

God the Creator

I want to do something a little different over the next few months in our teaching time. I'd like to combine three areas of learning together: the "big ideas" of the books of the Old Testament, how they are picked up throughout the rest of Scripture and what bearing they could possibly have on our lives today. In the process, I hope that we will gain an understanding of what God was doing in the first 2000 years of biblical history and how that is connected to what He did through Jesus and the early church. I also hope that we can gain deeper insights into those books of the Bible that we perhaps don't spend as much time reading or studying.

I don't know of a better place to start a series like this other than at the beginning, at the book of Genesis. So, let me ask you a question: What does the word "genesis" mean?

Genesis means "beginnings", so let's draw up a list of things that got their start in the book of Genesis:

- the world, the universe, life, animals, fish, birds, etc.
- temptation and sin; the first murder, rebellion against God
- first ark, first worldwide flood
- first covenants and that includes covenants that God made with Noah, with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.
- God begins a new thing - a covenant people through whom He will show grace to the world

Genesis is the beginning of so many things, including blessings and curses, including jealousy, vengeance and forgiveness. Because it covers so much ground in such basic areas, I want to divide it into two parts: the creation and pre-history of the world as one part, and the covenant with Abraham and his descendants as the second part.

What do we learn from the first chapter of Genesis? - We learn that God created, by His spoken word, everything that we now experience as the world around us, the universe and all the laws that govern it. If we turn to our New Testament, we read in Hebrews 11:3, "By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God." This is not primarily a matter of scientific investigation, although there's a lot within science that supports what the Bible describes. The writer of Hebrews is telling us that a true insight into the origin of the created order can only come through faith. Trying to put all the pieces together outside of faith will frustrate you, because there will always be mysteries that are unanswerable.

Within faith, however, we can understand three things about the creation that don't make sense to the pure scientist, the person without faith. These three are: 1) that creation belongs to God and is therefore accountable to Him; 2) that creation is an expression of the will, or the purpose, of God; and 3) that all that God made was good; in fact, very good. We're going to look at those three aspects of the creation story and

how they are carried through the rest of Scripture.

What happens when you write a poem, invent something, create an original piece of music or make a discovery that opens the doors to further exploration and further discovery? That thing you created belongs to you. You can patent it. You can copy-right your poem or musical composition. It's yours. Is it different somehow if you create a universe with countless trillions of stars and planets, with giant galaxies that span thousands of light years? What if you create life? Is that yours or does it belong only to the living thing you have made?

The Bible is pretty clear in answering this question. We start with Psalm 24:1

*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it
The world, AND all who live in it
For He founded it upon the seas
And established it upon the waters*

And Paul quotes this passage in giving Christians freedom from the Jewish laws about what foods they were allowed to eat. In 1 Corinthians 10:25,26 he writes:

Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

The simple law of ownership, that what a person makes belongs to them, applies to the created order. What God has made, belongs to Him. There's an interesting couple of verses in Isaiah 45 where we see this applied:

This is what the LORD says -- the Holy One of Israel and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question Me about My children, or give Me orders about the work of My hands? It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.

"Look," He says to His critics, "Who are you to question Me or to give Me orders about what I've made?"

This was not the world view of the other ancient peoples who had their own ideas about how the world came to be. Typically, they would present the idea that the world came out of conflict between the gods and rebellious primordial matter. Also typical was the ancient view that humans were created in imperfection and improved as time went on. You could easily conclude that Genesis is countering those rival creation accounts, both by showing that the creation came from the powerful, unchallenged actions of a single and supreme God, that this supreme being judged that what He had made was good, not evil, as some of the ancient stories portrayed, and that the human race fell from an exalted position, causing grief to themselves and to all of the Creation. From the good in the garden, we soon get murder, enslavement to evil and the judgment of the flood.

The second thing we see is that God had a purpose in His work of Creation. We see Him in relationship with the first man and woman in the garden. We see Him giving

them responsibilities, primarily to multiply, to fill the earth and to subdue it and to steward it. The clearer picture of God's purposes in Creation comes throughout the rest of Scripture.

Let's start with Isaiah 43:7:

*Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth --
Everyone who is called by My Name, whom I created for My glory, whom I
formed and made*

There is a clearly stated primary purpose, the reason for our existence, is that humans would demonstrate, would reveal, something of the glory of God to the rest of creation. Notice the contrast with the previous chapter:

I am Yahweh; that is My Name! I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols. (42:8)

Notice that only humans are able to give glory to something that is less than God. Who else but people would give glory or praise to an idol, something they have made, rather than the Maker of all beauty and goodness? It is humans that Paul is describing in Romans 1:21-25:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles . . . They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.

So, we are created in order to bring glory to God and we do that by honoring and praising Him in the presence of other people, so that they, too, might come to honor God.

Let's turn to another letter of Paul's, the one written to the Colossians, chapter 1 starting at v. 15, talking about Jesus:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him.

So Jesus, the Creator described to us in Genesis, is both the Maker and the purpose of the Creation: all things were created by Him and for Him.

Now, let's look at the third point, and that is that Genesis teaches that God saw all that He had made and it was very good (1:31). We sometimes think that because of what happened in Genesis 3, where sin entered the world and polluted everything, that the world of nature is no longer good. But listen to a few of the biblical writers reflecting on God's creation. First, Solomon in Proverbs 3:19,20:

By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding He set the heavens in place. By His knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.

In Jeremiah 10:12:

*But God made the earth by His power
He founded the world by His wisdom
And stretched out the heavens by His understanding*

In response to people who were limiting the freedom of the believers in Ephesus, Paul writes to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:4):

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer.

Don't reject marriage, don't reject certain foods, don't reject what God has created good and pretend that you are doing something that pleases God.

So the Scriptures reflect the view of Genesis that all that God had made was good, that His goodness, in a sense, was demonstrated through the things He had made. It's a similar idea to Psalm 19:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.

The Creation tells us something about the Creator. The Creation tells us, for example, that God created human beings in His image so that He could have relationship with us. The Creation tells us that God knows what beauty is and that He values it, as we do. The Creation tells us that God is both wise and powerful, that He has both the wisdom to see all the complexities of His universe and to keep all its forces in balance. He knew what would sustain life on planet earth and He gave us all we need to support 7 1/4 billion people. Now if we could just find a way to share all the earth's provision! The Creation tells us that there is a goodness and grace in who God is because there is so much for us to appreciate and to enjoy, so much that satisfies us, that gives us pleasure, that delights us. Some family members were telling us over the holidays about a trip they took early in the year to Africa and the amazing experiences they had in watching a Thompson Gazelle being born, in seeing the speed of a cheetah in full flight, in getting a close-up look at the knees of a giraffe and to have elephants walking up close beside their jeeps. We've seen the beauty of the Milky Way at night, powerful waterfalls and gorgeous sunsets. We've tasted an amazing variety of foods that God has created and delighted in their diverse flavours. We know that there is evil in the world, but we also know that there is goodness and the goodness goes back all the way to the Creation. Let me take you to Romans 8:

The creation was subject to frustration, not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.
(vv. 20,21)

What is he saying? Is it possible that this broken world could still be fixed? Is it possible that there is a redemption coming, not only for us, but for all creation?

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons

and daughters, the redemption of our bodies. (vv.22,23)

The redemption of our bodies can only mean the new thing that will take place at the end of time, when we are given a resurrection body, like the one that Jesus had. And here Paul is comparing that to a kind of resurrection for the Creation, that the groaning that our earth is going through will be replaced by something wonderful -- and we read about that in Revelation 21:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a beautiful bride prepared for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne saying, "Look, the home of God is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever. (vv 1-4)

What God made to be good is currently in bondage, but there is a liberation coming, a glorious new thing -- not a new planet Tatuine, but a new planet earth, with all its original beauty and goodness restored ... but better.

Now, let's review the particular themes that come from the point of view of faith, of believing that God has created our universe.

1. We conclude the obvious: that this creation, like any other creation, belongs to the One who made it.
2. We can see also that God created with purpose and that His purpose was specifically in relation to humans, that He would receive glory from us, who are made in His image.
3. We see finally that God's creation was good and that the evil that has oppressed it will not endure forever, that out of the pain of enduring human rebellion, the creation will be made new -- a new heaven, a new earth.

So, what does all of that mean for the Christian?

1. It means that we acknowledge that our lives are not our own, that we belong to the One who made us, in the first place, and the One who redeemed us, in the second -- that's the same being, that's Jesus Christ, 'by whom all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him.'

2. The world view of our culture is that we are independent beings, with a relatively loose allegiance to our country, very little to our family and no required allegiance to our God. The world believes that one of our life tasks is to make our own purpose, to find for ourselves the reason for our being. Here we read that we were created FOR Jesus, for His glory, for His purposes. That smashes the view that we belong first and foremost to ourselves, our agendas for our lives, our goals and aspirations. No; our purpose in life is not to find out what we want out of our years and to pursue that, but to find out what Jesus wants and to pursue that. In that decision, we find what life

can truly be and the fulfilment of pursuing what is worthy of the time we've been given, what is really worth living for.

This changes everything. The reality that there is a Creator, and that He has both a right to, and a purpose for, His creation, means that our lives can only be as fulfilling as they were intended to be when we pursue that purpose with passion. Anything less than that is just living, existing for a petty purpose like, "I want to be happy." And people whose only pursuit in life is their own happiness find it pretty elusive. It's there for a while and then it's gone again. It's just not enough to answer that deep question, "Why am I here on this earth? What justifies my existence and for what purpose was I made?"

3. The idea that the Creation is groaning for a great day of liberation and restoration is part of the Christian hope. We believe that, one day, we will experience the resurrection, the final victory over death which, if the Lord doesn't return this century, will eventually take our bodies from each of us. But the Bible teaches that there will be a new heaven and a new earth and that, in that new heaven and new earth, there will not be any perishable, aging, fragile bodies, but only the life of the age to come, the new bodies that are like the new body that Jesus was resurrected to following His crucifixion. His resurrection was the first fruits, the foretaste of what will one day be our experience. The body that dies is like a seed that falls into the ground -- out of it comes a new life (Paul explains this in detail in 1Corinthians 15).

But the whole of creation is like that seed, for out of the death of the old order comes this new heaven and this new earth, the permanent restoration of all that God created to be "very good" as described in Genesis 1. All of creation awaits that day, all of creation longs for the resurrection of the children of God, because that means that everything that has been destroyed by sin, everything that has been corrupted, spoiled, will be made good again, and we will once more see the world as God intended it to be.