

Genesis 1:1-2

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Genesis / Genesis 1:1-2

Prayer of Illumination

Divine Spirit, illumine to me the words of the Lord. Show me the wealth of glory that lies beneath the old familiar stories. Teach me the depths of meaning hidden in the songs of Zion. Raise me to the heights of aspiration that is reached by the wings of the prophet. Lift me to the summit of faith that is trod by the feet of the apostle Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. Amen.
(George Matheson)

Text: Genesis 1:1-2

Genesis 1:1-2 ESV

¹ *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*
² *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 waters.*

Prayer

Introduction

We begin the new year at the beginning, in Genesis. That is what the word *genesis* means: beginnings, or origins.

We are going to spend the next few months working through Genesis chapters 1 to 3, in which we will find that the whole Bible is in these three chapters in *seed* form.

Every doctrine, every principle of our religion, every storyline of Scripture can be traced back here to these first three chapters.

To illustrate the density that lies within these texts, I can tell you that, for example, the Reformed Expository Commentary devotes an entire 53 pages to only the first *two* verses of Genesis. Genesis 1-3 gives us Creation, Covenant, Kingdom, Fall, Grace, Redemption, and Promise. Genesis 1-3 gives us the seed from which the rest of the Bible grows and takes shape. Genesis 1-3 answers every worldview question.

It addresses *origins*. Where did everything — including ourselves — come from? Why is there something rather than nothing at all?

It addresses *identity*. Who are we? What does it mean to be human? Are we accidents? Are we designed? Are we animals? Are we valuable?

It address *meaning*. Why are we here? What is our

purpose? What are we here *to do*. Do we invent meaning for ourselves or do we discover it?

It addresses *morality*. How do we know how we should live? Is there such thing — objectively — as good and evil? Who says? Whose Word has the final say?

It addresses the *problem*. What has gone wrong? The problem of evil and suffering and pain.

It addresses the *solution*. Can it be fixed? How? Who can rescue?

It addresses *destiny*. Where is everything headed? What's the destination we're all heading towards? Is there life after death? Is there judgement? Is there restoration of broken things?

All of these questions — and many more — have their answers found in Genesis 1-3.

And practically speaking, it's very important to know the *beginning* of a story if we are to understand the *rest* of the story. So, we begin at the beginning.

We also begin by taking the words of Genesis 1-3 *seriously*. If everything else in Scripture finds its origin in these chapters, then to have a warped view of these chapters is to have a warped view of the rest of the Bible. If you start sailing just one degree out from where you should be, it might not seem like a big error to begin with, but a few

thousand miles later and you're nowhere near where you wanted to be.

To reduce Genesis 1-3 (or chapters 4-11 for that matter, as people are wont to do) to mere poetry, or mythology, or parable, is lethal to the Christian faith. We must take these words as absolutely true and faithful. We must take these words as they are: God's infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient Word to us about the beginning of everything.

Let's begin in verse 1.

In The Beginning, God

Genesis 1:1, *“1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*

God created the heavens and the earth. The word 'created' is the same Hebrew word that David uses in Psalm 51:10, when he says, *“10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”* This is a word that implies a work that only God can do. Only God can create a new heart in a sinful man, and only God can create out of nothing. Furthermore, the word implies a completed work — as opposed to merely starting off a process and leaving it to work itself out. This is not God winding up the cosmic clock and leaving it ticking down to the end of history. God created, and what He starts He finishes. God isn't just starting off a whole bunch of

natural processes, chemical reactions, light, matter, energy, atoms colliding, worlds spinning, gravity pulling, space expanding, and then He stands off just watching. No, He, even now is holding all things together by His powerful world (Hebrews 1:3). Even now He is sustaining all things. It is in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). He created and is sustaining that Creation.

And in creating the heavens and the earth we have “God’s great work in history.”⁴ The creation of all things out of nothing — *ex nihilo*. That’s what the phrase ‘the heavens and the earth’ means. Everything that exists. The universe. We have more information in John 1:3, “*3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*” In other words, everything that was made, was made by God. And John is telling us in His gospel, that Christ, along with the Father and the Spirit was there at the beginning, creating. And of course, if the phrase ‘the heavens and the earth’ means ‘all that there is,’ then that implies that nothing exists outside of God, or that which He has created.

In these 10 words, we have the foundation for the Christian worldview. The way Christians see everything. This is the way reality is. God is the ultimate source of all Creation. Everything that ever began to exist finds its cause and origin in God. And the only thing that never began to exist, is God Himself.

So although Genesis is about the beginning of everything, it's not about the beginning of God. For God has no beginning and no end. He was there in the beginning, but He Himself never *began*.

To put it another way, we could say that *everything that begins to exist has a cause*; that *the universe began to exist*, and that, *therefore, the universe has a cause*. That cause must ultimately be *causeless* because you need to have a starting point, you need to have an unmoved mover, you need to have an absolute beginning. What's more, if time, space, matter, and energy all *came into being* with the universe (something that both Scripture and modern science affirms), then the cause of the universe must be timeless, spaceless, immaterial, unimaginably powerful and intelligent, causeless, and even *personal*. How come? Because to have no universe is to have no matter or energy, and to have no matter or energy is to have no option for a *scientific* cause of the universe. Richard Swinburne put it like this: you can either have a scientific or a personal cause. If you walk into a kitchen and I'm there standing next to the kettle that is boiling, you could ask me, 'Dave, why is the kettle boiling?' And I can respond in two ways. I could respond *scientifically*: the electric current flows through the heating element, and because the metal resists the flow of electrons, electrical energy is converted into thermal energy, which is transferred into the water through conduction, and the temperature of the water continues

to rise through molecular motion, until a specific physical condition is arrived at: that of the water reading 100 degrees celcius (at sea level).

Or I could respond *personally*: because I wanted a cup of tea.

Without electricity or heating elements or water or kettles, the only explanation left for a universe that came into being out of nothing, is a *personal* one. Someone must have put this here.

Now you'll notice that I didn't use the Bible to make that point. But the Bible indeed says that we can all come to those sorts of conclusions about the origin of the universe, and the fact it was created by a personal God.

Romans 1:19–20 tells us “*19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*”

In the beginning, God created the universe, He created all that there is outside Himself, both spiritual and physical, and He has made that so clear to us, just by opening our eyes and looking around, that we are now without excuse.

This is why this verse is the foundation for a Christian worldview: because *everything* comes from God.

Why did God do this great work of creation? What was His purpose in creating everything that there is? He had no need for it. He wasn't lonely. He wasn't bored. In His Triune self is perfect happiness, perfect community.

Revelation 4:11 gives us the answer: *“11 “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.””*

God created all things for His own glory. Psalm 19:1, *“1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”* Psalm 145:10, *“10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you!”*

So in the Christian worldview, we don't start with *us*. We start with God. We start with understanding that He is central, He is ultimate, He is all, and without Him, there would be nothing. And only from there, only with reference to Him, can *any* other question ultimately be answered. This means that every question in life, every challenge we face, every decision we take, must be seen through a God-centered lense, not a man-centered one.

Forms and Voids

In verse 2, we are told that *“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 waters.”*

Verse 1 acts like a summary statement. In verse 2, the focus moves to the central scene and stage for God's creative and redemptive work: Earth. We are told that the earth was without form. The Hebrew word is *tohu* and means an 'uninhabitable wilderness.' We are told that the earth was void. The Hebrew word is *bohu*. It means 'empty.' So the description is not of primordial chaos, but of a desolate and empty place. Just to note here, and this may come next week as we start to work through the days of Creation, that the first three days of Creation are all about creation form and structure in response to the formlessness of the earth, and the fourth, fifth, and sixth days are about God's filling that form with life, so that it is no longer void and empty.

Darkness was over the face of the deep. Is there anything scarier than utter darkness and utter depths? The original readers of this text, the Israelites, would have found this terrifying. Darkness and deep waters to them reflected "the most inhospitable conditions to life."¹¹ We can easily see why. Think about Bilbo Baggins in the Hobbit being lost under the mountain, feeling his way along the walls in utter darkness, unable to see a single thing. Hobbits quite like holes underground, but humans don't so much. That idea of utter, unrelenting, hopeless darkness, of being effectively buried alive is one of humanity's greatest fears. Likewise, we know the topography of the moon in far greater detail than we know the details of the ocean floor on our own planet. Imagine floating above a mile-deep

body of water, unable to know what is beneath, powerless to overcome that environment.

But the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Holding it all together. About to participate in the great work of creation in six days. About to speak things into being that had never existed before. About to create *out of nothing*.

I said before that the story of the Bible is here in seed form. Here we have the Spirit of God hovering over desolation. Formless emptiness. And He — and He alone — brings life to it. Here is the gospel. The God who made all things from nothing chooses to, by His Spirit, breathe life into dead hearts and make stone into flesh. The God who created the universe from nothing is the God who can create spiritual life in a human being. And this is a work, as it were, from nothing. That is, nothing in us. He doesn't respond to our goodness, our ability, our spiritual maturity. He saves as He creates, of His own free will.

Christian Worldview

In the beginning God created everything. And God forms and He fills; He speaks light into darkness; He brings life where there had been only death. The gospel, the story of Creation and redemption in the first two verses of the Bible.

And if these first two verses contain all that, they also

contain, as I said earlier, the foundations for the Christian worldview. The way we see everything. Rushdoony put it this way, *“The source of things is all-important. If the triune God by His sovereign and just acts created all things, then all things are derivative from God’s act, dependent on His Being, and subject to His total government and predestination.”*

That sounds grand — and it is. But it also *means* something for our lives. It means many things for our lives. It means many things for every detail of our lives.

All things derive from Him. All things depend on Him. And all things are subject to Him. This means that anything at all that exists cannot be understood properly if it is understood without reference to God. Think about anything at all. It cannot be properly understood without reference to that from which it derives. If you wanted to understand a book, you would want to know about the author. And authors are knit together by God in their mother’s wombs. If you want to understand this world, you have to know about the Creator of this world.

This is one reason why pursuing a Christian education is so important. Because any education that studies anything without reference to that things ultimate source will be deficient in one way or another.

It’s also another reason why being people of the Word is so important. Because in the Bible we have God’s self-revelation. He speaks in the book of Creation, and He

speaks in the book of Scripture. We are to understand creation, which is an imperfect revelation (a fallen one), in light of Scripture (God's perfect revelation), and not the other way around. If we wake up in 2026 and find ourselves thinking that we know better than the Bible, thinking that we are kinder than the God in these pages, or wiser than the God in these pages, or more loving than the God of these pages, then we need to remember that in the beginning God created everything.

This also means that there is no neutrality. Everything comes from God, it therefore all belongs to Him and is subject to His rule. This means that there is only covenant keeping or covenant breaking. There are no fence-sitters; all are without excuse; all men know that they owe worship to this God, but they suppress that truth as Romans 1 tells us. They exchange the truth about God for a lie and choose to worship created things rather than the Creator, condemning themselves for failing to honour God.

If everything comes from God, then worship is owed to Him and to Him alone. And if everything comes from God, and everyone *knows* that to be true, then we should live in light of that fact. Christians need to stop acting like people don't know God is real. What has been created by God reveals God. Everyone around you who denies the truth about God is holding a beach ball under the water — suppressing a truth, and it takes them effort to do so. When we come along with the simple truth of the Word of

God, when we boldly speak the truth and live according to the truth, when we submit our lives to God and His Word, we are living according to the way reality actually is, and for those who suppress the truth, that is like poking them in the ribs... They're only going to be able to keep that truth suppressed for so long, because creation declares the Creator. They *know*.

And because God created the heavens and the earth, because He created it in a hands-on kind of way, in a sustaining kind of way, we can see that for every natural process, every natural law, there is a God who is *in control*. Nothing occurs apart from His will. No sparrow falls without His say so. Snow falls for many scientific reasons, but the book of Job tells us that snow comes from God's storehouses. Rain and sun fall and shine, but it is God who causes it. He is not disconnected from His Creation, but active in all of it at all times. He sustains it *all*. All things therefore serve His purpose and His purpose is His own glory. He works all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. We sing 'Whate'er my God ordains is right.' He is the only One who can make sense of pain or suffering, the only one who can flood darkness with light, and who can fill the void with life. The darkness and the depths of Genesis 1:1 will one day be fully and finally done away with, as Revelation 21 tells us — there will be no more night, and the sea will be no more.

And lastly, this means that the God who, by His Spirit,

hovered over the waters of Creation, is the God who, by His Spirit, blows where He wills, to regenerate — to create again, to begin again — our dead and sinful hearts. So if you don't know the Lord, turn to Him. Trust in Him. Submit your whole life to the One who created all things and who calls you to honour Him with your life. Without Christ, our lives are formless and void; with Christ, He creates a new heart, and fills our lives with meaning and purpose, everlastingly, for our good, and for His glory.

Let's pray.

Footnotes

[^] ESVEC, 41

^{^^} ESVEC, 42.