

The God of Creation

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[0 : 00] Gracious Father, thank you again for your word, the Bible. Thank you that you continue to speak to us today. And although it was written so many years ago, what you tell us is still relevant for us today.

And so far we ask that you would give us minds to understand and hearts that would live in light of your word. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, have you ever found yourself watching a TV show or a movie only to be interrupted by someone who walks in the middle of it and starts asking questions about it?

I mean, I like a good action movie and sometimes I'll be watching one and Michelle, my wife, will walk in and in the middle of the most action-packed scene, the most tense part of the movie, she starts asking questions, why is that guy chasing that guy? And who's this guy? What's this movie about?

And so on. And she'll also add disparaging comments like, as if he could jump that high. I say, it's an action movie, not realistic movie. Of course he can jump that high.

Now, to be fair, I have done that the same to her, only she watches different sorts of movies and so my questions are more along the lines of, why is that person crying? And is that person crying? Why are they all crying? Actually, it's not that bad.

[1 : 18] But the point is, when you walk halfway through into a movie, having missed the beginning, it's hard to make sense of the rest of it, isn't it? And that's because the beginning of a movie sets the scene, introduces us to the main characters and helps us to make sense of the rest of it.

Well, today we come to the book of Genesis. Genesis. And that's what those first few chapters of Genesis in particular do. They're like the beginning of a movie, but a movie about real life.

They set the scene, introduce us to the main characters and help us to make sense, not only of the rest of the Bible, but of life in this world.

Just like the beginning of a movie helps us to know who the people are and why they are here, so these chapters help us to understand who we are and why we are here. Of course, a different beginning will lead to a different understanding.

So today, the dominant view is not Genesis 1, but what is taught in our schools, as I understand it, which is atheism and evolution. They say the beginning was a random or accidental chemical combustion that created the first single cell organism.

[2 : 37] And from there, the cell then accidentally mutated over billions of years in a process of natural selection, which has truth to it, by the way, then kind of has everything we see today.

Natural selection is not the same as evolution. You need to realise that. So that's our beginning. If we understand it, the dominant view today, then if we began with an accident, then it means our life is basically an accident.

You see, where we start determines where we end up. Or take the dominant view taught back in Moses' day. Back then, one of the big theories was the Babylonian creation story called Enuma Elish.

So on the next slide, there's seven stone tablets that we have in the British Museum at the moment, and they tell the story of how the Babylonians thought creation began, how humanity began.

And one of the things that the British Museum has is also a stone sculpture. And on the next slide is a rubbing of that stone sculpture, where it's a picture of two gods.

[3 : 48] So on the left is Tiamat, who is a female dragon. She had a husband called Apsu, and they gave birth to lots of other gods, including their great-great-great-grandson, Marduk, who's the guy on the right.

Now, some gods killed the husband, Apsu, and that led to all-out war, so the story goes. And then Tiamat went to war with Marduk, and you might be able to see, but Marduk ends up stabbing her and winning the day.

The story then continues. Marduk uses half her body for the sky, the other half for the earth. He uses the body of another god he kills to create humanity, so that humanity might provide food offerings and drink offerings for the gods.

And so if this is our beginning, then our understanding of life means that we are born out of war and chaos, and are an afterthought by the gods to provide food and drink for them.

And we are to live in fear that war could break out between the gods at any moment, which could end our lives, similar to Greek mythology and so on. You see, what we believe about our beginning will shape our understanding of our life today, who we are and why we're here.

[5 : 05] But I want to suggest, you'd be glad to know, that I think the Bible's beginning offers a better understanding for life today than any other. But I also want to suggest that we cannot come to Genesis chapter 1 looking for answers that it was not written to give.

Answers like, how does this fit with science? Rather, we need to come looking for the answers it does give, like, what is God like? In other words, Genesis 1 is not meant to be read as a science textbook, but a theology book, a theology about God.

God is the main character. I mean, the word God comes up 35 times in 35 verses. And so while it is partly written against other creation theories like Enuma Elish, it is primarily written to simply tell us about the God of creation, which brings us to point 1 on your outlines, verse 1 in your Bibles.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Now in the very first sentence of the Bible, we see a number of things. Firstly, we see that God is God. It says, in the beginning, God existed.

[6 : 27] He was there before creation even came to be. In other words, God is eternal, always existed. Now while we find that hard to understand, it's actually comforting.

Because it means he is truly God. I mean, if he was created by another God like Marduk from the Babylonian story, then he's not really the supreme God, is he? The one who created him is the supreme true God.

And if he was created by another God, then presumably he can die, just like those Babylonian gods died, or the Greek mythology gods like Zeus and so on. Now would you really want to put your life in the hands of a God who is not the true God and can die?

I wouldn't. But the God of the Bible is eternal. He existed before creation, he cannot die, and therefore he's truly God. I once had a child ask me, who made God?

It's a common question. And I said, well, no one, but that's why he's God. Now the child paused, thought about it for a moment, and then said, well, I suppose being God means you're special.

[7 : 37] And then he just walked away content. He got it right though, didn't he? The very fact that God always existed shows he is special, that he is God, you see.

A second thing we see here is that God is God because he creates everything out of nothing. So when it says in verse 1 that he created the heavens and the earth, he's using two opposites, heavens up there and earth down here, to mean everything in between.

So we do this sometimes. For example, a school teacher, I might say, I really want the big kids and the little kids to listen, by which they really mean orchids, don't they?

They're using opposites, big and little, to mean everyone. And here in verse 1, the opposites of heaven and earth are used to mean everything. God created everything. And if he created everything, then he must have started with nothing.

He didn't use dead bodies of other gods like Marduk did. The writer of Hebrews, in fact, puts it like this on the next slide. Hebrews chapter 11 says, By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

[8 : 55] In other words, God created everything seen out of what is not seen, out of nothing, by his word. Now, only God can do that. Again, I remember teaching some kids at our Wednesday afternoon kids club here at church.

This was a couple of years ago and we were looking at the creation story and I said, Okay, I want you all to make a paper airplane out of this piece of paper. And they had great fun making the paper airplanes and throwing them as far as they could.

And then I took all the paper away and then I said, Okay, I want you to make another paper airplane. And they kind of just looked at me blankly. One kid just pretended to fold one and said, I made an invisible plane and threw it, tried to be smart.

But another girl said, Oh, we're not God. Now, she meant it as a complaint but she got the point, didn't she? It's the very first of the Bible declares that God is God because he existed before creation and created everything in creation out of nothing.

But this verse also declares that God is the ruler over creation. If God is the creator then he's not part of his creation but he rules over it. And I realize this may seem obvious for us who are Christians here but people often worship Mother Earth.

[10 : 13] I'm sure you've heard of that expression. They worship Mother Earth as though creation itself is God. But Genesis tells us that God is separate to creation.

He is not part of it but above it. And because he is above it, because he created it, then he rules over it. It's his. He is the boss.

Now again, this is actually a good thing because it means, for example, when we pray, we are not praying to a God who is not in control and is unable to do things. We're praying to a God who does rule over creation, who is in control.

But notice verse 2 as well. God is not just the ruler over his creation but he is the sustainer of his creation. Verse 2 says that the Spirit of God hovers over the waters.

Now it's a bit hard to just get this from the English but the word for hovers here is used in the Bible for God who hovers over his people watching over them but also feeding them, caring for them, leading them.

[11 : 21] In other words, sustaining them. And that's the picture we have here. Not of the Spirit who hovers from a distance like a parent hovering in the background watching their children play at the park.

No, no. Hovering and being involved in creation and sustaining it. Well, if you don't take my word for it, take Jesus' word for it on the next slide. Jesus says this in Matthew 5.

Your Father in heaven, notice, causes his Son to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

You see, God is still involved in creation. Causing the sun to rise. The sun doesn't rise automatically. God causes it to keep rising and setting. Keeps sending rain and so on.

God is not like a clockmaker who just winds up his creation and walks away. Rather, he's still involved in it, caring for it and sustaining it. And so already Genesis has told us a lot about God just from the first two verses.

[12 : 24] How he's different to the other so-called gods of Babylonians and so on like Marduk and so on. And this beginning helps us to already know who we are and why we are here.

We are created by God. He is our boss whether we realise it or not and he sustains us whether we realise it or not. But the question then comes, well, what sort of boss is he?

Is he a good one or a bad one? Well, we are now given a glimpse of God and what he is like by how he creates in verses 3 and following which brings us to point 2.

Now again, we're not going to work through all those verses bit by bit. I want to just show you themes and highlight to you what the text highlights to us so that we might know what God's character is like.

And so, after he makes the world, so he creates the world in verse 1 and 2 but in verse 2 it is formless and empty. Do you notice that in verse 2?

[13 : 30] And so, the first thing we notice is that God is a God of order because he starts to bring order to this formless creation. In fact, the word for formless there can also mean chaotic.

God starts to bring order to this chaotic creation. So, verse 3, and God said, let there be light and there was light. God saw that light was good and he separated the light from the darkness.

He called the light day and the darkness he called night. You see what God is doing? He's organizing things. He's separating light from darkness. He's naming things. He's bringing order to this chaotic creation.

And it's just not this organizing thing that we see as well here that tells us that God is a God of order. It's also the fact that the days are ordered.

You know, day one, day two, day three, and so on. But it's also the fact that every day repeats the same pattern. So, on the next slide, we had this refrain which kind of runs through every day.

[14 : 34] I don't know if you noticed it as the Bible was being read before. It says, and God said, let there be dot, dot, dot, dot, and it was so, and there was evening and morning, day, whatever.

That same structure, that same refrain, is repeated for every day. Again, giving order, you see. And so, this teaches us that God is not a God who creates chaos by going to war with the other gods, like the Babylonians story, but God is a God who brings order out of chaos.

What's more, God is also a God who fills with life what is empty. So, verse 2 said that the creation was empty, but now we see God filling his creation with life.

We see this in the big picture of the day. So, the first three days are forming creation, and the next three days are filling creation. Now, to kind of represent this pictorially, I've got a slide, which I've also put on the back of your outline.

So, if you've got your outline there, you can get a closer look at it. Someone asked if my children drew this. Sadly, you'd think so, but no, it was me. And what I'm trying to show you here is that there's days that correspond to each other.

[15 : 53] So, the days across the top, day one, two, and three, the form, the general form is created. And then days four, five, and six, that form is filled. So, day one is night and day, and then on day four, it's filled with the sun, the moon, the stars, and so on.

Day two is the sea and the skies, and then day five is filling it with birds and fish and an octopus who's missing some legs. Sorry about that.

But you get the point. So, even the structure of this account shows that God is a God who fills with life. And this filling of life is also seen in the little details as well.

So, God creates lots of different types of flowers, for example. He's not stingy and gives us just one type of flower. Although, that would make it easier for me when choosing which flowers to buy my wife, Michelle, if I ever bought her flowers, actually.

But the point is, God has given us plenty of choice. So, verse 11, God said, let the land produce vegetation, seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it according to their various kinds.

[17 : 06] And it was so. Not just to one kind, but various kinds, he says. Or, verse 20, down the bottom of the page, God said, let the water team filled with living creatures.

Not just have one goldfish, but filled with living creatures. Or, verse 22, over the page, where God blessed the fish and the birds that they might fill the sea and the skies.

You see, the point is, this creation account shows us that God is not a stingy God, but a generous God who fills with life what is empty. Now, there's still order, it's according to their kinds, but there's an abundance of life.

He's a generous God who delights to bring order and fullness of life out of chaos and emptiness of life. Something that we see him continue to do in the Bible.

But the next thing we also see from this account is that God, what he creates is good. Do you notice that that phrase and it was good is repeated throughout the account.

[18 : 16] world. There's no evil when God created the world. Instead, everything was good. And so again, we see that God is a God who delights in creating good, not evil.

And as we know from the rest of life and the Bible, this means that God will even create good out of evil. Again, something we continue to see in the Bible, as I said.

I just think of all the strife that's happening in the Middle East. it's hard to believe that any good can come out of that and yet I hear story after story of Muslims turning to Christ.

But there's actually more. God actually makes people the pinnacle of his creation. Verse 26, people are the last thing he creates. Kind of like how you leave the best of a dinner to last.

You eat all your veggies first and you leave your succulent steak to last. That's what I do. Anyway, it's kind of what God is doing here. Leaving the best to last. People are important.

[19 : 21] The most important part of his creation. And it's backed up by the fact that we are the only part of his creation that is made in his image. And that all of creation has actually been made for us.

It's extraordinary. Notice how God first created a whole world of good things and then gives it to humanity to enjoy and rule over. I mean, that's extraordinary when you think about it.

You see, we are not created to provide for the gods, like the Babylonian myth story. Rather, God creates to provide for us. We are the pinnacle of his creation.

So we see here that God is a God who delights in us, who cares about people, who considers people of great worth in his sight. What's more, we now have purpose in life.

We are created to rule over creation, to care for it and enjoy it. But we also to enjoy fellowship or rest with God. You see, the goal of creation is the seventh day.

[20 : 24] That's where it's all heading. And on the seventh day is a day of rest. Rest in the Bible is a picture of enjoying fellowship with God. And I don't know if you notice, but in chapter 2, verse 3, there is no evening or morning for the seventh day.

It's not there. It's as though this seventh day is meant to last forever. A day where we're to enjoy fellowship with God. And so again, this creation account teaches us that God is a God who delights in giving his people rest, who gives us worth, meaning, purpose in life, and longs to enjoy fellowship with us.

And he has done it all by his powerful word. Each day begins with and God said, and adds, and it was so. In other words, God speaks and it happens.

If only that happened in my house, I'd love that. I'd speak and the kids, but then again, I'm not God. God's word is powerful to create. He speaks and it happens. Of course, his word turns out to be none other than his son, Jesus Christ.

Remember from our second reading, I think it's on the next slide actually, from John chapter one. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. Through him, all things were made.

[21 : 49] Without him, this is Jesus, nothing was made that has been made. In Jesus was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. As John goes on to make it clear, the word is Jesus.

See, God created the world through his son, Jesus. It's in Christ, Jesus, that we find true life and purpose, in other words. And what's more, he will recreate us through the word about Christ.

For sin has meant that we've all been emptied of life eternal and face the chaos of hell. But through the gospel word about Jesus, God can create good from evil.

He can fill us with life eternal when we trust in Jesus. As Jesus himself says in John 10, I think on the next slide, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

So we now have to find life and meaning and purpose in Christ by trusting in him. And so the question is, have you done that? Have you put your trust in Jesus?

[22 : 56] I started by saying that beginnings help us make sense of the rest of life. They help us to understand who we are in this world. So for Ben, his beginning is Andrew and Emma's son will tell him that he is a crump who will take after his parents in some ways, hopefully all the good ways.

But as I said, what we believe about our beginning will shape what we understand about our life today. If we believe as our children are taught that there is no God, we are simply a random accident, then we must understand that we are accidents and there is no meaning and life.

Atheists still struggle to get around that one. Or we can believe that we are an afterthought by the gods created to provide for them, which means we are not worth much, we are not precious in God's sight.

Or we can believe that there is a God of Genesis 1 who created us and rules over us, yet sees us as the pinnacle of his creation and longs to enjoy fellowship with us.

And so despite our sin, he gave his son so that he might again create good and fill us with life now, spiritual life now, and bring order out of this chaotic world later in the world to come.

[24 : 16] So if you think God's beginning here in the Bible offers a better life than atheism, then why not put your trust in Jesus? Because in Jesus you find life and meaning and hope.

And for us who have, there are several responses we can make, which we'll look at more in the coming weeks, but just one for today. If God is the God of the universe, the one who rules and created everything, the one who gave his son to save us, then he is worthy of our praise.

And so in the words of Revelation on the last slide, it says you are worthy, the people in heaven say you were worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power.

Why? Well, for or because you created all things and by your will they were created and have there been. And to him, that is Christ, who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, to him be glory and power forever and ever.

Amen. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you for this chapter, which we've really only scratched the surface of, but we thank you for the truth that it reminds us that you are God, that you created us, but you are not a mean God who lords it over us, but that we are the pinnacle of your creation, that you care for us and sustain us and long to enjoy fellowship with us so much so that you gave your only son, Jesus, to die for us.

[25 : 58] Father, in light of who you are as our creator, help us to continue to live to bring you praise and glory by our words and by our lives. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.