

In the Beginning God
Genesis 1:1–2:3
September 23, 2012

Genesis tells a story. Not a complete story but one that needs the New Testament to finish it out and complete the details. Derek Kidner has rightly pointed out that the New Testament has more parallels to Genesis than even the Old Testament [*TOTC: Genesis*, 14]. For ultimately, Genesis traces the beginning of man, the fall of man, the downward spiral of humanity, and God's pursuit of a people that He brings into covenant with Himself. These people He calls by His name. But He dare not call people by His name without dealing with their rebellion and enmity against Him.

So we discover in the NT just how far man spiraled downward after the fall (Rom 1:18ff.), the meaning of Abel's sacrifice (Heb 11:4), how Abraham was justified and why we too must be justified in like fashion (Rom 4), why Adam's sin affected the human race (Rom 5), the difference between a son of the promise and a son of the flesh (Gal 3–4), the whole reason for the creation (Col 1:16), who the serpent is (Rev 20:2), where the creation is ultimately heading (Rom 8; Col 1; Rev 21–22), and why it matters that Abraham's offspring survive (Matt 1; Luke 1–3).

As we span the two Testaments, we're confronted by two massive events: Creation and Resurrection. If the creation is true then your life can only find its fulfillment in the Creator and His purpose for you. If the creation declares anything, it shouts purpose in every sentence! But the fall (Gen 3) confuses and distorts this purpose. So the NT declares that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ reverses the curse and effects of the fall; it turns right side up what the fall had turned upside down. If the resurrection is true, then you and I can find our purpose in relationship to the Creator through Him who God raised from the dead.

However, many doubt the creation by God, trusting in some other idea of human origin, despite how far-fetched it may be. There's a reason for that. People don't want to find their purpose in the Creator, preferring to pursue ultimate selfishness, as though their existence in this world owes nothing to the God who created them. They don't want to admit that there's anything wrong with them or the rest of the world due to the fall recorded in Genesis 3, so that they are willing to walk in ultimate self-deceit. And they certainly don't want to acknowledge that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has a bearing on present existence and future hope, so that they cling to the ultimate self-confidence in the face of the Creator and Judge.

In light of this human rebellion, I would propose to you that the creation of the universe by God demands our attention, calling for our awe, wonder, worship, and submission to Him as King. The creation story, *if it is true*, stops us in our tracks, stops our pursuit of selfish ends, and points us to relationship with the Creator.

Since God created the universe, it is by Him, to Him, and for Him that we owe our existence, our worship, and our submission to His kingly rule. How that happens takes us to the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But that it is so can be found in this familiar narrative of the creation. What does the creation story teach us? Let's consider this in seven observations.

1. God is the subject of everything in the creation.

Our world, especially the Western world, seems to delight in an anthropocentric focus, that is, that everything centers in *us* not in God. Take for instance the advertising world. When is the last time that you were encouraged to buy a car for the glory of God? Or take a particular trip as a means to serve God? I know that may come across as rather silly due to the bombardment of man-centered thinking in our day. But if we believe that “the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever,” then it makes sense that if I buy a car I should buy it for the glory of God as an instrument that might be useful in serving Him. Or if I take a trip it should be to enjoy what God has created and magnify Him for His generosity toward us through the creation.

I’m not thinking that the advertising world will catch this as a hint anytime soon!

We’re mesmerized in Genesis 1 with just how central God—not man—is to the creation story. He created the world; the Spirit of God moves over the surface of the deep; God speaks and light comes into existence; God declares the light good; He separates it from darkness; He names the light day and the darkness night. Every step of creation emphasizes that God has thoughtfully contemplated what needs to come into existence, and then by the divine voice, He calls that which has never existed before into existence. *Creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing. God does that!

If the Lord God contemplates what needs to come into existence, if He contemplates every contingency of what *could possibly be created* but thoughtfully decides and declares what He indeed wisely knows is needed in creation, then we must admit that it exists as a display of His glory.

The day and the night declare that God is the center and subject of creation. We are gladly *objects* of the Subject’s creative power. The heavens and the earth are objects—magnificent objects at that—but objects nonetheless not subject of creation. So everywhere we turn we witness the creative activity and power of Him who is the subject of creation!

That’s why this short narrative of creation uses the name *Elohim*—God, 35 times! That’s also a good reminder for us, that the default position of man-centeredness (the anthropocentric view of the world) did not enter the picture of the creation until Genesis 3, when humanity rebelled against God as Subject, elevating the object to the throne of supremacy.

Think about the story unfolded in Genesis 4 with Cain and Abel. Eve thought that the birth of Cain would be the means to end the curse brought on when she and Adam ate of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet, as the two brothers grew and the time came to bring an offering to the Lord, Cain lost sight of the God-centeredness of the creation. His jealousy of his brother’s offering and acceptance by God, rather than bringing repentance and correction, spilled over into the most self-centered of human acts: killing another human being.

So, too, our sin, our unbelief, and our rebellion models self-centeredness in defiance of the God-centeredness of the creation. When we come to terms with our man-centered pursuits—when it grabs our attention—the story of creation will not suffice to bring correction and change. Instead, it’s the story of Christ’s resurrection that offers hope and reorders our existence to glorify God and enjoy Him with passionate God-centeredness.

2. God is not the creation but the Creator.

I know that should be obvious. And it is when you read the creation story. But a large part of the world does not agree. Hinduism, Buddhism, and a host of Eastern religions' influence, battle against the distinction between the Creator and the creation. For some reason, these religions have become so cool among Westerners who have not taken the time to see the end of such worship. But it's not just those religious practices that do this. It's also found with a cadre of protestors and environmental and animal rights activists that mistakenly lump the Creator in with the creation, or at minimum, ignore the Creator while fawning over various elements of the creation. It's evident by worshiping the creature instead of the Creator (Rom 1:25), by elevating the temporal to the place of the ultimate. The very ones that will go to great lengths to protect a tree or a mollusk or an amphibian think nothing of little ones created in God's image being destroyed from the womb.

And yet the opening verse of God's Word could not be more distinct. **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."** God is not in the rocks or trees or mollusks. He remains removed from the creation. We sometime use a word to describe this: God is *transcendent*. So He's not bound by time and space as we are; He's not subject to change as we are; He does not swing and sway due to outside influence as we do [see J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, 28–30].

Yet here is the remarkable truth. This same God that is transcendent, who has no need for anyone to make Him happy since He happy in Himself or to meet His needs for He has none, created the universe. And in that creation, as the story unfolds, we find this same God pursuing the apex of creation—humanity—condescending to reach those separated from Him due to sin and rebellion. He condescends by speaking to Adam and Eve, giving them promise that the curse would one day be removed. He condescends by preserving Noah and his family, and then by calling Abram out of paganism and into covenant with Himself. His condescension reaches its highpoint in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. And that led to the Creator's self-humbling at the cross to remove the curse in the fall and the penalty of sin so that mere creatures might enjoy the Creator through faith in Jesus Christ.

3. In the beginning declares the eternal existence of God.

Creation had a starting point. Even one denying the existence of God yet embracing a Big-Bang theory of creation admits a beginning to the universe. Modern physics even gives affirmation to this beginning. Stephen Hawking's latest theory shows just how far the scientific community will step out on a limb in order to deny the Creator. Quoting from a U.K. Guardian article, "Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing," he writes. "Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going." [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2010/sep/02/stephen-hawking-big-bang-creator>].

Despite the audacity to claim that the universe just created itself out of nothing—without any work from God—Hawking still admits a beginning point. There was a time when nothing in the universe existed. (I'm not sure where he theorizes that gravity came from so that it could step up to the plate and create the universe!)

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God was not lonely, forlorn, and needing someone to fellowship with. Nothing was lacking in Him. He perfectly delighted in Himself as God. The inter-Trinitarian fellowship, hinted at by the use of the Hebrew name for God—*Elohim*, that has plural dimensions—proved infinitely satisfying. Yet God, for His own reasons and glory, purposed to *begin the work of creation*.

Creation was *out of nothing—ex nihilo*. Thus the primordial ooze or protoplasm or matter espoused by various camps of evolutionists, does not make sense. With all of the abilities of science we still cannot create something out of nothing. The **“beginning”** means just that—a starting point when there were no natural materials with which to work, no ooze to squeeze together like clay, no basic forms of life to expand upon, no models from which to work—NOTHING!

Yet, one being existed in that nothingness: **“God.”** Without beginning, without ending, without a pantheon of Babylonian and Egyptian and Summerian gods to compete with, the God who created everything that now exists, eternally existed.

It is amazing that so many, now living thousands of years into human history, dare to deny God as Creator and dare to espouse a God-less creation theory. They need to hear the words of God to Job (Job 38:1–7).

38 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,

²“Who is this that darkens counsel

By words without knowledge?

³“Now gird up your loins like a man,

And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!

⁴“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell Me, if you have understanding,

⁵ Who set its measurements? Since you know.

Or who stretched the line on it?

⁶“On what were its bases sunk?

Or who laid its cornerstone,

⁷ When the morning stars sang together

And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

4. God as Creator declares His sovereignty over the universe.

The identity of **“the heavens and the earth”** means the totality of the universe. The statement includes everything that has ever existed or will exist. The universe belongs to Him. The narrative furthers this by taking a retrospective look at the nothingness of the void as God created the universe. **“The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”** Scholars debate the meaning and implications. Was there a previous creation, some kind of gap? Was there an initial creation and then the days of creation brought shape and life into it? Or was this simply retrospective or introductory? It seems that the latter is the best option, that Moses declares God as Creator, then poetically describes the “confused emptiness,” as Calvin put it, from which God created the world [quoted by David Atkinson, *BST: The Message of Genesis 1–11*, 24]. Atkinson adds, “In the beginning the created world lacked order and shape.” There’s a play on words with

“formless and void,” *tohu wabohu*, or “a wasteland and empty” [Kenneth Matthews, *NAC: Genesis I–II:26*, 130].

So the text pictures creation in shapelessness and formlessness, waiting for the artistic creativity and ordering of the Creator’s infinitely wise work. Then the creation begins! Light and darkness, the expanse of heaven and the waters, dry land and the seas, vegetation and trees, day and night, sun and moon, *also the stars*, sea creatures and birds, cattle and creeping things, and man and woman created in God’s image! Each **“after its kind,”** each uniquely framed and purposed to fit perfectly in the created order by the Creator. He who created everything did not do so, wind it up, and let it go, as 18th century Deists supposed. He created and He governs all that exists for His glory.

As Abraham Kuyper explained, over every square inch of the creation, Jesus Christ as Creator declares, “Mine!” The NT brings this out in numerous ways. In contrast to the Greek ideas of what they called a *demiurge* (a less-than-god being) being an instrument of creation since nothing divine could touch the material world, Jesus is the Word in the beginning with God, so that “all things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:1–3).

Paul wrote, “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col 1:16–17). All the creation is HIS! It’s very existence is by the exercise of His power to hold it together—that’s sovereign rule!

The writer of Hebrews agrees. God, “in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He . . . upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:1–3). In other words, He rules and governs all that He has created [see Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 22–24]. When we take a look at Revelation 5, and see the Lamb take the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the heavenly throne, we again see the vivid expression of Christ’s sovereign rule.

5. God as Creator usurps the pantheon of ancient gods.

In the Babylonian myth, *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian god Marduk defeats Tiamat, the watery chaos monster, and in the process becomes the chief god. He strikes Tiamat with an arrow then severs her with half becoming the sky and the other half becoming the earth. One would think this would stop the infighting of pagan deities but alas, it does not! They continue their fighting and their baneful treatment of men, whom they hold as slaves, demanding that the slaves bring them food.

But our Creator is nothing like that! He stands apart from the pagan deities. No conflict with another god takes place at the Creation. Darkness is not even a problem since it is part of His creation. Instead of enslaving, He creates humanity in His image and gives them dominion over creation. Instead of demanding a food allowance, He blesses and gives them food to eat through what He has created (Gen 1:11–12, 29–30). Even an ancient Jew in exile in Babylon would find this comforting!

Notice how the narrative reinforces God as the one and only God. First, God names the day, night, darkness, heaven, earth, etc., which implies His sovereign rule over them. Second, He creates light as distinct from the sun and moon (**“the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night”**), which took away the pagan claim of

deifying the sun and moon. The choice not to use “sun” and “moon” titles demonstrates that these heavenly bodies serve His purposes not that of the gods named by those titles.

6. God’s majesty and artistry in the creation calls us to worship.

I’m arrested by the little phrase in verse 16: “He made the stars also.” Astronomers tell us that there are a billion galaxies with a billion stars in each. Yet this God who artistically created the universe chose to place Earth as a speck of cosmic dust in the vastness of the created universe *so that the Lord God might reveal Himself to us*. He has certainly done that through creation! We have cause to see His handiwork and celebrate Him.

One of the reasons that I enjoy flying is because it gives such an amazing view of God’s creativity. I’ve worshiped as I’ve flown over the icecaps of Greenland and Canada, as I’ve watched those jagged peaks of the Alps and the tree covered mountains of the Smokies, as I’ve watched the vastness of the Atlantic with symmetric ripples, and a thousand other sights that can take my breath away. Yet I can worship *because* the Creator made Himself known through more than the creation. He made Himself known through Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh and dwelled among us so that we might behold His glory as the only begotten Son of God (John 1:14).

Let us not rush by the sight of a flower budding or a bird building a nest or a squirrel gathering acorns or a butterfly emerging from its cocoon without glorying in our Creator!

7. God’s work of creation points toward ultimate fulfillment only in Him.

There are three things that I would point to in the text that remind us that we must look beyond the creation to the Creator.

First, there’s the orderliness of creation. What does order imply? It points to purpose and a reason for existence. Chaos, the opposite, points to purposelessness and vanity. When you take the time to see how everything is put together in this world, dare you think that it just happened? The intricate patterns and designs stamped on creation shout to us: God made that! And because He did, you are called to bow to Him as King.

Second, man as the crowning point of creation, as “image bearers,” implies that apart from the One whose image we bear, our lives have no purpose. While some try their best to unite us to the animal kingdom, no other creature bears God’s image. That points you to finding your reason for being in Him alone.

Third, the seventh day sanctified by God (2:2–3) is another pointer to how ultimate satisfaction cannot be found in the torrid pace of something as good as work but rather in our resting in the Creator and delighting in all that He has done.

Conclusion

This takes us, then, to the cross and resurrection because the default position of our rebellion against God (Gen 3) pushes us to insist on living life our own way. The way to God seems futile because of our sin and rebellion. Yet the Creator became part of the creation in order to redeem *image-bearers* and restore that image in the light of Jesus Christ. Paul borrows the language of creation to explain: “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). Has He shone the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ in your heart?