

Creation and Formation

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[0 : 00] Let's turn this evening to Genesis chapter 1. Genesis 1, reading again at the beginning. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering or moving over the face of the waters.

I'm going to spend some time looking at this chapter, because it contains, as we'll see hopefully, much that is then unpacked in the rest of the scripture.

It's something that anticipates very much everything else that's described after the description of the work of creation. And it has in it many things which we ourselves, of course, find very relevant today.

Not only the rebuttal of many ideas as to how the universe came about, and I hope that through going through this, our younger folks especially, you meet with the theory of evolution and developments of that theory of evolution in school and colleges and other places, that we will see how a proper understanding of Genesis very easily counteracts those theories that evolutionists and others, non-creationists actually set out.

And they're very common today, and from that, of course, develops the kind of thinking that wants to cut the supernatural, or the ideas of God being real, from human understanding and from human practice.

[1 : 45] And as we reach there at the beginning of the chapter, it gives us there in this account of creation, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

We're just going to look at the first two verses tonight, because there's actually quite a lot in these two verses itself. The account that we have of creation, you can very easily see that it's a prologue, or a prelude, or you might say an introduction, pretty much the same thing, an introduction to the rest of scripture, to the rest of the Bible.

These two chapters that you have at the beginning of the Bible are the Bible's introduction to everything else that follows. Which is why we said that the rest of the Bible, in a sense, is really what follows on progressively from this, or takes from this, the other aspects of God's work that God has revealed to us in the whole of scripture.

So it is itself an introduction to the rest of the Bible, and we'll see that there's a connection between that and the introduction to some other books, particularly the Gospel of John, which in many respects follows a similar pattern to these opening verses of Genesis.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And then it proceeds to tell us that all things were made by him. So here is the prelude to the rest of scripture, here's the introduction to the rest of scripture, but there's something else.

[3 : 15] The account that you have here of creation, actually tells us that God's work of creation, was itself a prelude to the rest of his work.

This is not just something where the Bible is saying, here is my prelude to what else I've got to speak about. What the Bible is saying is, the work that God did in creating the universe is actually an introduction.

An introduction to something else. An introduction to his work of redemption. Now just think about that for a moment, because it's only just in recent times, through space technology and discovery, that we've really got some glimpses into some of the deepest parts of space, as far as least as we can reach at the moment.

And we're told that not only are there billions and billions of planets and of stars, outwith our own galaxy of the Milky Way, there are actually billions of galaxies, containing each of them billions of planets and of stars.

We just cannot possibly begin to imagine the vastness, the complexity, the wonders of this universe, the whole creation.

[4 : 41] And just think of how awesome a thing that is. That's what the psalmist himself was actually saying, although there's much more that he goes on to say, when I look up unto the heavens, which thine own fingers framed, unto the moon, unto the stars, and he's not going beyond what he can see with his eye.

Then I say, what is man that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man that you should visit him? That awesome universe, that awesome work of God, great and awesome as it is, is actually just his introduction to something even greater.

Because the work of creation in Genesis is compressed into the space of a week. These six days, whatever you make of the days, and know yourselves, there are different opinions as to whether they're literal 24-hour days, which many creationists think, or whether, like other creationists too, they take them to be longer periods, but that they are spoken of as days.

We'll leave that aside for the moment. But the fact of it is, in terms of the days, as we understand them at least, to actually direct us to our human understanding, God is describing his work of creation, creating and setting everything in the universe that exists in six days.

And the rest of the Bible takes up thousands of years. Why? Because God is telling us the work of creation, awesome, astonishing as it is, is not God's greatest work.

[6 : 38] It's his introduction to the work of redemption, to the work of salvation in Christ. just like you find on a stage performance or a play on stage or a performance of whatever kind, you know that there's a time when the curtain goes up and then there's usually an introductory act or an introductory piece play before the main thing then begins.

Well, you can say what Genesis is telling us is that God's work of creation, if you like, is equivalent to lifting the curtain. It's God raising the curtain to the greater work of redemption that's going to be displayed as his great drama, his great spiritual drama of salvation.

The creation is the introduction to it. Now, if the creation, astonishingly great as it is, is but his introduction, what does that say of his work of redemption?

What does that say of the magnitude, of the size, of the dimensions of God's work of redemption in Christ? When you cannot possibly comprehend the universe and its creation, its vastness, its greatness, and the greatness that created it, how can we possibly go beyond that as an introduction and begin to realize the immensity of our redemption?

And doesn't make it, doesn't it make it all the more wonderful that he says what is man? Because Psalm 8 is not about the insignificance of man.

[8 : 27] Psalm 8 is not saying compare to the creation and the vastness of the creation. When you look up, says the psalmist, to the work of your hands, then I say what is man?

The psalmist is not saying what an insignificant, pathetic little thing man is. What he's saying is how significant man must be that you visit him.

That you who have done such great things in creation that you should actually come to think upon and to visit this man, it must mean that to you, O Lord, this man, this creation, this creature that you made is so significant in your sight that you made your son to become man for his redemption.

So there it is, the work of creation is this prelude to the greater work, to the drama of redemption.

And there are a number of things that then open up for us as you come to this work of creation itself, before we ever come to the work of redemption. The first is creation, the second is formation, the third is then, we'll look at it next time, the third is separation, because there's an emphasis there on separation.

[9 : 51] He separates the waters above from the waters beneath, he separates the light from the darkness, he distinguishes between things. But let's leave that, let's look at creation first and then formation.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. As soon as you open your Bible, the first subject that meets you is God.

That's the very first emphasis, the very first thing that you read. The first subject of the first sentence is God. And you don't need to be good with grammar to realize that all the way through this chapter, God is the subject.

God is the main thing that's emphasized. God's name comes up 35 times within the space of this opening chapter. And of course that means as the Bible opens up and you follow out what it says, what you find on the opening page and in the opening sentence is the same all the way through.

God is its subject. It's the book that God has written about himself. If we come away from our Bibles at any time, and God has not been the main subject for us, we have misread it.

[11 : 16] We have not read it properly. Even when it speaks about ourselves and the creation of human life, it is still more about God than it is about human beings.

And God said, let us make man in our image. So he made man in his likeness. He gave man significance and he gave him dignity and he gave him dominion and he did it.

God is still the main subject. And here you find the very thing at the beginning that carries on all the way through God. And this word for God in Hebrew is a plural word.

It's a word that's in plural form. Elohim. And strangely it takes a singular verb. Which you don't find commonly at all in the likes of our English or Gaelic or whatever.

You find it used in a collective noun sense. Like you would say the flock of sheep is white.

[12 : 31] great. But you don't say the singular sheep are. Or you don't say that anything plural like you would say the ships is coming.

But with God there is a plural form and it takes a singular verb. Elohim is great. God plural word is great.

Why is that? Well it takes the New Testament really to reveal this in the fullness that it has. But here you could say that in the beginning of the revelation of God there is certainly in it what's called the plural of fullness.

Some people think it's the plural of majesty but it's the plural certainly of fullness because the word itself Elohim is a word that has in it the significance of something that's absolutely full.

And of course God is fullness fullness of life fullness of wisdom fullness of power you cannot add to anything that God is in his power in his wisdom in his glory in his immensity in his being he is fullness and of course that takes you I'm sure it's in your mind just now you're thinking ahead to the New Testament and the description of the Lord Jesus Christ and who he is and what he is and why he is significant and what his significance is about and you find that in the likes of Paul's letter to the Colossians you find that in him dwells the fullness of God bodily see that fullness Elohim is in Christ and it's in Christ as it is in God and it's in Christ because he is God and as John tells us this Elohim includes the person of Christ which is why it's not just a plural of fullness but it's a fullness the New Testament will tell us contains trinity of persons and the one God this great mystery of mysteries but yet this really precious mystery because we don't have a Christian religion to speak of without it being founded upon and founded by the God who is

[14 : 58] Trinity the triune God the God who is the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit now it takes the New Testament to really bring us to see that in a clearer light and of course even then we can't begin to understand anything but the fact of it and very little of the actual nature of it or the essence of it but it's there and it's even already here hinted at so that when you come to the rest of the New Testament the rest of the Bible especially New Testament then you can shine that light back on these words the beginning of Genesis so that's the first thing God second thing in creation is in the beginning in the beginning God created and in the beginning is certainly a reference to the beginning of all that has been created because there is no beginning to God himself and that's one of the things you notice here when it goes on to speak about in the beginning the beginning of the universe as we know it as it exists

God existed God was there God made the heavens and the earth he created the heavens and the earth that's their beginning from the God who has no beginning but it's not just a reference to time in the sense that it's the beginning of things created and that they had their beginning by God creating them it is that but it's more than that because it means when you go to let me just point out in Isaiah chapter 46 and it's not just in this one verse you'll find it elsewhere as well this is just an example of it and Isaiah actually has this as frequently as anybody else where God is speaking there about himself Isaiah 46 and verse 10 he says remember this and stand firm and call to mind you transgressors remember the former things of old for I am

God and there is no other I am God and there is none like me declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done saying my counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purpose I am God declaring the end from the beginning in other words when you go right back here to Genesis to the opening words of the Bible and you read in the beginning God created what you are really saying as well is in the beginning God already had the end perfectly known to him the end is in the beginning because it's in God it's in the plan of God it's in the mind of God it's in the knowledge of God and how precious that is to our lives as individuals as congregations as the church of God in the world but particularly precious to us as individual

Christians when you go to the psalmist Psalm 139 says pretty much the same thing when it talks there about the surrounding knowledge of God that surrounds him and in which all things that are true of him are known by God far more than he knows himself how does he go on to speak that what use does he make of that what good is it to us to know that the end of all things is already there in the beginning with God that he has it all at once well isn't that what the psalmist meant when he said how precious Lord are your thoughts to me how precious are your thoughts to me what does he mean he means that every aspect of his life from beginning to end the beginning and the end and everything between everything that goes towards his end and his destiny and the way that it works to that end it's all there to begin with how precious then are your thoughts how often do you and I turn to that how often we need to turn to that how often we do turn to that to that wonderful all embracing knowledge of God where God in his immensity and eternity knows the end from the beginning and knows the end at the beginning in the beginning

God created you come to this word created now we've said that God is a plural and the verb is a singular but this word this verb created in Hebrew is never ever used of any subject but God when it talks about human beings doing things or fashioning things or creating things it never uses this verb this is used exclusively of God nowhere in the Old Testament do you find this verb for any other being person than God in the beginning God created because before God created there was nothing else and I know it's impossible to get our heads around that there was nothing but God but God is eternal and God is everywhere but nothing else existed except himself and when he created the heavens and the earth it was he who brought them into being from nothing there was nothing but himself in the beginning and in the beginning he created the heavens and the earth nothing existed till God created that's what it's really saying to us so right at the very start in the opening sentence you've got the main subject you've also got the fact that in the beginning

[21 : 36] God took account of all things that would ever be from this beginning he had them all planned and it will all be as he planned and it is God who created this and the creating is the creating that only he can bring about that's why the word is used only of God only he can create something out of nothing and I think we mentioned recently in looking at Abraham in Romans chapter 4 the wonder of faith as God gives us faith as it describes the God we have faith in the God we believe in and in regard to his promises as well as it puts it there he believed in God who calls things that are not as though they be he spoke about a son for Abraham but he didn't exist and yet to God he was as real as any other matter was because he existed in himself in his own mind in his plan in his purpose he calls the things that are not as though they be there is where you find a connection with redemption a connection from this very emphasis connecting with the greater drama of redemption he calls things that are not as though they be all the way through this chapter

God is taking things that are not and speaking them into being and God said let there be light and God said let the earth bring forth and God said let us make man in our image it's God saying God speaking God's power by his own will bringing things that are not into being calling things that are not as though they be isn't that what he's done for yourself he's brought into your possession what didn't exist in your possession before he's brought life and immortality to light through the gospel he's brought salvation into your possession you didn't have it before it was there announced in the gospel as something which existed but it didn't exist in you or my possession until God put it there until God spoke it into being as it were in our possession just like he spoke to the grave of Lazarus and the dead body of Lazarus came to life and emerged from that sepulchre

Lazarus come forth that's how he spoke to yourself whenever that moment came and whenever that moment was maybe you don't know it maybe I don't know it for myself but God knows it and you know it happened because you see the result of it it's God's creative word calling into being the things that he has always had in his own mind but that were not until he spoke them into being what a great God what an immensity what wonderful lessons even from this opening verse of Genesis to apply to our understanding and experience of God and that brings us to formation so here's creation God in the beginning created and 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 water now notice there the earth was without form and void let's ask a question in all the vastness of that universe of billions and billions of worlds and of galaxies where is the centre of the universe or at least let's rephrase it where as far as Genesis 1 is concerned is the centre of the universe what is the most important planet out of all the billions that exist what's the most important to the writer of

Genesis what is the most important to the creator himself the earth see it's immediately saying the earth it's spoken about the whole creation in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and then it says the earth was without form and void because it's on this earth on this planet this planet that looks so beautiful from space as you are now able to see it from photos taken from far away this wonderful blue planet as it's commonly referred to this is where God chose to manifest his glory in the drama of redemption he created it to be the stage on which redemption would actually be worked out and shown and finished the earth and from its beginnings here the earth in its development owes its development to God giving it formation because what you read here is the earth was without form and it was void and you're beginning already to get the sense of something significant about to take place because the six days that follow in the description of Genesis 1 is really equivalent to God taking the earth as it is at first and then bringing it to have order and form and arrangement of the various forms of life and the various things around these forms of life such as the dry land and the seas and the animals and the fish and the birds it's all about creating form and order it begins with it being without form and void that's something that means essentially it's got the idea of it not being developed something that's not developed properly yet something that's rather shapeless if you like compared to what it's going to finally be and the work of each day as we're saying is God taking that formless earth and giving it form giving it a definite shape and appearance and order as he had always purposed the earth was without form and void and that is really a mark of

God's work not just here in creation it's a mark of his work in redemption as well he begins with what doesn't have proper shape in fact when you think of the words that he uses in the bible for sin in the word iniquity for example in other words for sin it has the meaning of something that's gone wrong something that's bad something that's even very twisted and without form without proper shape and what does God do he gives it form but he doesn't just give it any form if you think of our fall that's described in Genesis 3 that's where we became distorted and all out of shape and what God then sets about doing is giving that lost sinner form and shape as he should have but it's actually bringing us to be like his own son that's the form that God has in view for us the form as we'll see in a minute that's mentioned in Romans 8 and to the likeness of God's own son because we were as we'll see created in his likeness anyway in the beginning so there's the work of each day

[29 : 52] God taking the earth that was without form and void and he proceeds to give that shape and to give it order to bring about all these things that actually will finally bring it as God intends and it's interesting in the Bible that when it speaks sometimes about the judgment of God in other words you can say the blessing of God is God giving something formless a proper shape God's blessing shapes your life shapes it in the way that God himself is pleased with in the way that brings you to be like himself that gives you his own beauty and puts it upon you judgment is one way that the Bible describes it but when it speaks about judgment let me just again pick out a verse you can look it up more fully afterwards Jeremiah as you know is a book that's full of God's declarations of judgment against the people of Judah that Jeremiah was appointed to pronounce this is what he says in chapter 4 where he talks about the judgment that's going to come upon the people unless they repent and turn back to God

I looked on the earth and behold it was without form and void you see exactly the same words as Genesis 1 to the heavens and they had no light it's going back to the pre formed creation when the earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep there is Jeremiah saying or God through Jeremiah this is what I am seeing in the judgment of God that human life recedes backwards it goes to the shapelessness that the creation had to begin with I looked he goes on to speak about there was no man and all the birds of the air had fled and the fruitful land was a desert and all the cities were laid in ruins before the Lord and his fierce anger there is Genesis 1 all over again but it's before God gave shape to it so the judgment of God takes you back to shapelessness and the blessing of

God brings you to formation and brings you to have the shape appearance the order that God himself gives us by his grace and darkness it says was over the face of the deep the deep there is just the water but there is as yet no dry land that comes later when God separates between the waters so that the dry land actually appears so you have a picture there of the earth before God began to set about giving it form it is just darkness over the face of the deep it is just water or liquid with no solid earth at all appearing and the spirit of God moves or was moving over the face of the water now that too is very significant we'll finish with that but this is itself something that carries us right into the work of redemption following creation the spirit of God in the old testament was not understood as clearly as you understand from the new testament so again you take the light of the new testament you can shine it back into the old as long as you don't think that way back in those early days that they had such an understanding of the three persons of the trinity as you have it was through the coming of Christ especially and then the teaching of the following apostles that are now in the letters of the new testament that you find that teaching about the trinity opened up for us but here is saying the spirit of God the one we know now as the third person of the trinity

God himself but here specified as the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters now just think of the picture that you have there of the earth just as God is about to bring it into shape and form and order there is just the deep the waters that cover the earth and darkness over the face of the deep because there is no light yet and the spirit of God is hovering over the face of the waters in other words it is saying two things by this and here is where we come into the meaning of this word hovering over the authorised version has was moving over the face moved over but the image actually the word is used in some places for what you find a bird doing a mother hen with either the eggs or the chicks that have come from the eggs as her brood she hovers over them and the two ideas that you have built into that are first of sustaining them maintaining them as they are but secondly she is there to nurture their development whether you think of the eggs or the chicks the mother hens hovering over them is all about not just protection and sustaining but also doing that with a view to something else coming from that with a view to the next stage that's what the spirit of God is brought before us as doing hovering over the face of the water it is the

Lord's spirit who sustained the creation who kept it from falling apart the power of God through his spirit the energy that was required not only to bring the creation into being but to sustain it to keep it to maintain it then as it was it is the spirit of God that's specifically mentioned as hovering over moving over the face of the deep to keep it but also to actually bring it to the next stage so we follow from that the next stages the days as they follow that it was the spirit of God particularly that was active in the bringing into being of light when God said let there be light that it was through the spirit of God that that came about

[36 : 41] God by his spirit and that's why it's connecting with the work of the spirit in our redemption how do we come to have our eyes opened how do we come from the formlessness of our sinfulness and fallenness and lostness to have the shape and the form of salvation about us by the work of the spirit except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter or see the kingdom of God and how often through the new testament you have an emphasis on the ministry of the spirit of God not only as bringing us to life spiritually creating life within us but also maintaining that life and preparing us for the next stage of our experience there is a great connection with this passage where you find the spirit of

God in Romans chapter 8 for example as in a sense hovering over our lives presently he has brought us into being he is through the work of sanctifying us he is forming us into the shape or the image of Christ but that's not quite finished and will not be till the day of our glory which is beyond our resurrection from the dead physically that's why Romans 8 is such a wonderful connection to this chapter as well where Romans 8 from verse 18 really through to verse 30 you find that the connections are very obvious there where he says at verse 18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us or in us for the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God for the creation was subjected to futility not willingly but because of him who subjected it in hope that means the curse that came upon the whole creation because of man's sin has placed the creation

God is saying here Paul is saying in a situation of longing longing to be free from that bondage of corruption as it's called for it will be set free to obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God for we know that the whole creation is groaning together in the pains of childbirth till now and not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit see what he's saying we have the first fruits of the spirit we have the spirit already in us but the spirit already in us is the first step the first stage the first if you like it's the prelude it's the introduction to the much greater eternity that's waiting for us we have the first fruits he's there as the deposit of what's to follow and we grow on inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption of sons the redemption of our bodies for in this hope we were saved and he goes on to speak about the spirit interceding for us and so on all the way down to we know that all things work together for good and then he comes to say for those who he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son there's the terminus there is the end that

God always knew and had in mind at the beginning to give us form and the form is no less than conformity to the image of his son in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form and void and darkness so by the face of the deep and the spirit of God moved over hovered over the face of the waters in the spring Lord as we marvel over your work of creation from the account we have in your word we pray that it might move us to be all the more astounded at your work of redemption Lord we give thanks that you have brought to us a word that is so perfectly put together a word that brings to us its own evidence of being your word of being spoken forth in a way that comes to enlighten our minds not only of these great issues of creation but especially of redemption we thank you that you are the one who still presides over all things as you did from all eternity and we ask

Lord as you are the one who has government over all the things in the universe that you would give us day by day to willingly place ourselves under the government of your mind the government of your wisdom and your power and all that you have by way of your plan for your people so bless us now we pray hear the prayers of your people and forgive our sin for Jesus sake Amen