, a drop of golden sun.

[ 7 : 28 ] Mi, a name I call myself. Fa, a long, long way to run. Fa, a needle pulling thread. La, a note to follow.

So, tea, a drink with jam and bread. And that will bring us back to Do. Now, if our culture could know Genesis 1 as well as we know Do, Re, Mi.

It would change everything. The fact is, the beginning of the story that makes sense of our stories is a poem.

It's a song. It is not a philosophical treatise, although it opens up profound philosophical insights. It is not a scientific paper delivered at some conference, though it has huge scientific implications.

Genesis 1, 1, 1 to 2, 3, is a poem. It's a song. In Psalm 137, the people of Israel, who are then in captivity in Babylon, asked their contemporaries, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

[ 8 : 45 ] I think Genesis 1 is one of those songs. And the first three notes just happen to be C, C, C. Creator creates creation.

I owe the phrase to the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann. Creator creates creation.

When these three notes are gotten at the beginning, we can sing the rest of the story in tune.

Without these three notes, it is not possible to accurately understand human existence. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Creator creates creation. Not just some power or process somehow did something to cause the emergence of Mother Nature. Creator creates creation.

My heart breaks for the millions of people in our time who are trying to sing the song of life, who have fabulous voices, but who do not know the first three notes.

[ 9 : 58 ] My heart aches especially for the millions of children in our time who never have the opportunity to know how the story begins. The first sentence of the story joyfully declares the universe is not an accident.

And you are not an accident within it. The universe did not accidentally come into being. And you did not accidentally come into being.

There is a maker, a person. A person as personal as you are. Who creates. Who delights to create. Who creates you and everything around you. Notice how the song is bracketed.

Genesis 1-1, the heavens and the earth. Genesis 2-1, the heavens and the earth. The hymn of creation begins and ends with the phrase, the heavens and the earth.

Now, scholars call this kind of phrase Amerism, which is a way of expressing totality by contrasting points. The heaven and the earth means the whole universe.

[ 11 : 06 ] The creator creates everything that is. The universe did not just happen and you did not just happen. The first three notes just happen to be creator creates creation.

Now, let me just, in this opening message in the series, make a number of observations about Genesis 1, which we'll elaborate on as we go.

In the spirit of Genesis 1, I have six plus one observations. Seven observations. And I am keenly aware that I am now going to walk into a minefield of various opinions and perspectives.

And there's no way that I can speak to all of them in one or even a series of sermons. So, if you have questions about the text or questions about what I am doing with the text, you can send them to [genesisquestions@firstbc.org](mailto:genesisquestions@firstbc.org) And I'll do my best to try to answer them or send the questions to someone who can.

[Genesisquestions@firstbc.org](mailto:genesisquestions@firstbc.org) You can even be doing that during the sermon if you want. Although, by the ending, the question might have been answered.

[ 12 : 25 ] Okay. Six plus one observations. And next week, I'll add an eighth. Okay. Know where we're going? First observation.

We know that Creator created creation because the Creator told us so. That is, this fundamental affirmation of Genesis 1 is not the result of human reflection on creation.

This fundamental affirmation is the result of revelation by the Creator. Yes, most humans throughout history have come to the conviction that this created order is the work of some sort of Creator.

Although they tend to get the headlines in the media, those who deny that there is something or someone who made the universe are in the minority. After all, as Psalm 19 declares, the heavens are telling the glory of God their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

And the Apostle Paul a brilliant thinker, probably one of history's most brilliant thinkers, says in his letter to the Romans, For since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood through what He makes.

[ 13 : 42 ] Yet, believing the message of the heavens and the earth, finally getting what the created order inherently declares is not the result of human reflection but of divine revelation.

What Jesus said to Peter after Peter confessed Him to be Messiah, Son of God, Jesus could say to anyone who believes there's a Creator, flesh and blood did not reveal that to you but my Father who is in heaven.

Now this is why then the message of Genesis 1 does not fit any merely human vision of reality.

The author of Genesis 1, Moses or one of his disciples, did not sit down one day and after long reflection on what any human can see around us deduced that there is a Creator.

The human author of Genesis 1 was led to that conviction by the revealing work of the Creator.

What the Creator reveals connects with what the author and his contemporaries thought but what the Creator reveals goes beyond what any human being ever deduced.

[ 14 : 56 ] Indeed, what the Creator reveals often contradicts what humans deduce and therefore corrects what humans deduce.

For many of the contemporaries of the author of Genesis 1, creation came into being as the result of an intense struggle between warring gods. In the Babylonian story, for instance, known as Immanuel Elish, the god Marduk splits the body of the goddess Tiamat and from Tiamat creates the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1 connects with that story but then contradicts that story in order to correct that story declaring the good news that the heavens and the earth are not the result of two gods who hated each other warring it out.

Rather, the heavens and the earth are the result of the decision of the one god to freely choose to make the heaven and the earth. Genesis 1, because it is revelation and not deduction, will both connect and contradict.

It will connect with what we humans can deduce and then it will contradict what we humans have deduced in order to correct what we humans have deduced.

[ 16 : 19 ] Now, is this not the case with nearly everything in the rest of the story and especially the gospel of Jesus Christ? A virgin conceives?

Like, things don't happen that way, say, human-shaped worldviews. worldviews. The baby lying in Mary's arms is the creator come to earth.

What are you smoking, dude? Other worldviews will say. As Jesus dies on a Roman cross, God and humanity are reconciled.

The way into the holy presence of God is made for unholy sinners. Who would have ever deduced that sitting in front of the cross? You could have sat in front of the cross the rest of your life and never deduced that.

on Sunday morning after he died, the tomb where Jesus had been laid was empty. Jesus was alive. Death had been defeated. What? Don't you know such things don't happen given our scientific worldview?

[17:20] Jesus is coming again and he's bringing with him a new heaven and a new earth. What? That blows the circuits of what any reasonable person can deduce by looking at the present moment.

Yes, it does. Revelation blows the circuits. comes to us as contradiction to bring about correction so that we might know the truth that sets us free.

Biblical scholar Sidney Graydonis calls our attention to a narrator of Genesis 1. He writes this. The text reveals an omnipresent narrator who was present before any humans were created.

This narrator also is omniscient. He knows the thoughts of God. God saw that it was good. Knows the deliberations of God. God made humankind in his own image. Graydonis just makes that comment and goes on to the next page and I'm stuck there going, whoa, wait a minute.

So who is this narrator? I think I know the answer. Who was there in the beginning? Who was there who would know the mind of God as he creates?

[18:36] Answer? Jesus Christ. The Word as John calls him in his gospel. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Yes, on one level Moses or one of his students narrates the revelation of Genesis 1 but on another level behind Moses before Moses is the Word of God himself revealing what none of us would have been able to deduce.

we know Creator creates creation because the Creator told us so. First observation. Second observation. Creator creates out of nothing.

In the beginning God created. The word the text uses is the Hebrew word bara, B-A-R-A. In the beginning God barad. Now, in Hebrew there are two major words that are translated in the English as create.

One of them is asah. To asah is to take something that already exists and out of that something make something else. In the Hebrew Bible both God and humans asah.

[19:47] We take a tree trunk for instance and out of it we make two by fours and out of those two by fours we build a building. Or we take iron ore out of the ground and out of the iron ore we make tracks for trains. We asah.

So does God. That's why scripture will often refer to God as a potter. God takes something and out of something makes something new. But no human bara's. Nowhere in scripture do you find a human being baraing.

Only God can bara. Why? Because the verb emphasizes making without analogy. Making what has never been there before.

In short making something out of nothing. Ex nihilo as the church has put it through the centuries. Now in Genesis 1 we find bara at key points of the unfolding revelation.

In verse 1 at the very beginning declaring that the whole universe is created out of nothing. Without analogy no precedent for it. There was not a universe that then God says I think I'll make something that looks like that.

[20:54] No analogy. In verse 21 where living creatures or the animals come into existence. They're bara created out of nothing without analogy no precedent for it.

And then verse 27 where human beings come into existence. Three times bara three times. It's the text way of saying now get this God bara humans in his own image in the image of God he bara them male and female he bara them out of nothing without analogy there was no precedent for it. Talk about contradicting to correct. At the time Genesis 1 was composed and today the song speaks a radically different word.

When the creator created the universe he did so out of nothing there was nothing and out of the nothing God made something. When the creator created living creatures the animals he did so out of nothing.

Yes they are chemically related to what comes before them but the creator brought them forth as a new work of creation and when the creator created human beings us he did so out of nothing. [ 22 : 09 ] Yes we are chemically and biologically related to what came before us but the creator brought us forth as a new work of creation. Whatever anyone else believes about how human beings came into being Genesis 1 calls us to believe that we were barad not a sod made without analogy without any precedent as a brand new work and oh how our contemporaries need to hear this word.

Barad you are barad I thought about making a thousand t-shirts I'm barad only God barads no one else could have made you no process however created could have ever come up with you you are unique work of the creator who brings life out of nothing.

Third observation creator creates creation by speaking by the word yes in Genesis 2 we're going to find God getting down and dirty and shaping humans but what Genesis 1 wants us to get first is that God creates by his word no wrestling with primordial powers no needing of exerting of energy against resistant forces simply speaks let there be seven times let there be light let there be a firmament let there be waters gathered and dry land appear let the earth sprout vegetation let there be lights in the firmament let the waters team with swarming living creatures let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind seven times let there be and then an eighth time let us let us create humans in our image the creator creates simply by speaking are we surprised then that when the creator comes to earth comes to earth as one of us

Jesus redeems and recreates by speaking rise take up your pallet and walk demons be gone wind and wave be still Lazarus come out and a dead man walks out of the tomb this gives us tremendous hope the God who made us need only speak and things begin to happen which he's doing all the time right before us speaking into being new creations in Jesus Christ and one day he will say the word time and a new heaven and a new earth will descend but I'm getting ahead of the story fourth observation creator creates creation in divine time in divine time that is according to his own timetable this I think is the point of the six plus one structure of Genesis six plus one seven in the Bible you might know that the number seven points to completion or to perfection in the last book of the Bible in the revelation of Jesus Christ

John speaks of seven spirits of God now John knows there are not seven spirits of God there is only one spirit he says seven spirits as a way of describing the one spirit in all of his completeness and perfection the seven day structure of Genesis one is a way of saying God made the universe and all things within it in his time according to his perfect schedule now you might know that Genesis one is actually riddled with a lot of sevens not just seven days for instance in the first verse there are seven words in the second verse there are 14 words two times seven in the section on the seventh day there are 35 words five times seven now get this each noun in the first sentence is repeated by a multiple of seven God Elohim 35 times seven times five heaven 21 times seven times three earth 21 times seven times three and it was good seven times seven days six plus one a way of saying however the creator did it he did it in his own time fifth observation creator creates creation in a divine way in a divine way now this is crucial to see look at

[ 26 : 49 ] Genesis 1 2 look at the second verse and the earth was formless and void formless and void in Hebrew it's tohu and bohu tohu and bohu tohu formless without structure bohu void or empty the song of creation then sings of how the creator brings form out of formlessness and fullness out of emptiness and it's beautiful to watch it unfold Genesis 1 is laid out in two rows days 1 to 3 and days 4 to 6 in days 1 to 3 we have the movement from formless to form from chaos to order in days 4 to 6 we have the movement of from emptiness to fullness if you will in days 1 to 3 God builds the house in days 4 to 6

God furnishes it now in day 1 God calls forth light the fundamental energy of life in day 2 God calls forth the firmament the sky to separate the waters in day 3 God calls forth the dry land and gathers the water around it God empowers the land to produce vegetation the support system of the life that is yet to come now watch this on day 4 God goes back so to speak to the work of day 1 and calls forth lights to use the light God calls the cosmic system as one scholar calls it that makes for this orderly movement of day and night and note by the way in that section that the song does not call the sun the sun or the moon the moon just the greater light and the lesser light why because it's speaking a word a liberating word to the ancient cosmologist the ancient cosmologist had made the sun and the moon into gods that they feared understandably so

I mean given the amount of energy pouring out of the sun every second I understand the temptation to deify the sun I think I would have made the sun of God too but it's not a God it's just a great light made by a great person now in day five God goes back so to speak to the work of day two and calls forth fish to live in the waters and birds to live in the sky God empowers the fish blesses them to be fruitful and to multiply the creator revealed in genesis one loves to bless fish and birds think sockeye salmon we saw it in day six God goes back so to speak to the work of day three and calls forth living creatures to live on the earth and humans to eat the vegetation

God also gives the living creatures the capacity to reproduce and then God blesses human beings to be fruitful and multiply the creator seems to delight in fruitfulness God really likes to multiply I think you can see then that the emphasis of genesis one is not on the six days of creation I have no doubt but that the God we meet in the Bible has the capacity to create in six don't think that's what the text is emphasizing after all when the author later refers to creation he's going to say in the day God created genesis 2 1 and 5 1 in the day God created the text or the song is simply emphasizing this twofold movement from formlessness to form from emptiness to fullness the text is wanting us to understand that this is God's way in the world however long it took or takes the creator loves to move things from chaos to order from the void into fullness and

I think that explains why human beings long for order and it's why we long for fullness and it's why the gospel of Jesus Christ is filled with the word filled and fullness the God who creates is at work bringing order out of the mess we make and bringing fullness out of the emptiness sixth observation creator creates creation good seven times and it was good now I know right now it doesn't always feel good and Genesis 2 to 11 will help us understand why but it all began good seven times it was good day one it was good day two is actually not it was good in day two and I don't know why I mean it's not because the sky is not good maybe it's because as Bruce Waltke says tongue in cheek even God doesn't like Monday day three it was good two times to make up for the absence of good in day two day four it was good day five it was good day six it was good the creator is like very good now why now very good because we remain we remain it was when the creature

[ 32 : 40 ] God calls man and woman comes forth that God finally says very good thus the seventh observation creator creates a creature in his own image creator creates a creature who shows the rest of creation who the creator is and what the creator is like we'll pick it up on that note next Sunday living God I don't think we would have figured this out we can see a lot but we wouldn't have gotten this thank you for this song thank you for teaching us the notes and in your mercy and grace will you help us be able to sing it as never before we pray in

Jesus name amen