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THE GOD OF CREATION

Genesis 1:2-25

By

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Genesis Lesson 3

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When Rachel Saint brought some of the primitive Auca Indians to the United States, she took them to New York City and to the top of the Empire State Building. But the Indians, who thought that an elevator was just a little room and who were not used to being on top of a high structure without climbing it, had no idea of where they were when they stepped out of the elevator and onto the observation deck. They were interested in the pigeons and pigeon droppings, but they had no interest in the fantastic view. Because of their limited perspective, they could not comprehend the panorama before them.

One of the unfortunate results of the predominance of evolutionary thought in our educational system and in our entire culture is that it has hindered even us as Christians from reading Genesis 1 from the viewpoint Moses intended when he wrote it. We get bogged down trying to reconcile the creation account with modern science and miss why it is given to us at the very beginning of God's revelation. We "miss the view" God intended to give us. John Calvin lifts our eyes to the view by writing, "The intention of Moses, in beginning his Book with the creation of the world, is, to render God, as it were, visible to us in his works" (*Calvin's Commentaries* [Associated Publishers & Authors, Inc.], p. viii). After further discussion, he comes back to this theme: "We know God, who is himself invisible, only through his works.... This is the reason why the Lord, that he may invite us to the knowledge of himself, places the fabric of heaven and earth before our eyes, rendering himself, in a certain manner, manifest in them" (p. ix).

In our first two studies I sought to deal with some of the scientific matters because they are so predominant in our thinking that we could never approach Genesis as Moses intended without first showing why evolution is so fallacious. But having dealt with those matters, I now turn to approach the creation account from the perspective of Moses' purpose in writing. He's showing us that

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The creation account should point us to the Creator who alone is worthy of our worship, enjoyment, and obedience.

Moses' purpose was that in thinking about the creation account and in observing the world around us, we should focus on the greatness of God who brought it all into being through the word of His power. God is referred to by name 35 times in the opening section of Genesis 1:1-2:3. Clearly He is the great subject; creation is merely His handiwork, here to tell us of Him. As Paul states in Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." Thus we can enjoy creation as a marvelous source of revelation, compatible with and expounded upon by the more specific revelation of the written Word. As Calvin observes (p. xi), "For by the Scripture as our guide and teacher, [the Lord] not only makes those things plain which would otherwise escape our notice, but almost compels us to behold them; as if he had assisted our dull sight with spectacles.... For if the mute instruction of the heaven and the earth were sufficient, the teaching of Moses would have been superfluous."

Moses did not write to people who were isolated from the competing religious views of their day. Israel had been in captivity for 400 years in Egypt where the sun and a pantheon of other gods were worshiped. The Canaanites worshiped fertility gods, warrior gods, gods who guaranteed healthy crops, gods of the moon and stars. They offered food and, at times, even their own children to their gods to appease them. Against this backdrop of false religions, we see that ...

1. The creation account refutes many errors of false religion.

Moses asserts that God alone created all that is. He didn't consult with anybody. He didn't have to answer to anybody. He just spoke the word according to His inscrutable purposes and called into being all that exists. This is in great contrast to the pagan stories of origins of other ancient peoples. Most of them portray a great struggle between powerful forces, where one god finally wins and creates the earth. But Genesis reveals God as effortlessly

creating with a mere command: "And God said, 'Let there be ...'" He is sovereign over and separate from creation, because He made it by His word.

Since He created the sun, moon, and stars, He is over them and in no way are they to be worshiped. Karl Barth saw in the mention of light being created on the first day, but the sun, moon, and stars not being created until the fourth day, "an open protest against all and every kind of sun-worship" (cited by Derek Kidner, *Genesis, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* [IVP], p. 54). The fact that the stars are created by God and assigned a fixed purpose by Him shows that they do not have any ability to determine human destinies, thus refuting the widespread practice of astrology (Calvin, pp. 6-7).

There are three ways, by the way, of dealing with the matter of light being created on day one, but the sun, moon and stars not being created until day four. One approach is to attribute the light of day one to God Himself. In the future heavenly city, there will be no sun, but God Himself will be its light (Rev. 21:23; 22:5). Calvin states (p. 3) that "the Lord, by the very order of the creation, bears witness that he holds in his hand the light, which he is able to impart to us without the sun and moon."

The second view is that these heavenly bodies were created in verse 1, allowed to shine through in a diffuse manner on day one (1:3), but were hidden from direct visibility on earth until the fourth day (1:14-17). A variation of this view is that the heavenly bodies were created in verse 1, shone through on day one (1:3), but were assigned their fixed purposes of marking day and night, seasons, days and years, on day four (1:14-17; John Sailhamer, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* [Zondervan], 2:34).

A third view argues that we must see Genesis 1 as a literary-theological arrangement rather than a strict chronological narrative of how creation happened. This is not to call it a myth, but rather to recognize that often the authors of Scripture do not follow our Western mindset by arranging things in strict chronological order. For example, the table of the nations (Gen. 10) is not in chronological order, since it follows the scrambling of languages at Babel (Gen. 11). So here, it is argued, the material is arranged around theological themes rather than around a strict sequence of the

events of creation (Bruce Waltke, *Christianity Today* [8/12/88], pp. 42-46). But however you explain it, the point stands that the sun, moon, and stars are not to be worshiped; they are the mere servants of the powerful Creator who spoke them into existence and assigned their functions.

The creation account refutes a number of other common religious errors. That one God created all that is refutes polytheism, the belief in many gods, and dualism, the view that the good and the evil gods are equal. That He is separate from and over His creation refutes pantheism, the view that the creation is one with God, and the New Age movement, which worships the creation. That He created matter refutes that matter is eternal. That God pronounced creation "good" shows that matter is not evil. That God granted to His creation the ability to be fruitful and multiply refutes the pagan fertility cults (Kidner, pp. 48-49, 57).

That a personal God created the world and put man over it refutes nihilism, the view that human life and history have no discernible meaning and that there is no objective ground of truth or of morals. That God made man as male and female who together reflect His image gives dignity and equality to both sexes, while (as chapter 2 shows) assigning them differing roles. That God appointed man to have dominion over the creation refutes the radical animal rights movement, but also calls us to responsible stewardship of the earth and all its resources. And, that God created all that is by the word of His power refutes evolution by chance and all of the philosophical baggage that goes with it. Thus all of these errors of false religions that have continued to rear their heads down through the centuries are refuted by this first chapter of Genesis.

2. The creation account exalts many of God's attributes and purposes.

As we look at what God has made and as science probes even deeper into the mysteries of the distant universe on the one hand, and the mysteries of the atom on the other, it should stagger us with the infinite power, wisdom, intelligence, creativity, and glory of God. As Matthew Henry put it, "The height of the heavens should remind us of God's supremacy and the infinite distance there is between us and him; the brightness of the heavens and

their purity should remind us of his glory, and majesty, and perfect holiness; the vastness of the heavens, their encompassing of the earth, and the influence they have upon it, should remind us of his immensity and universal providence" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary* [Fleming H. Revell], 1:5). Let's look at just a few of the attributes and purposes of God as set forth in Genesis 1:

**God is sovereign and all-powerful--*He is eternal and self-sufficient, as we saw in our first message, which means, He is the only uncaused Being who is in need of nothing or no one else. When He created the heavens and the earth, He did not hold consultations with anyone because there was no one else! He simply acted in order to bring about His sovereign purpose. If He had chosen to do so, He could have spoken the whole thing into existence in a single sentence. I believe He used the six days of creation to teach us and set a pattern for our existence, that we are to work six days and rest on one each week. That God merely had to speak in order to call into existence what did not exist shows His infinite power and should humble every person and even every nation before Him (2 Pet. 3:5; Ps. 33:6-9)!

**God is intelligent--*How scientists can study creation and deny the presence of an intelligent Creator behind it is beyond me. From the tiniest insects to the movements of the planets there is overwhelming evidence of an intricate, interdependent plan. One reason I am inclined to take the six days of Genesis literally is that you cannot take out major sections of creation without upsetting the balance of the rest. Even ardent evolutionists admit that earth's ecosystems are finely balanced, so that the tiniest interference threatens the whole system. Yet they argue that this finely balanced system, which shows evident design, came into being through sheer chance over billions of years.

Years ago Sir Isaac Newton had an exact replica of our solar system made in miniature. The planets were all geared together by cogs and belts to make them move around the sun in perfect harmony. One day as Newton was studying the model, a friend who did not believe in the biblical account of creation stopped by. Marveling at the device, he exclaimed, "My, Newton, what an exquisite thing! Who made it for you?" Without looking up, Newton replied, "Nobody." "Nobody?" his friend asked. "That's right! I said no-

body! All of these balls and cogs and belts and gears just happened to come together, and wonder of wonders, by chance they began revolving in their set orbits and with perfect timing." That's your option if you don't believe in an intelligent Creator of the universe. If time would permit, I could give dozens of examples that show incredible, intricate design in God's creation. For starters, consider your own body!

**God is orderly--*Obviously this is an orderly universe. Such order does not come from random chance. Many scholars have pointed out the orderly progression of the days of creation.

FORMLESSNESS TO FORM:

Day 1: Light & dark

Day 2: Sea & sky

Day 3: Land & plants

Days 1-3 remedy "Formless"; Days 4-6 remedy "Void."

EMPTINESS TO FULNESS:

Day 4: Lights

Day 5: Fish & birds

Day 6: Animals & man

God did things in an orderly manner. Concerning this, Harry Blamires writes (*Recovering the Christian Mind* [IVP], p. 161),

We do not learn that God breathed one day upon the formless void and lo, there emerged a viscid semifluid, semi-transparent substance, the protoplasm. And God said: "From among the elements thus varyingly combined in this unstable combination let vital properties emerge such that millions of years hence, if the one in a billion chance occurs, something may one day achieve vegetable, nay animal existence. And if perchance, millions of years later still, some hungry creatures should spend long hours stretching their necks upwards to feed on foliage wellnigh out of their reach, let their efforts be rewarded by the development of the genetic specification for a long neck. In brief, should such a remarkable concatenation of unforeseeable events occur, let there be no more of a to-do about it, but let there be a giraffe!" There is nothing vague or casual about the biblical account of creation. There is nothing suggestive of a massive historical role for the fortuitous.

The orderliness of all creation shows us not only that God is orderly, but also that He wants us to live orderly, purposeful lives (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).

**God is personal--*He is not a mere cosmic force, but a personal being. He speaks, He sees, He makes value judgments about what He has made, and He creates man in His image as a personal being. Evolution stumbles at this point, because it has no explanation for the uniqueness of man as a personal being. It cannot explain the jump from apes to man with his reasoning powers, his ability to communicate in language, and his consciousness of God.

Have you ever thought about, "How did language evolve?" Maybe you assume that cave men spoke in unintelligible grunts, and that gradually language developed. But my college linguistics professor pointed out that you can't have part of a language. There is no evidence of any language evolving from grunts. Even the most primitive peoples on earth have highly complex, complete language systems. The vocabulary develops according to culture, and grammar and usage may change over time. But you've either got the whole language system or none at all. Evolution can't explain that. Creation can. Man was created in the image of a personal God who communicates in language.

**God is good--*The text repeatedly emphasizes, "And God saw that it was good" (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). This shows the personal God's care for His creatures, especially for man. The thrust of chapter 1 is that God is preparing the earth to make it habitable for man. The good is that which is good for man. God's seeing is an important concept both here and throughout Genesis. The first special name given to God is Hagar's "El Roi," the "God who sees" (16:13). God saw her desperate need and provided water to spare her son's and her lives. God's seeing the goodness of His creation that He has provided for man sets the stage for the tragedy of chapter 3, where the woman *saw* that the tree was good, but she was seeking goodness for herself in defiance of God and His good provision. When we come to the judgment of the flood, we read, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth" (6:5). Because He is good in His very being, God must judge all sin.

Those who hold to evolutionary origins for the earth have no basis for determining what is right and wrong. Perhaps the evolutionist can say that whatever helps man is good, since man is at the apex of the evolutionary process. But which men? Usually it works out that whatever helps me is good; let the other guy be hanged!

And so without God survival of the fittest becomes a grim moral system based on selfishness and might makes right. But the God who is good and pure has revealed to us His standards of right and wrong.

So the creation account shows us that God is the sovereign, powerful, intelligent, orderly, personal, good Creator.

3. The creation account calls us to worship, enjoy, and obey the Creator.

When we see the wonders of what God has made, including the marvels of our bodies, it should cause us to exclaim with the psalmist, "Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker" (Ps. 95:6). When we enjoy a beautiful sunset or see the Milky Way on a dark night, we should exclaim, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Ps. 19:1). As those who know the Creator personally because we have been reconciled to Him through faith in Christ our Savior, we can truly revel in and enjoy the world that He has made, even though it is marred by man's sin. We can live each day in submission to His will as revealed in His Word, fulfilling the purpose He has ordained for our lives.

Part of our enjoyment of God involves enjoying Him through the beauty of His creation. I encourage you to recover the wonder that children have over the beauty of a butterfly or the marvels of a pretty rock or the delicacy of a spider's web or delight in a rainbow. Also, the fact that God is creative gives affirmation to a Christian's involvement in the arts. When we enjoy or create a painting, sculpture, photograph, music, or literature, we are sharing in a gift from God, the ultimate Creator.

Part of our obedience to God the Creator means being careful, responsible stewards of the earth and its resources. It seems to me that a lot of the environmental issues being debated in our country today are being polarized by extremists on both sides. As stewards over the earth, we can use the earth's resources in a responsible manner, but it is sin to waste, destroy, and exploit the earth with no regard to the impact we're making.

Conclusion

God is not only the Creator of heaven and earth; He also creates new life in those who have been damaged and destroyed by sin. The Bible proclaims, "... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation ..." (2 Cor. 5:17). Sin plunges our lives into chaos, emptiness, and darkness. God's Spirit moved into that first formless void, and God spoke the word: "Let there be light"; and there was light. Even so, in speaking of the power of the gospel, and alluding to his own dramatic conversion with the blinding flash of light on the Damascus Road, Paul writes, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:5).

It is the nature of the Creator God to turn chaos into order, emptiness into fulfillment, and darkness into light. He still uses His Word to break through the chaos and darkness of the human condition, flooding it with His saving light. His Spirit hovers over lives, preparing them for God to make of them a new creation. Seek God in His Word and ask Him to create in you a clean heart through Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What was Moses' intention in writing Genesis 1? Why is this an important question to answer?
2. Should Christians eschew or pursue scientific knowledge and investigation? Why?
3. Is there a "Christian" philosophy of beauty, art, and music? Is some art and music anti-Christian? How can we tell?
4. Where is a proper biblical balance on the environmental debate? Which Scriptures are relevant?

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