

## God as Creator

January 4, 2009

Purpose: To help us appreciate the wonder of God's creative act, bringing forth an orderly world with an ultimate purpose

Key Bible reference: Genesis 1.1-25

Key Verse: Genesis 1.1 *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth*

Background Material: Genesis is the first book of the Hebrew Bible. The first eleven chapters of Genesis set the history of the Jewish people in the context of "world" history. After Genesis 11, the focus shifts to the particular history of the Jews.

The first chapter of Genesis was probably written during the time of the Exile in Babylon (around 550 B.C.). By this time in history, the children of Israel knew themselves to be a nation formed by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This God, identified as Yahweh [YAH-weh], was the One who had delivered their ancestors from slavery in Egypt and had brought them into the Promised Land. As Yahweh had delivered their forebears in the past, so they believed Yahweh would deliver them from their own exile in a foreign land.

It is from this perspective that Genesis 1 is written. The people see themselves and their history within the broader context of world history. The God of the covenant with Abraham, the God of deliverance from slavery in Egypt, is also the God of all creation, the God of all human history.

The first twenty-five verses of Genesis 1 are some of the most familiar verses in the Bible. Yet it seems that each time we read them, they offer new insights into the mystery and majesty of God's act of Creation.

These verses do not offer us scientific proofs; instead, they are a proclamation of faith. This is religious writing, not scientific. The creation of the world is told in "narrative" form, that is, in story form. Genesis 1:1-25 is the account of God's acts from the beginning of time. This passage of Scripture begins the story of God's relationship with God's sometimes faithful, sometimes unfaithful, creation.

Genesis 1:1-5: To understand the picture that this first chapter of Genesis is painting, we must attempt to envision the cosmos as the Hebrew people did. They knew nothing about other planets or galaxies, and they presumed that the sun orbited around the earth. Therefore this account of Creation is very "earth focused." In verse 1, the two things created are the heavens and the earth. And everything else is created as it relates to the earth.

Verses 6-7: Above the earth God has created a dome that separates the waters under the earth from the waters above the earth. The dome is the sky, which holds back the waters above the earth except during times of rain, snow, and so forth. In order that dry land might appear, God gathered together into seas the waters that were under the dome and let the dry land appear. The waters that are below the earth appear as streams, lakes, and rivers. Water surrounds the earth on all sides, and only God has the power to limit the expanse of the waters.

It will be helpful if you can envision a four-cornered flat earth with a dome arched above it as the sky. Above this dome are waters, and below the flat earth are more waters. This seems to be the picture of the earth as Genesis 1 describes it.

Verses 8-13: Once the waters above and below are separated, the waters that cover the earth must be restrained so that the dry land may appear. From the earth God now calls forth vegetation: plants and fruits, each with the ability to reproduce. Notice that four different times in verses 11-12 the word seed is used. The Hebrews are affirming something unique here. Their pagan neighbors believed that gods and goddesses were responsible for fertility. Here it is being affirmed that God has put the possibility of reproduction within the plants themselves in the form of seeds. This account affirms a world that is not under the control of pagan deities of fertility.

Verses 14-25: In these verses there is no mention of the sun or the moon as entities on their own. They are indirectly referred to as the "greater light" and the "lesser light" in verse 16. But even these designations relate to how they affect the earth. The former "rules the day" on earth, and the latter "rule[s] the night."

Then God fills the sky, which holds back the waters above, with all types of birds; and God fills the waters below with fish and sea creatures. Notice that the great sea monsters are a part of God's created world (verse 21). Other nations around Israel believed that their gods had to fight and conquer the sea monsters in order to bring the world into being. The Hebrew people affirmed that all of the created world—even the giant sea monsters that represent evil—are under God's control.

On Day Six, God creates all the animals that are to inhabit the earth, which was created on the third day. The final act of the sixth day of Creation is the creation of human beings.

The first twenty-five verses of Genesis 1 move from a description of a formless, watery void to a majestic creation that is pronounced "good" by God.

Notice the rhythmic order of the first chapter of Genesis. First there is the pattern of God's speech: "And God said, 'Let there be ...'" or "Let the ..." (verses 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, and 24). Everything comes into being by the very word of God. God's command brings all things into existence.

Then there is the regular refrain of "And it was so" (verses 7, 9, 11, 15, and 24). This is similar to our "Amen" or to the phrase "So be it." This refrain is an affirmation that what God has spoken has become a reality.

Then that new reality is evaluated: "And God saw that it was good" (verses 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25). The earth and all its inhabitants are affirmed as the good work of a good Creator. There is no denigration of creation here, no sense that the material world is inherently sinful or evil—quite the opposite! What God has brought forth is intrinsically good.

Finally, the rhythm of Creation is set within a temporal framework: "And there was evening and there was morning" (verses 5, 8, 13, 19, and 23). Even the way in which time is described reflects a particularly Hebrew view of the world. The Jewish people begin the day at sunset rather than at dawn. Therefore they would write that the full day includes "evening and morning." If we were writing this, we would assume a day to be morning and then evening.

Days One and Four relate to the creation of light. On Day Two, God creates the sky, which separates the upper and lower waters; while on Day Five, God creates the birds that inhabit the sky as well as the fish that swim in the seas. On Day Three, God makes the dry land appear and then calls forth vegetation; while on Day Six, the animals and humans who rely on that dry land and vegetation for their existence are created.

The orderliness of God's creation is evident. From the original void, darkness, and chaos, God has created a world where light, goodness, and order abound. This world and all that is in it has been thoroughly planned out by a loving Creator.

Prayer: Eternal God, we call you our Father; and you are. But how astounding that is to us! That the God of all creation would be interested in us, in our lives, in what we do and what we say—that is indeed an amazing thought. Yet here on the first page of our Bible, we find both truths—you are the Creator of the universe, yet you have made us in your own image. We humbly accept our calling, and we prepare ourselves now for the task to which you have called us. In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen.

## Credits

Our *Year Through The Bible* curriculum has been adapted from “Complete Bible Lessons for Adults,” edited by Delia Halverson. The plans in that product were adapted from *Adult Bible Studies* 1992 – 1998 (ISSN 0149-8347), which were published quarterly by Cokesbury, The United Methodist Publishing House, 201 Eighth Ave. South, PO Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202-0801.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission.