

*Prayerfully read Genesis 1:1–2:3 at least two times and then read the following notes.*

*Context: Setting the Table*

As we discussed last week, the book of Genesis is organized under ten headings, each dealing with a particular group of “generations.” These first verses stand outside of that structure, serving as an introduction, or prologue, to all that is to follow—the rest of Genesis, the remaining four books of the Pentateuch, and the Scriptures as a whole.

*Content: Reading the Text*

General Notes

*(Section Divisions)* The current chapter divisions in both the Old and New Testaments were devised in the 1200s AD for the Latin Vulgate. While they are certainly helpful for locating passages, they are often, particularly in the Old Testament, a very poor guide to the structure of the text itself and we will often depart from them in this series.

*(The Structure of the Seven Days)* There is a remarkable patterning to the days of creation—while the first set of three days focus on the creation of three *environments*, the second set of three focuses, in parallel order, on the *creatures* that occupy each of those three environments. I have tried to draw out this structure in the headings.

(1:1–5) Day One: Division of Light and Darkness

*(1:1a)* In Hebrew, Genesis 1:1 is exactly seven words long.

*(1:1b)* In the entirety of the Old and New Testaments, God is the *only* one who is said to create anything.

*(1:1c)* There is an absolute distinction between God, the Creator, and everything that he has created including space, time, and matter. This is the foundation of all true theology and cannot be over-emphasized. Theologians often refer to this foundation as the Creator/creature distinction. In sharp contrast to the stories of creation that have come down to us from the Ancient Near East (ANE), Moses says nothing whatsoever about the origin of God. He is rather the foundational truth by which the existence of everything else is explained.

(1:7d) The contrasting words “heaven and earth” work together to refer to what we would call today the “universe,” the totality of everything that exists.

(1:3) The words translated “and God said” occur exactly ten times in the creation account. They are traditionally referred to as the “ten words” of Creation and have a number of fascinating links to the ten plagues and the ten commandments (always referred to as the “ten words” in Hebrew).

(1:3–5) The creation of day and night on the first day created the “environment” for the greater and the lesser lights, created on the fourth day, to rule over.

(1:5) God, who is light (1 John 1:5) has no need of the Sun to produce light. We who follow Jesus will one day see this for ourselves when all has been made new (Revelation 22:5).

### (1:6–8) Day Two: Division of Sky and Water

(1:6–8) On the second day, the sky was separated from the waters, preparing the environment for the creatures of air and sea created on the fifth day.

### (1:9–13) Day Three: Division of Dry Land and Seas

(1:9–13) On the third day, by dividing the dry land from the seas and causing vegetation to sprout forth, God prepared an environment for the land creatures he would create on day six.

### (1:14–19) Day Four: Creatures of the Heavens

(1:14) “Outside Genesis 1, the word translated as “lights” is always used in the Pentateuch to designate the sanctuary lamp in the tabernacle...”<sup>1</sup> The tabernacle (and later temple) was in many ways a miniature replica of the universe described in Genesis 1.

(1:16a) At a number of points, Genesis 1 goes out of its way to directly subvert the creation narratives of the ANE. In the world in which Israel lived, the ordinary words for “sun” and “moon” were the names of pagan gods. Moses therefore simply refers to them as the greater and lesser lights, humble functionaries rather than independent deities.

(1:16b) Belief in astrology was pervasive in the ANE. While the greater light (the sun) was given to rule the day, and the lesser light (the moon) was given to rule the night, the stars were simply created. They did not rule over anything, and they certainly did not control the destiny of human beings.

### (1:20–23) Day Five: Creatures of the Sea and Sky

(1:21) In a number of ANE creation accounts, the word translated here as “whales” refers to fearsome dragons, rivals of the gods who needed to be conquered *before* creation could take place. With the first use of “created” since 1:1, Moses draws attention to the fact that these creatures also were nothing more or less than creations of the one true all-powerful God.

### (1:24–31) Day Six: Creatures of the Dry Land

(1:26a) While this verse was never intended to serve as a “proof text” for the Trinitarian nature of God, something that would only be revealed much later, it is perfectly in keeping with that later revelation. Far more significant than any grammatical subtlety is the reality that both the Spirit (1:2) and the Word (1:3—and God *said*) of God are involved in Creation at the very same time as the Father is. (see John 1:1–3, Hebrews 11:3, Colossians 1:16–17).

(1:26b) The word translated as “earth” (*adamah*) in v25 is closely related to the word translated as “man” in v26 (*adam*).

(1:26–27) In the ANE, kings often claimed to be the “image” of their particular deity and would sometimes set up their own “image and likeness” in order to lay claim to a particular piece of territory. When understood in its historical context, the point of this text is that God created mankind (and not just some particular king) as his image, *so that* mankind could rule over his creation as his representative. Though this image has been marred by sin, it has not been lost (Genesis 9:6) and because of this, the life of *every* human being is precious and valuable.

(1:28) While we have been given dominion over the earth, we exercise that dominion as the representatives of God himself. When our rule over his creation does not reflect his goodness, we slander our Creator.

(1:29–30) In the creation accounts of the ANE, the reason for the creation of mankind was so that the gods could be fed through sacrifices and no longer have to work for themselves. Moses makes the point that the true God is always the provider, rather than the one who is provided for.

### (2:1–2:3) Day Seven: Creation Is Now Complete

(2:7–3) The seventh day is referred to three times in three consecutive clauses, each of which is exactly seven words in Hebrew.

(2:2) While the work of creation was finished by the seventh day, the work of preservation is ever ongoing, a point that Jesus makes in John 5:17.

(2:3) Just as the seventh day rest signaled the completion of the first creation, so Jesus's resurrection on the "first day of the week," (John 20:1) signaled the beginning of the inbreaking work of the new creation, a work that is even now taking place through the Spirit in congregations of believers all over the world.

### *Credo: Believing the Truth*

In the beginning, there were no planets or stars or people. There was no matter, no time, and no space. There was nothing and there was no one except God—until God began to speak. With ten speeches in six days, he created absolutely everything that is. He created stars and planets and rocks and water. He created birds and beasts and whales and trees. He created humanity, male and female, in his likeness and gave them the responsibility to image his rule over the very good world which he had made. Despite mankind's rebellion, the purposes God had for his creation in the beginning, described here in Genesis 1, are the very same purposes we find him fulfilling at the end, described in Revelation 21–22. When the work of redemption has undone the results of rebellion, the heavens and the earth will be made new and all things will once again be very good.

### *Conduct: Reshaping Our Walk*

Discuss the meaning of the text and then walk through the following application questions as you discuss the difference this meaning ought to make in our lives today.

Moses made it clear that God created and controls *all* that is, including those forces that the ancient world often thought he didn't. What are some of the forces in our own culture we might be tempted to think of as independent of God's control?

*Examples:* Unpredictable diseases, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, etc.

The unique value of each human being is founded on the reality that every human being bears the image of God. How might we be tempted to use other and lesser criteria to determine our own or other's value?

*Examples:* Valuing others based on how attractive or useful they are to us, showing favoritism to those who "have it together," thinking we are worthless because age or disability keeps us from doing what we once did.

#### Endnotes

1. Wenham 1987, 22 slightly adapted