

Introduction

This week we are beginning a new series on the Big Picture of Salvation. In other words, we're going to be looking at the ark of Scripture in a big picture approach. But I don't want to give a simple fly-by of the whole Bible, but we're going to look at the ark of Scripture through Creation, Fall, and Redemption in a unique way. For the next few weeks, we're going to be studying the primeval history from Creation to the call of Abraham, and then we'll shift from Genesis into the history of Israel and the covenants through the genealogy of Jesus.

In other words, from now until Christmas, we're going to be studying the history of salvation from the beginning of everything until the beginning of a new reality in Christ.

Tiamat and Marduk

Today, I want to begin our sermon with an ancient near eastern myth about creation called the Enuma Elish. This isn't the only ANE myth about creation, but it is probably the

most reflective to the culture of the day myth for the people of Israel as they received this teaching from Moses in the wilderness.

Here's how the story goes:

In the beginning there was a sea of chaos, undifferentiated waters raging and swirling. But one day the waters were separated into sweet, fresh water, the god Apsu, and bitter, salt water, the goddess Tiamat. Once divided these two gods give birth to new gods, but Apsu is annoyed by the noise of these younger gods, so he plans to kill them, and this troubles Tiamat so she warns her oldest son Enki about Apsu's plan, and Enki murders Apsu in his sleep. But upon hearing this news, Tiamat is enraged declaring war on the younger gods and appointing herself a champion and summons the forces of chaos to destroy her children. In the midst of the war against Tiamat, a champion emerges among the younger gods named Marduk. Marduk challenges Tiamat's champion and defeats him, and then Marduk kills Tiamat by firing an arrow through her which splits her in two.

And from the corpse of Tiamat, Marduk forms the heavens from one half and the earth from the other half.

Genesis 1 as an apologetic

Pretty, gruesome, but let's return to Genesis again.

Genesis 1:1–3 ESV

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The 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. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

Many secular historians look at the similarities and claim that Moses or postexilic Israelites wrote this Judaic account based on the ancient texts of Sumeria and Babylon, but that is foolishness. Let's take a moment to hear the differences between them and see if the similarities are strong enough to make that case.

First, we see that one God created everything. God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was **תֶּהוֹ וָבֶהוּ** , that is barren and empty. It was dark and empty, and the Spirit was hovering over the waters. The world was empty and dark outside of the presence of God in His creation. But that all changes with a word. “Let there be light”. – **יְהי אֹר** – and there was light.

Notice how peaceful this account is. In the Enuma Elish, there is annoyance, war, fighting, anger, murder, the desecration of a corpse, and creation from existing matter. And this all happens over seven tablets. But here in Genesis,

it all begins in three short sentences. One God, no conflict. One God, no preexisting matter. Creation from nothing, creation without conflict. The language of the waters being the only real similarity does not seem sufficient to claim that this is a Judaic retelling of a Sumerian creation myth.

God as self-existing

Given this cultural context of the Torah, let's focus in on this one point for today. God is the self-existing Creator of all that exists. To use the language of Aristotle, God is the uncaused cause. God is eternal. God is not just an idea or a force, but a being that exists! He is the ground of all being and existence and there is nothing prior to Him. God is a necessary and eternal being.

The presence of the Trinity

And now may be a good time to point out that the Trinity is already present in the text. God (the Father) created heaven and earth. God (the Spirit) hovers over the water. And at this point you may be thinking, where is the Son? Well, John clarifies that for us in John 1:1-3

John 1:1-3 ESV

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

God spoke and it was. The Father speaks the Word, who is the Son, and creation happens, and the means of that creation is through the Spirit.

Let's look at the Spirit's role in creation in two ways:

Genesis 1:2 ESV

The 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.

The Spirit hovered over the waters, or it could also be read as moved gently over the waters. The image is that of protection and creation. If we return to the image of the waters in the Enuma Elish creation myth, we think of the indiscernible waters as a sea of chaos, yet here, the Spirit hovers over the sea of chaos, which is barren and empty, and prepares and forms it for creation. Which leads us to the second way to look at this:

Psalms 104:30 ESV

When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

Creation happens through the Spirit. God the Father creates by speaking the Word, who is the Son, who creates through

the accompanied breath, who is the Spirit. Creation comes from the Father, by the Son, and through the Holy Spirit! And it all happens without conflict through the proclamation of God.

And we see the specific role of the Spirit in creation particularly in the creation of man in Genesis 2:7

Genesis 2:7 ESV

then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

The Spirit is the breath of God, and the giver, sustainer, and renewer of life!

The glory of God in Creation

Alright, we have gone down a theological rabbit trail of the Trinity, but let's return back to the purpose and text of Genesis 1.

Genesis 1 reveals that God created and ordered all that exists as according to His plan and purposes.

Looking again at the first two verses,

Genesis 1:1-2 ESV

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

The 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.

Before creation, there was only God, eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God was not wanting before creation and He was not better off because of Creation. Within God, there exists the perfection of all His attributes: Knowledge, power, goodness, beauty, love, truth, glory, and so on. God created because He wanted to, and He created to ultimately share His glory with creation for His glory, which we will continue to unpack as we go through the unfolding revelation of Scripture in the coming weeks and months.

But what we see here is an unfolding of creation. God creates the heavens and the earth, and what do we see immediately? An earth that is barren and empty, darkness, and the raging sea of chaos. In other words, Creation begins with nothing and ends with order, but let's walk through the days to see how that unwinds.

Day 1 - Light

Genesis 1:3–5 ESV

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

was morning, the first day.

Without any conflict, fighting, or action, God orders the formlessness of darkness by speaking light into creation. Many have understood this light to be the creation of knowledge or ideas or even of the spiritual beings, but that's purely speculation and conjecture. The point is that God conquers the chaos of darkness with only His Word.

Day 2 - The separation of the waters

Genesis 1:6–8 ESV

And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 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. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

The formless sea of chaos, likewise is separated and put into order by the Word of God. God did not create two gods by separating the waters, but instead, He created a distinction between the waters of earth and the waters of the sky.

The word expanse there is an interesting one. It describes a sheet of metal that is pounded out very thin, and in the most functional translation, we could just use the word sky

or even atmosphere, and the separation of the waters will become significant again in Genesis 6 with the Flood, but for now the point is simply that God calmed the raging sea and created order.

Day 3 - The forming and filling of the earth

Genesis 1:9–13 ESV

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. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 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. 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. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

Lastly, God overcomes the formless and empty earth with a simple Word. God spoke and the land and seas are ordered, and again God spoke and the earth is filled with vegetation. But the overcoming of the emptiness does not end with day 3.

Day 4 - Establishing time

Genesis 1:14–19 ESV

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, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. 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. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

As I previously said, there are many in Church History who believe that the light of day 1 is not light in a literal sense, although it could be the creation of light in a cosmic sense, or even the creation of matter and thus the creation of time itself in a physical sense. But again, that’s not essential to the purpose of our text. The point is that God created the sun and the moon to order the sense of time on the earth. Another sense of filling and ordering. But overcoming the emptiness does not end with day 4.

Day 5 - Filling the sea and the sky

Genesis 1:20–23 ESV

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.” 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. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

Before day 1, the earth was formless and void, or in other words, barren and empty. Now there is vegetation, ordered time, and the seas are filled with sea creatures and the skies are filled with birds. But overcoming the emptiness does not end with day 5.

Day 6- The fulfillment of creation

Filling the land with beasts and creeping thing

Genesis 1:24–25 ESV

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. 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.

And finally, we see life created on the land with livestock, beasts, and creepy crawlies. And God looks at it all and sees that it is good. And what we learn about the good in Genesis 1 is that the good is ordered, as the Word of God constantly uses the phrase according to its kind. God did not create a chaotic world without laws or rules, but God created a world that was neatly ordered and established, but on day 6, God was not finished yet.

The crown jewel of creation

Genesis 1:26–31 ESV

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

Everything else, God created according to its kind, yet God creates man according to something wholly other. God creates man in the image and likeness of God Himself, and then God blesses man. And just as God instructs the creatures of the sea and of the air to be fruitful and multiply, God addresses the creatures of the land, particularly man to be fruitful and multiply, because God overcame the chaos of formless creation and the chaos of emptiness through speaking into creation all that exists.

And whereas creation was good, after creating man, God looks at creation and says, “very good.” And then God completes His week by enjoying what he has made.

Day 7 - God rests

Genesis 2:1-3 **ESV**

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 was no warring, there was no fighting, there was no conflict. God spoke and there was. In comparison to the creation myths, this one does not fit. Every other story is polytheistic and chaotic, but the self-existing, sole God of the universe created everything and ordered everything according to His will with no conflict necessary.

And when God was completed, He enjoyed His creation and set a precedent for His creation to follow. It was not about the work, and God cannot grow fatigued. God rested because He enjoyed what He created, and it was very good.

The Bigger Picture

This introduction to Scripture is just that: an introduction. Genesis begins with a cosmogony, a theory of origins, that acts as an apologetic against the theological world around the people of Israel. Genesis 1 is not a scientific text, and it is not a historical text. It is a theological text. That doesn't mean that it doesn't hold within it scientific or historical truth, by no means, I fully believe that Genesis 1 does not contradict science and that it is historical, but that is not the purpose of the text. The purpose is to identify the key subject of Scripture - God, the Creator and Sustainer of All. The purpose of Genesis 1 and to reveal the author of Creation for the point of revealing that we are contingent

upon God for our existence. We are dependent upon God for our existence. And we cannot enjoy life until we come to realize that and come into relationship with our Creator. And the way we experience this relationship and the fulfillment and happiness that comes with it is through the person of Jesus Christ who is the Word of God by whom all things came to be:

John 1:1–5 ESV

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And God is not only the source of Creation but the end of Creation, the very purpose for our existence.

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It is not until we have a proper understanding of creation that we can truly flourish in this life. Creation teaches us that we are merely creature and God alone is Creator. We do not get to order our lives however we wish, we do not get to make demands of God as if He exists to serve us. No, we exist for the wonderful purpose to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That is human flourishing and real happiness. And only then can we understand Augustine's famous

words:

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

The Big Picture

So, let's conclude with this: How does Genesis 1 fit into the Big Picture?

First, it reminds us that God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, created all that exists and has being. We, as creatures, were created and should recognize that it is the Creator who determines the purpose of His creation, not the creature. We are dependent upon God for our existence, and we should glorify God for His creation.

Second, God is not indifferent to His creation. He calls it good; He gives life; and He provides instructions on what He expects. "Be fruitful and multiple" is not simply a command to procreate, but it also carries a spiritual meaning of create image bearers and worshippers. Be fruitful and multiple is echoed in the Words of Jesus: Matthew 28:19-20

Matthew 28:19-20 ESV

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have

commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Third, and this is like the second, God does not take His hands off of His creation. As we will see in coming weeks, what began good and properly ordered descends into chaos with Adam’s rebellion and the introduction of sin into the world. But God does not abandon His creation, but ultimately, God himself, in the 2nd person of the Trinity, steps into our place to reconcile us to himself and the fulness of God.

Which we could summarize as this: God not only created us, but He also provides the means to be in relationship with him. And praise God, that He did!