

SESSION FOUR

THE BEGINNING IN BLESSING

Genesis 1:1–2:3

I. INTRODUCTION

Genesis 1:1–2:3 comprises the first section of the book. Rather than the word *tôl^odôl* initiating this section (see notes, session 3), we have the simple yet profound statement in Gen 1:1 that God created the heavens and the earth. That which is created in Gen 1:1-2 is unformed and unfilled, so the remainder of the section will describe how God prepared it for man's habitation. This section not only teaches us that all creation stems from the "willed" desire and plan of the God known as Yahweh, but also that man enjoys a beginning wrapped in the blessing of God. Created in the image of God, man enjoys sovereignty over the earthly creatures and experiences the rest of God. The main point is that man begins in blessing, and this blessing is highlighted by man exercising delegated authority to rule while enjoying the "rest of God." This account of creation and man's origin stands in stark contrast to the pagan accounts of creation (e.g., the Babylonian creation account), where there are many gods warring with each other, and through the death of one of the gods, man is created to serve the needs of the gods. In the biblical account, man has dignity and a role of shared honor with the one all-powerful and loving God.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF 1:1–2:3

- A. Creation attributed to the one true God (1:1)
- B. Circumstantial details provided of the initial earth, indicating that it is not suitable for man's habitation (1:2)
- C. The narrative of creation in preparing the earth to be suitable for man (1:3-31)
- D. Concluding summary statement of creation (2:1)
- E. Epilogue: The Sabbath Rest (2:2-3)

III. THE PRIMARY MESSAGE

The Sovereign God creates all things by His divine word (showing Himself to be the Lord of all creation), preparing earth for man's habitation in order to establish theocratic *rest* with man mediating His rule over creation.

IV. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECTION

A. Creation attributed to the one true God (1:1)

Contrary to the pagan creation accounts, the biblical account attributes all creation to the one Creator God whom Israel worships, namely Yahweh Elohim. We should observe that two accounts of creation are provided (not different accounts, but from different perspectives):

1:1–2:3 Focuses on the creation of earth for man

2:4-25 Focuses on the creation of man himself and his initial state and environment

In the first account, man is the end and climax of God's creation. This account captures the dignity of man chronologically (he is the culmination of God's creative work). In the second account, the dignity of man is depicted logically. Everything is created for man: the garden, the beasts, and the woman (God's crowning gift to man).

1. The Name of God

- a. Gen 1:1 = God (Heb., Elohim - אֱלֹהִים). This term emphasizes the power of God, as pre-eminently displayed through creation.
- b. Gen 2:4 = LORD God (Heb., Yahweh Elohim - יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים). The name Yahweh (sometimes written YHWH) emphasizes His sovereign independence and His covenantal relationship with man and Israel.

Taken together, these verses attribute creation to both (God and YHWH). This stresses that the Creator God is linked once and for all with the "covenant God YHWH." When God sent Moses, he was to go in the name of YHWH (Ex 3:13-17; 6:2-9) who is nothing less than the sovereign God of creation. It is this God who had entered into covenant with Abraham that purposes to deliver Israel out of Egypt.

2. God "created" (Heb., *bārā'* - בָּרָא)

Although the word *bārā'* does not necessarily mean "to create out of nothing" (*creatio ex nihilo*), this is the probable implication in this context (cf. Ps 33:6,9 and Rom 4:17).¹ There are other words for creating or making:

¹ The issue of creation versus evolution is a modern-day discussion. The biblical account presents man as a product of direct divine creation, not the result of an evolutionary process. For a helpful introductory work surveying various creation models, see J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, ed., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1999).

יָצַר – *yāṣar* - to form (comp. Gen 2:7)

עָשָׂה - *‘āsāh* - to make (comp. Gen 2:18)

יָסַד – *yāsaḏ* -to found

יָלַד – *yālad* -to beget

בָּנָה – *bānā* -to build, fashion (comp. Gen 2:22)

The unique feature about *bārā’* is that it is used exclusively for the activity of God (never of man's work).²

3. Implications

The point is that the God of the Bible, Yahweh, is the creator of the entire organized universe, including the objects of nature which the pagans worship as gods (e.g., the sun and moon). Yahweh Elohim is credited as the absolute sovereign over all matter. This has two implications:

- a. The God of the Bible is supreme and altogether authoritative above all other so-called "gods."
- b. His sovereignty demands allegiance. He is to be obeyed not only in leaving Egypt, but in the ongoing submission to Torah, the revealed will of God.

B. Circumstantial Details about the Initial Creative Work (1:2)

1. Unformed and unfilled

Verse two should be translated as a circumstantial clause, "Now the earth was" Even though the earth was the result of the creative work of the *Perfect* God, it was not ready to be called "good." The reason is that it was considered to be *tōhū wābōhū* (vs. 2), which probably has the idea that the earth was initially unformed (or unproductive) and unfilled (empty). That is, the earth was not suitable for man's habitation. Furthermore, there is only darkness. Beginning with vs 3, God begins His work of rectifying this situation.

2. God's Spirit

Despite the darkness and lifelessness of earth, there is hope because the Spirit of God is there. God is in control, and moving upon the face of the water. This verb is used in Deut 32:11 of a bird (eagle?) fluttering over her young in their nest as she cares for them. There is a searching, caring, observant "air" about the Spirit's activity. Here is the creative, life-giving Spirit of God waiting to prepare earth for God's program with man.

²Cf. Thomas J. Finley, "Dimensions of the Hebrew Word for 'Create' (בָּרָא)," *BibSac* 148 (Oct-Dec 1991): 409-23.

3. A Redemptive Analogy

Though the matter called earth came by the creative work of God, its initial form anticipates an evil world where sin and death will reign. There is no life, and darkness abounds. There is no enjoyment of fellowship with God, or adoring of the glory of God. There is the intermingling of elements, and there is no order. God will use this, however, to display a paradigm of His redemptive work of salvation, an archetype of His many acts of salvation to follow. Even here, at the very beginning, we see a foretaste of what God wants to do with sinful man:

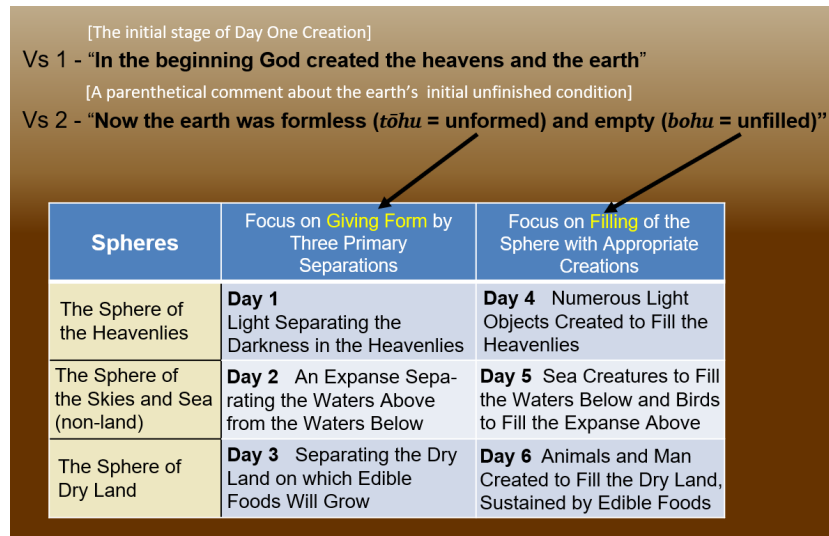
"For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Cor 4:6; cf. 5:17)

In the midst of our existence of darkness and sin-ridden lives, the Spirit of God is carefully hovering over us, waiting for the precious moment to bring forth light and create spiritual life in us, and henceforth separate us unto Himself.

C. The Narrative of Creation in Preparing Earth (1:3-31)

1. Our God is Orderly

Out of the realm where darkness abounds, God begins to bring order with unrivaled intelligence. The point is to take earth from being unfit to live in to the point where it is habitable for man (Isa 45:18). In doing so, the situation of being *tōhū wābōhū* is overcome—God will form the earth and fill it. Notice carefully the structure of the chapter:



2. The Creative Word

In the creative work of God, it is a simple word from God which brings forth existence. This motif is significant, for the power of the Word of God was important to Israel. It was reliable, and gave them assurance as they stepped out in faith. What YHWH had spoken was both powerful and certain. What He promised, that He was able to fulfill. Their response to the Word of God was to be absolute obedience and complete trust.

3. The Motif of Light

With the creation of light, God dispels the darkness. Light and darkness become major symbols in Scripture for good and evil. Light is characteristic of redemption and the holiness of God (Ps 18:28-29; 1 Jn 1:5-6). When we come to Jesus, we see the application of this motif with Him: "*In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it.*"

4. The Evaluation of God's Work

Following each day's creative work, there is an evaluation from God in the form, "and God saw that it was good." This is absent from the second day since God started "spatial separation" on the second day but did not finish it until the third day. Obviously, the drama of creation is meant to center on man, for God says after creating man "*and it was very good.*" All the creative work is a preparation for the man and the woman.

5. Man to Have Dominion

The climax of the chapter is the creation of the man and woman.³ Notice the shift from "*Let there be*" to "*Let us make.*"⁴ The man and woman are not only the final aspect of God's work,

³Regarding man as the "image of God," see Charles Lee Feinberg, "The Image of God," *BibSac* 129:515 (1972), 235-46.

⁴ The *plurality* suggested in the phrase "let us make" has generated much discussion, but unfortunately still lacks for consensus of interpretation. Modern exegetes (even conservatives) reject the notion that the author had in mind the Trinity. Ross seems to favor the idea that the form can be explained by the "plural of majesty," i.e., the plural is being used to agree with Elohim (which is technically in the plural in Hebrew, though translated as "God," singular—cf. Gen 11:7 [*Creation and Blessing*, 112]). A problem with Ross' view is that we do not see the plural "we" in Gen 1:29 ("I have given you every plant"), as we might expect. Gordon Wenham, writing in the Word Commentary series, rejects Ross' view. He notes, "Joūn's observation (114e) that 'we' as a plural of majesty is not used with verbs has led to the rejection of this interpretation" (*Genesis 1–15*, 28). Instead, Wenham feels that the choice lies between two other options: (1) God is addressing His heavenly court, i.e., the angels (though He alone actually does the creating); or (2) the author is employing a "plural of self-deliberation" (or self-exhortation)—as though God were talking to Himself [but others have pointed out that the Hebrew construction of Gen 18:17 tends to weaken this view]. Wenham (as well as Waltke, *Genesis*, 64) seems to prefer the heavenly court view, stating:

"And in fact the use of the singular verb 'create' in 1:27 does, in fact, suggest that God worked alone in the creation of mankind. 'Let us create man' should therefore be regarded as a divine announcement to the heavenly court, drawing the angelic host's attention to the master stroke of creation, man. As Job 38:4, 7 puts it: 'When I laid the foundation of the earth . . . all the sons of God shouted for joy' (cf. Luke 2:13-14)" (Wenham, 28).

Yet the heavenly court view is not without problems either. If the angelic court is in view, would the words "in our image" (vs 26) imply that man's image is not after God alone but also that of the angels? Also, Isa 40:14 seems to suggest that God did not consult or counsel with anyone in His act of creation.

More recently, Victor Hamilton (*The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, NICOT, 134) has expressed a preference for the view that the plural expresses the plurality of God within unity (though not explicitly affirming a trinitarian understanding). Verse two had already spoken of the *Spirit* (assuming that the Hebrew *rūaḥ* should be translated "Spirit" and not "wind")—thus informing us that God is a complexity of being. Cf. D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *TynBul* 19 (1968): 62-69; and G. Hasel, "The Meaning of 'Let Us' in Gen 1:26," *AUSS* 13 (1975): 58-66. Hamilton is probably on the right track—there is a *divine plurality* to God, which is reflected in man's *human*

but they are to rule and exercise dominion over creation. Adam was God's theocratic administrator. He had "delegated authority" to mediate God's rule. In a sense, God is sharing this "rule" which is His unique right and privilege.

This is man as he was created to be . . . sharing in God's reign over the earth. Tragically, this privilege will be forfeited with the fall of man in disobedience (cf. Ps 8; Heb 2:6-8). In grace, it will be regained for man in Christ and ultimately find realization in the establishment of our Lord's kingdom to those who are faithful to Him.

God's Plan for Man to Share Dominion With Him

1. The Original Intention of God	Gen 1:26-28
2. Lost Through the Fall	Heb 2:8
3. Regained Through Christ for Man	Ps 72:8; 110:2
4. Available To Those Who Faithfully Endure	2 Tim 2:12; Heb 10:36

D. Concluding Summary Statement of Creation (2:1)

E. Epilogue: The Sabbath Rest (2:2-3)

1. Obviously, God was not exhausted when he concluded the six days of creation (Isa 40:28). Yet, the Sabbath rest is a major motif of the Bible, being equated with the fulfillment of promised blessing. In Hebrews 4, the "rest" anticipates the kingdom age when man is finally brought to the fulfillment of promised blessing and God has re-established His right to rule over His creation.

The keeping of the Sabbath was a sign of the Sinaitic covenant and an open evidence of obedience in following the LORD.

2. Blessing

In Gen 1:1–2:3, God is specifically said to bless in three regards:

- a. fruitfulness (1:22)
- b. dominion (1:28)
- c. rest (2:3)

plurality ("And God created man . . . male and female He created them" – vs. 27; cf. 5:1-2). Sailhamer has a good elaboration of this view ("Genesis," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1:38). He states, "Following this clue the divine plurality expressed in v.26 is seen as an anticipation of the human plurality of the man and woman, thus casting the human relationship between man and woman in the role of reflecting God's own personal relationship with himself." Though not explicitly affirming the Trinity, this approach would allow for a *complexity* to God that will be developed further in Scripture. However we choose to explain the bewildering plural in Gen 1:26, the fact remains that Jesus Christ was involved here as Creator God (as the NT makes clear).

For the Israelites, these three areas were to be theirs in the land of promise as God's theocratic people. The remainder of Scripture will be concerned with the process of establishing the bliss of theocratic rest. The Abrahamic covenant in Gen 12 is a key to this process.

V. THEOLOGICAL EMPHASES REVEALED IN GENESIS 1

- A. The nature of God as the sovereign creator. Everything that exists was made by Him and therefore is and must be under His control.
- B. The basis of Torah
If indeed God was before all things and made all things—including the things pagans worship—how foolish it would be to worship any other gods before Him.
- C. The activity of God in redemption.
- D. The purpose of God to establish man in blessing, mediating God's rule.

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

Genesis one informs us that the creation was the sovereign work of YHWH Elohim. In Jn 1:1-3 and Col 1:16, we discover that this Creator God is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. This is important, for it reveals most supremely the grace of God: the very One who made you went to Calvary for your sins. That is what makes the love of God so irresistible! Can you think of any reason to question God's love for you? You might want to meditate on Romans 8:36-39.