

Read also Matthew 8:23-27

Genesis 1 is one of the most familiar texts in the Bible. I am excited that we are studying the first eleven chapters of Genesis. The beginning, how the world was created, has generated plenty of conversation, speculation – and controversy – about God, and about humans, and even about animals. Perhaps God intended that.

But, when we hear words like “evolution,” “intelligent design,” “six days vs. thousands of years,” often public discussion gets reduced to short and simple explanations, with people defensively siding up on one side or the other with the result that we miss the beauty and the truth of the whole text.

The Creation as presented in Genesis surpasses imagination in its magnitude. From it we can learn some very important facts about God. It must not be overlooked or dismissed or reduced to simple understanding. We owe it to ourselves to stop and look a little deeper; to open our minds. And I am excited about it.

We will find within this text the most exciting, intentional, giving God – a passionate God who had an incredible purpose in mind.

Have you touched God's purpose for you? Do you feel excited about life because God is near? Do you approach the Bible with the hope that it will enlighten and guide you? We must have an open mind to faith to experience the truth.

If your life is “ho hum,” then Genesis is for you. Let it awaken you to thinking about God. Genesis will strengthen your faith. My intention is to help you grow deeper spiritually.

Genesis 1 is so familiar to us that we are not going to read it right now. You were given a handout of the passage when you came in. I want you to take it home and read it. Homework, yes. And, I want you to get some highlighters when you read it because on the back of the page are instructions to help it come alive for you.

The Old Testament is a compilation or a canon of sacred documents written at different times, which were chosen by a long process of selection. Considering the fact that the land of Israel lies in an area of unceasing contention between the world's great powers and the fact that the Hebrew people seldom lived independently, the survival of the Hebrew Bible is nothing short of miraculous. Yet all that considered, today this book captures the hearts and minds and devotion of people all over the world, from all cultures.

The book is worthy of deep, not just intellectual, but theological study. You must approach the text with faith and be willing to listen.

Why is faith and a willingness to listen necessary? Because, the Bible is not a book of history or science, or even literature. And, this book is not meant to debunk history or science. History gives us chronicles of events; science gives us the structure of reality. Genesis 1 is a theological exposition about God which enlightens you about the meaning of life. It invites experience with God.

God's story is a passionate story; and, a story of the community of God. It has been passed on and their story has become *our story* as we are changed by these words.

The Bible contains all kinds of literature. Genesis 1 is a poetic narrative. Take your handout. You will see repetitions:

God created;
God said;
And this is what happened;
It was good.

Genesis 1 was meant to be spoken out loud; maybe it was originally said as a liturgy. Most people were illiterate so that allowed them to hear about God.

Genesis 1 was probably first addressed to the Jewish people who had been carried into exile during the sixth century, when Israel was conquered by Babylon. Their homes were burned before their eyes; loved ones killed; the temple desecrated and pillaged. Their city wall was broken down.¹ The people had lost all they knew.

It was a time filled with chaos and despair.

We know what chaos in such a time is like. We know what it means to be attacked by an enemy who desires our demise. We know what it is like for buildings to be knocked down, search for people in the rubble, and the heartache of wondering what the future holds in the midst of such darkness.

This story in the Bible tells of a promise; a God who brings good things out of chaos and darkness. This story shows that God creates life and light and order. To despairing exiles it declared that the God of Israel is the Lord of all of life.

Let's look at the text.

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים

In the beginning, when all was formless, confusion, a wasteland, nothingness. Remember when the disciples were in the boat with Jesus and the sea was out of control?

God is Creator. God speaks and the world is altered. The Creator creates.

That is good to know in times of famine, drought, when fires rage and floods come.

Jesus spoke and the seas were calmed and under His control. What do you learn about Jesus from that? He has the power of God to alter reality. You must know the text to understand the implications. But in this secular age spiritual training is minimized and even ridiculed as a waste of time. Are you giving Biblical study time?

¹Read Ezra and Nehemiah for the story.

If not, your faith will suffer.

The Creator creates creation. Other ANE (Ancient Near East) stories about creation have survived, stories of creation, migration, and an ancient flood. You might even say the theory of evolution is the modern day story of how the world began. Those stories have similarities to the Bible stories, but the Biblical story is unique.

Enuma Elish is the most famous Mesopotamian myth. In it the gods are birthed.

But in the Bible the Psalmist writes, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (90:2).

The Biblical God creates. Our God creates creation. That cannot be reversed. Subject, verb, object. Never the inversion.

In those ancient stories a struggle takes place between the gods and chaos. We see that in the Biblical account. In ancient mythologies, the nature of the gods is that people irritate them, which cause much of the chaos, therefore people must make sacrifices to appease the gods and make them produce.

In the Bible, God binds Himself to creation as one who provides and who brings life and hope in the midst of the struggle. In your homework you might circle:

"God blessed them"

"God said, 'I have given you every seed-bearing plant and all the fruit trees for food.'

God's call on us is for worship and thanksgiving, not appeasement. God is very unique from the gods in other Ancient Near East literature.

Let's talk about evolution. There is plenty of evidence for the evolution of species, and for some species that have become extinct. But here are two things we need to note:

The evidence does not always show that nature by itself improves itself. Things do not evolve randomly to a higher plane. In addition, in Biblical accounts there is no crossover between animal and humans. Animals and humans are distinct – similar in that each are able to produce offspring **of its kind**. (See Gen. 1:25)

Humans are God's crowning glory and made in God's image, an image that includes male and female. Now, grab a pencil and circle this: vs. 26 – "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves."

Isn't that cool? Together God, Jesus, and the Spirit hovering over the waters created humans.

Here's what Colossians says about Jesus: "He is the image of the invisible God . . . all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (1:15-17 excerpts).

Do you see the similarities between the Bible and other writings? Do you see the uniqueness in the God of the Bible?

The Creator created creation. Subject, verb, object; it cannot be reversed. There is no confusion.

Let's once again look at the first word in the story: בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים

Part of that word includes the word "six;" as in six days. And, reading the entire text, who can deny that the creation is described using the concept of day. And, literalists have focused on this word, but let's be theologically savvy.

Here's what the apostle Peter says:

"But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" (2 Peter 3:8).

And the Psalmist writes:

"For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night" (Psalm 90:4).

You see, God does not tell us every mystery and to insist that "we know" is naïve. Some things remain hidden and we must trust God's wisdom and let it rest with the theological statement,

God's word transforms reality. Praise be the name of the Lord.

Here's a mystery God has been willing to share. This is the most exciting part of the whole passage. Look at your handout at the very first verse.

"God created the heavens and the earth."

I told you earlier God is bound to us. Ephesians 1:9-10 says God's purpose is to in the fullness of time, to bring everything together, both heaven and earth, under the authority of Christ. A plan God set in place from the first sentence in the Bible.

"God has now revealed to us his mysterious plan regarding Christ, a plan to fulfill his own good pleasure. And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ-- everything in heaven and on earth" (Eph 1:9-10).

God's word transforms reality for eternity. Praise be the name of the Lord.

AMEN