

## **CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH**

Genesis 1:1-5, 26-31

As we continue our journey through the Apostles' Creed, I invite you to open your Bible to **Genesis 1:1-5, 26-31**.

The Apostles' Creed states: *"I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth."* Last Sunday we talked about God as Father. This Sunday, God as Creator. That's where the Bible begins. Hear the word of the Lord ... (***read the text***)

I

**In the beginning** ... Not along the way. Not years into history. In the *beginning*. Before time. Before history. Before anything existed that exists today. In the *beginning*. As Gardner Taylor put it, *"before there was a when or a where, a then or a there."*<sup>1</sup>

**In the beginning, God** ... God before all things. Before creation, before the earth and the moon and the stars, before plants and trees, before birds and fish, insects and animals, before humankind—*"In the beginning God ..."*

*"I am the alpha and the omega"* says the Lord God, *"the one who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty"* (Rev 1:8), God eternal in the heavens with no beginning and no end. Psalm 90 says it this way:

*Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.  
Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting, you are God (vv. 1-2).*

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<sup>1</sup>Gardner C. Taylor, *How Shall They Preach?* (Elgin, IL: Progressive Baptist Publishing House, 1977), 61.

This simple message is a **searing rebuke** to those who would try to conceive of creation without God.<sup>2</sup> And yet many do. With Charles Darwin and his book *Origin of Species*, many tried to push God to the margins of creation if not push him out altogether. In place of creation birthed by God's word and work, creation became the product of naturalistic processes that remove God from the equation or at best locate him as a spectator in the stands sitting on his hands with his mouth shut watching all the action unfold. Darwin's theory claims that life began millions of years ago with simple, single-cell creatures and then developed through mutation and natural selection into the vast array of plant and animal life that populate the earth today. What had been explained by supernatural terms, what had been explained by God, Darwin explained in natural terms. In reflecting on the impact of Darwinism, a *Time* magazine article put it this way: "*Charles Darwin did not want to murder God, as he once put it. But he did.*"<sup>3</sup>

No, he didn't. **God is alive and well.** God is Creator. "*In the beginning, God ...*" The Hebrew word for God is *Elohim*. *Elohim* is the plural form of *El* or *Eloah*, maybe the oldest designation of deity in the world. *Eloah* sounds very much like *Allah*, the Arabic word for God. The Hebrews borrowed the term *El* from the Canaanites. The name can refer to either the one true God or to the multitude of false pagan gods. The context determines the meaning. *El* (singular) is used more than 200 times in the Old Testament. *Elohim* (plural), the name in Genesis 1, is used more than 2,500 times—32 times in this chapter alone.

Did you hear me say that the **name is plural**? Don't let that bother you. *Elohim* does not mean many gods in our text. Genesis 1:1 is not and cannot be translated accurately, "*In the beginning gods created the heavens and the earth.*" The plural has deeper meaning than that.

When we look at it through New Testament eyes, we see in the plural *Elohim* **whispers of Trinity**—one God in three distinguishable persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1:1 and 1:27, the writer uses a plural noun, *Elohim*, along with a singular verb, *created*. Is this a hint of Trinity? We see the Holy Spirit involved in creation in v. 2, "*hovering over the waters*"—watching over creation like a bird watches over her young. And in New Testament texts, John

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<sup>2</sup>Indebted for this insight to John C. L. Gibson, *Genesis*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 19.

<sup>3</sup>"Iconoclast of the Century, Charles Darwin (1809-1882)," *Time* (December 31, 1999).

1:3 and Colossians 1:16, we see that nothing was created without Jesus' involvement too. So is there a hint of Trinity in the plural *Elohim*? Those who first heard this name would not have considered this, but perhaps this was God's way of giving us a foretaste of a greater revelation of himself in days to come.

We can't be 100% sure about that, but we can be sure that *Elohim* communicates the **majesty of God**—what the rabbis called the plural of majesty. In a world of many false gods, *Elohim* is the one true God, the God of gods, the one God in whom all the attributes of deity reside—the plural of majesty. *Elohim* is the first name God reveals to us in the Scripture. We will hear God's covenant name *Yahweh* a bit later. The first name we hear is *Elohim*. "*In the beginning Elohim—God ...*" God is first, primary, and preeminent. Nothing precedes him. God first: "*In the beginning, God ...*"

## II

"*In the beginning, God created ...*" And God did it without a thing to work with but his voice. When nothing existed but God, he created all that is. "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" The Hebrew word for *created* is *bara*. God is the only subject of that verb in the Old Testament. It's used six times in Genesis 1, and it implies freedom and sovereignty in the Creator. And in this context, it also implies that God created something out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). The other creation word used in the chapter is the word *made*—a different Hebrew word. But the word *bara* is a special word, a God-only word. That's important. Among other things, it teaches us that matter is not eternal—that there can be no naturalistic explanation for creation, that creation didn't begin with matter; it began with God who created something out of nothing.

Can **anyone else** create something out of nothing? The artist has paints and canvass and subjects. The writer has words and grammar and language. The carpenter has tools and steel and wood. And even the inventor has a wealth of raw materials at her disposal. Can anyone but God create something out of nothing?

No. Only God. Genesis was **written against the backdrop of other Near-Eastern stories** of creation—stories of many gods creating the world out of raw materials that were already available to them. In the Near-Eastern stories, suns and moons are powerful gods, but in Genesis they are but created things and timekeepers created by God through the power of his word. The Genesis account sets Israel’s God, *our* God, above and apart from the false gods of the pagan nations of the day.<sup>4</sup> Our majestic God is the one true God who can create something out of nothing, the God who can speak the word and bring a universe into being. God doesn’t birth the world like a woman in labor, groaning, pushing, sweating, straining, aching, to get her baby into the world. No labor for God. God speaks and creation comes into being.

Genesis claims that **God speaks** into the dark formless emptiness: “*Let there be light,*” says God, “*and there was light*” (Gen 1:3). And had we read the whole chapter, before God is finished speaking there is light and land and sky and moon and sun and plants and birds and fish and animals. God made all of this out of nothing but his imagination and his powerful Word. God did not have to begin a fitness program to build the strength and endurance needed to create all that is. God just cleared his throat and spoke a universe into being.

And did it with **artistry and flair**—design, order, beauty, color, rhythm, and joy. Creator God is a Master Artist. Robert Smith captures God’s artistry in creation ...

God created it out of nothing because there was nothing available. He came from nowhere because there was nowhere to come from. He stood on nothing because there was nothing to stand upon. He took nothing and made something. He put the sun in the sky without an upright and put the nine planets in a merry-go-round system around the sun without causing a collision. He painted the sky blue without a stepladder or paintbrush. He carpeted the earth with green grass. He scooped out valleys and piled up mountains and wrote the songs for the birds to sing.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>A concise comparative discussion of Genesis vs. *Enuma Elish* and other Near-Eastern creation stories is found in David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 16.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Smith Jr., *Doctrine that Dances* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 59.

### III

**And last and best, God creates man and woman to steward everything else God created.**

God did not create man to exploit the earth and its resources but to tend it, manage it, live from its fruit, and enjoy it. God saw all that he created and called it “good.” After creating humankind, called it “very good” (1:31). Man and woman are not ornaments in creation, not just one more thing God thought of as he was wrapping up his creative work: “*It’s all nice, but something’s missing. I know—I’ll make people.*” None of that. Genesis elevates humanity as the crowning touch of God’s creation. Hear vv. 26-27:

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.*

Unlike any other creature in creation, God made humankind in **his own image and likeness**. Among other things, that means that God made us rational, free, responsible, with a sense of morality, and with a capacity to relate personally to God. But it means even more in its context. In the Ancient Near East, only kings and queens could claim to be in “the image of God.” The writer of Genesis expands that to every human being on the face of the earth: every man, every woman, every color, every nationality, every person created in the image of God. God considers humanity royalty and invites us to join him in his rule over the earth.<sup>6</sup>

Because God created us in his own image and likeness, we are more like God than anything else in the universe. In the creation story in **Genesis 2**, we read that God took a hands-on approach by fashioning the first man from the dust and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). Human beings are the crown of creation; God takes special interest in us. When God looked at creation, perhaps he said, “*I like the squirrel. The elephant is a good idea. Lions are kingly. Horses are swift. Peacocks are beautiful. Camels are funny looking but efficient. The*

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<sup>6</sup>Indebted for this insight to Michael F. Bird, *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 104.

*duck-billed platypus is an interesting experiment. Eagles are majestic. Dolphins make a really cool sound. Dogs are nice. I'm not so sure about cats (just kidding). They are all good, and I like them all. But when I look at man and woman, they are the only ones like me. I have breathed my life into them."*

In a culture that tells you you're the sum of your body shape, your IQ, your feelings, your genitalia, and your preferences, don't forget that the Lord God Almighty, your Creator, says that **you are the crown of creation**, royalty, elevated in status to everything else God made. Only humankind is created in the image and likeness of God. That sets us apart. Animals are content to eat, drink, sleep, reproduce, and die. Human beings have moral consciousness, a desire for relationships, a longing for God. Human beings contemplate the meaning of their lives and what waits for us after death. Nothing else in creation does this. I have a dog named **Tux**. I love the little fellow. Other than taking a walk with me each morning and playing with his toys, Tux basically sleeps all day in the house by himself. He may eat a little food, lap up a little water, and beg at the dinner table. He may sleep on his bed for a while and then, for a little variety, crawl into the corner or stretch out on the couch and sleep there. Does Tux want more out of life? Does he lie around an empty house and think, *"My life is so empty. There's got to be more to life than this? Maybe I should get a job. Maybe I should form some deeper relationships. Maybe I should go to church."* Human beings are not animals. We are different. We are better, higher, nobler—even when our behavior is more animal-like than human. God made us the crown of creation because he created us in his own image and gave us the earth as a gift to care for, manage, and enjoy. God loves all his creation. It's all good. But he takes a special interest in you and me.

#### IV

**This has huge implications.**

This means that **you are not an accident**. You are not the result of some evolutionary process that began in some single-celled creature that across time, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest made you, you. No, you are, as Psalm 139:14 declares, *"fearfully and*

*wonderfully made.*” God knit you together in your mother’s womb (Ps 139:13). You are not an accident. You are not a mistake. You are not here by chance. You are the handiwork of God.

God’s creating you in his own image also means **you are no animal**. So don’t live like one: moved only by your baser instincts and lusts while ignoring the nobler parts of your humanity.

- You have **moral sensibilities**; let God inform them.
- You are free; use your **freedom** to serve the God who made you.
- You have the capacity for **self-discipline**; control yourself and live responsibly.
- You are capable of **relating to God**; know him and love him and follow him.
- You are **accountable** to God; live in such a way that the prospect of God’s judgment evokes anticipation more than apathy or dread.

You are no animal. You are a human being. Live into and out of the image in which God created you.

This also means that **your life depends on God**. God is more than Creator. The Bible also describes God as the Provider and Sustainer of the universe and our lives. In his sermon to the philosophers in Athens, Paul claimed that *“in [God] we live and move and have our being”* (Acts 17:28). You are alive and breathing in this moment because God wants you to be. The world doesn’t spin out of control and planets do not collide with one another because in the person of Jesus Christ, God *“is before all things, and by him all things hold together”* (Col 1:17). Creation is not some toy that God wound up and set loose to do its thing so God could get on with more interesting matters. God holds creation together. He is active, not passive, in the process. If God were to let it go or turn his back, creation would fall apart at the seams and descend back into formless chaos. **With Covid and Afghanistan and fires and floods and drought and division spinning this world into chaos, it feels like God has turned his back on this planet.** But he hasn’t. God is holding it together. God is working his plan. These are birth pains as God prepares to send Jesus back to the earth and recreate the earth and the heavens that will last for eternity. God is also working in ways we cannot see. And he is working in your life too. And he better be because your life depends on God. You may consider yourself a self-made person. You are not. Your life depends on God. Without his constant sustenance, you would drop dead in your tracks.

And God's special interest in humanity, in you, carries this implication too: **you find meaning in life only in him**. You find that meaning because despite your sin, God does not give up on you. Instead, God remakes you as a **new creation**. Writes Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17 – *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!”* When humanity fell into sin and separation from God, God sent his only Son Jesus on a rescue mission to save us and reclaim us. It took the cross. It took our sinless Savior Jesus bearing our sins on the cross to end our curse, to kill sin's penalty and power over us, and to adopt us into God's forever family. You can know our Creator God in Jesus Christ. Not just as Creator but as your *Abba* Father. Turn from your sins and put your trust in him today. He will make you a new creation. He will save you from your sins. He will adopt you into his family. You will become God's child not just by Genesis creation but by new birth, new creation through faith in the crucified, resurrected Christ. It is only in Christ that we find the meaning and purpose for which God created us. Listen to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – *“You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.”* That is the meaning of life: in whatever you do, you can glorify God and enjoy him forever. We can find meaning only in God.

Creation is not just trivial fact; it has huge implications for you and me.

## V

### **And it leads us into worship.**

That where the creation stories are going all the time. Genesis 1-2 is not about the *how* of creation but about the *who*. These chapters introduce us to the one true God, Creator of the heavens and the earth. There is no intention on the part of the narrator to set forth a scientific explanation about the beginnings of the universe. The intention is to draw us into faith and worship. **Don't bring your microscope to Genesis 1-2; bring your kneeling bench. Don't take these chapters to the lab; take them to the sanctuary.** Look with wonder on who God is and what God does, and worship. Will Willimon observes:



Since Darwin, we look upon the earth, not so much with wonder, but rather with curiosity. Our world is a thing to be poked at, examined like a cadaver, mined, developed, bulldozed. The earth was without form and void until the advent of the biologist, who explained it, the engineer, who fixed it, the real estate developer who subdivided it.<sup>7</sup>

No. Creation is more than that. It is the **handiwork of God**—the wonder of his artistic imagination and creative genius. And it is God’s gift to humankind to explore and enjoy and steward as acts of worship to our Creator God.

**Surely creation theology leads to worshipful doxology as we give praise to our Creator God.** So praise him today!

**Praise God who speaks whole worlds into existence.**

Praise him to whom the oceans are as puddles,  
and the mountains are as plains.

Praise him who can spin a planet on his finger,  
and fluff the skies like a blanket.

Praise him who scattered stars in the heavens  
like glitter from a tube,  
and praise him who could blow it all away  
with one puff of his breath.

Praise our God who created the heavens and the earth!

**Praise God who covered the earth with plants of every kind**

and who filled the seas with fish too numerous to count.

Praise him who set the birds to flight,  
and who made animals to walk, crawl, creep, and hop upon the earth.

Praise him who made humankind last and best of all,

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<sup>7</sup>William H. Willimon, *The Collected Sermons of William H. Willimon* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 48-49.

the crown of creation, made in the image of God,  
fashioned from the dust of the earth,  
brought to life by the breath of God,  
and given stewardship over all the earth.

Praise our God who created the heavens and the earth!

**Clap your hands, you rivers.**

You trees, stretch out your arms in praise.

Birds, sing your songs to the Lord.

Frolic in the sea, great whale,  
tail dance on the lake, you large-mouth bass.

And you creatures of the earth:

roar, cackle, bark, howl, meow,

chirp, croak, and chatter

with delight,

to give praise to your Maker.

**And praise him, all his people,**

for you are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Sing to the Lord and clap your hands to the One who made us.

For he is the one true God, eternal in the heavens,

the Creator God,

the God who makes something out of nothing,

the God who designed and brings order to the universe,

and the God who holds it all together.

**Praise him for the new creation he makes us in Christ,**

for the salvation only he can give,

for the meaning and purpose he gives us in him,

and for the grace to glorify him and enjoy him forever.

**Give praise today in the house of God**

to the God of this house,  
the God of the universe,  
and the God of you and me.

**Praise our God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth.**

Praise Him now!

Praise Him forever!

Hallelujah! Amen!

Preached: August 22, 2021

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