

In the Beginning

God Creates the Heavens and the Earth

Genesis 1:1-2:3

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Scripture

Today, I am beginning a new series of sermons on the first eleven chapters of Genesis that I am calling, “In the Beginning.” For the next year or so, I plan to preach short series of sermons, alternating between Genesis and Ephesians.

My intention for “In the Beginning” is to preach 6 messages on Genesis 1–11. Naturally, this will be more of an overview rather than a verse-by-verse exposition of the text. Expounding an entire narrative will give us a view of the flow of redemptive history and what God was doing in the beginning in the salvation of sinners.

I am hoping that by alternating short series of sermons between Genesis and Ephesians we will all stay engaged in worship, learning, and growing in the knowledge and grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Also, if we need to address something different, it will be easy to do so.

The book of Genesis opens with the words, “In the beginning....” This is the English translation of the first word in the Hebrew, “*Bereshit*.” In fact, God’s people in the Old Testament called this book *Bereshit*. The English title “Genesis” comes from the Greek word that means “origins.” It was called the “Book of Origins” because it provides a description of the origin of the heavens, the earth, inanimate life, and animate life, including human beings.

So, a good question, as we begin our study in Genesis, is, “Why study the book of Genesis?” Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman III answers:

To understand our origins. To understand who we are, our meaning in life. To comprehend our place in the world, our relationship with other creatures, with other humans and with God

himself. To recognize the significance of the rest of redemptive history culminating in the ministry of Jesus Christ.¹

Our brief overview of Genesis 1-11 will address, at least briefly, some of these answers.

I should make one further comment as we commence our study of Genesis. My conviction is that the Word of God, which of course includes Genesis, is the ultimate and supreme authority. So, where there are questions about science and Scripture, or history and Scripture, or geography and Scripture, or whatever and Scripture, the supreme authority belongs to Scripture. The reason for doing so is because God is the author of Scripture. The conviction that Scripture is the supreme authority has important implications for how we view science, history, geography, and so on, as we shall see in the coming weeks.

So, let us now read about God creating the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:1-2:3:

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

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

¹ Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 15–16.

⁹ And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” ²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according

to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

² Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Genesis 1:1-2:3)

Introduction

I am reading Bill O’Reilly’s *Killing the Rising Sun: How America Vanquished World War II Japan*. He mentions that the Dresden bombings in Germany on February 13–15, 1945, were a catastrophic slaughter of civilians. Allied bombers dropped 3,900 tons

In the Beginning

of bombs, killing somewhere between thirty-five thousand and one hundred thousand people and leveling four square miles of the city. The firebombing of Tokyo killed four times as many and destroyed sixteen square miles of the city. The most well-known among civilian bombings during the war, the German “Blitz” of London from September 1940 to May 1941, saw forty-five thousand tons of bombs dropped on the city, with the loss of one million homes and forty-five thousand civilian casualties.² And, of course, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945 killed at least 129,000 people.

The death and carnage of World War II seems far away to many of us. However, an unexpected attack on September 11, 2001 in the USA killed 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others. And since that day we live in the shadow of terrorist attacks.

If that is not bad enough, I recently read about an asteroid that had been discovered. Sidney Greidanus writes:

The Grand Rapids Press reported that astronomers had discovered a new asteroid. What made this item newsworthy was that this asteroid may be on a collision course with planet earth. This asteroid is a monster that is 1.2 miles wide. If it should strike the earth, its impact would cause terrible devastation around the world.

The date for a possible collision was set at February 1, 2019. But it was also pointed out that (quote) “the odds of the asteroid striking the Earth are about one in 250,000.” A week later another article reported that astronomers had determined that the asteroid will miss the Earth in 2019. But it will come back and may strike planet earth on February 1, 2060.

I don’t like the odds of one in 250,000 for the earth to be devastated in my lifetime or that of my children. I don’t like to live with odds. It makes me feel powerless and at the mercy of chance happenings. And how accurate are these astronomers anyway?

² Bill O’Reilly and Martin Dugard, *Killing the Rising Sun: How America Vanquished World War II Japan* (Henry Holt and Co.; Kindle Edition, 2016-09-13), 84.

About [the summer of 2002] “an asteroid the size of a soccer field missed the Earth by merely 75,000 miles – less than one-third of the distance to the moon.” That was a near miss. And, if I’m not mistaken, astronomers discovered this “soccer field” *after* it whizzed by us. There would have been no warning at all. And even with a warning, there would have been nothing we could have done.³

People fear powerful, destructive, and unpredictable forces that are beyond our control. They make us feel helpless and fearful. And even Christians who have robust view of God’s sovereignty and providence are prone to feeling anxious and fearful.

Today, we are going to learn about God’s message of comfort that comes to his people in Genesis 1. Sometimes we miss this message because we are so focused on the conflict between Genesis 1 and modern science.

It seems to me that Moses, the author of Genesis 1, was not focused on trying to give a scientific account of the creation of the world. Instead, he was giving his people a message of comfort.

Let us remember when God gave the message of Genesis to Moses. Moses wrote Genesis (along with the other four books of the Pentateuch) during the 40 years in the wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel. This was several thousand years after the creation of the heavens and the earth. Much had taken place, as we shall learn in subsequent lessons. However, the people of Israel had been living in Egypt for over 400 years. There they had lived under persecution and oppression. Finally, God heard their cries and sent them a deliverer in the person of Moses. He led them out of Egypt so that they could return to the Promised Land. The people of God had just left the most powerful nation on earth with all their many gods, and they were journeying to a new land with all that was unknown before them. It was during their journey to the

³ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 478–479.

In the Beginning

Promised Land that Moses wrote the book of Genesis. It was intended by God to be a message of comfort to his people.

Lesson

Genesis 1:1-2:3 teaches us that by his powerful word, God created the heavens and the earth as his good kingdom.

Let's use the following outline:

1. God Created the Heavens and the Earth by His Powerful Word
2. God Completed His Work in Seven Days
3. God Created Everything Good

I. **God Created the Heavens and the Earth by His Powerful Word**

First, God created the heavens and the earth by his powerful word.

Genesis 1:1 says, **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”** Moses began by saying, in effect, “People of God, hear this: Our God, the sovereign, supreme God created the heavens and the earth.” There is no word in either Hebrew or Greek for “universe,” but Moses was asserting that our God created the entire universe. Our God created absolutely everything.

Other great powers of the time had their stories of creation. But either the gods themselves were created, or they created the world out of something that was already there. In contrast, the Bible asserts that the God of the Bible, *Elohim*, as he is called in Genesis 1:1, created the entire universe *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Moses wanted the people of God to know that our God is supremely powerful and he alone creates all things out of nothing.

But that is not all. As Moses began to describe the process

he said in Genesis 1:2a, **“The earth was without form and void.”** The earth was formless and empty. It was a complete wasteland, and utterly inhabitable by anything. In fact, **“... darkness was over the face of the deep”** (1:2b). It was pitch-black. There was no light at all. I don’t know if you have ever been in a place where there is no light at all. When I worked underground in the gold mines in South Africa, I sometimes used to turn my light off in a tunnel where there were no other lights. It was completely dark, and I could not see my hand at all if I held it two inches away. That was the condition of the earth in Genesis 1:2b. There was no life on earth at all. Nothing could live. It was utter chaos.

But there was hope. Moses said in verse 2c, **“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”** Notice that **the Spirit of God** was not part of the chaos; he hovered **over the face of the waters**. He was about to bring order out of chaos.

In Genesis 1:3 we read, **“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”** Simply, by his powerful word, God pushed the darkness aside with his light, light that would make life on earth possible.

And over the course of six days, God created all that there is simply by the power of his word. Ten times in Genesis 1 Moses repeated the phrase, **“God said.”** This was not lost on the people of God in his day. They knew that in the wilderness God gave them the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, which they called “the Ten Words.” In ten words in Exodus 20, God spoke his law for his people. And in ten words in Genesis 1, God spoke his creation into existence.

Moses was reminding the people of God that the kings of that day spoke and it was done. Whatever the king commanded was done. Genesis 1 portrays God as the King of the universe. He speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it happens; he wills it, and it comes to pass. Our God is the supreme, sovereign, all-powerful king of the universe. He is so because he created it.

So, people of God, nothing on earth happens apart from the sovereign word of God. Our sovereign God is in control.

II. God Completed His Work in Seven Days

Second, God completed his work in seven days.

Genesis 2:1–3 says, **“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”** There were six days of creation and one day of “rest.” The Hebrew word for **“rested”** in verse 2 means “ceased.” You see, it is not that God was so tired after six days of creation that he needed rest to recuperate. No. He completed his creation in six days, and then ceased from creating on the seventh day. God was establishing an important cycle of work and ceasing from work for humans.

Like the number “ten,” seven was another important number to the people of God. When the people of God traveled through the desert, God gave them manna on six days and none on the seventh day. They were to collect enough on the sixth day and trust God that it would last through the seventh day. Then God also commanded in the fourth of the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20:8–11, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

God was telling his people that the pattern fixed at creation,

and encoded in the Ten Commandments, was in fact a promise of entering God's rest. Only God can give people true spiritual rest when they trust in him, and in his provision of salvation, which come through his Son, Jesus Christ.

III. God Created Everything Good

And third, God created everything good.

Six times, at the end of each day of creation, Moses said, "And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:4; 1:10; 1:12; 1:18; 1:21; 1:25). The light was good, the dry land was good, the vegetation was good, the sun, moon, and stars were good, the fish and birds were good, and the land animals were good.

Finally, after God created humans, also on the sixth day, we read in Genesis 1:31, "**And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.**" Man is the pinnacle of God's creation. And God delighted in his creation, especially his creation of man.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of God's creation of the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:1-2:3, let us be comforted by the knowledge that our God is the sovereign Creator who controls all things.

God created the heavens and the earth by his powerful word. He completed his work in seven days. And he created everything good. Like the ancient people of God, we also live in unsettling times. However, let us believe that God is in sovereign control of his creation, and in his almighty hands we are safe forever. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
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