

“He is the Lord our God”

Genesis 1

A minefield of opinions

As we look at Gen 1–3 over the next few weeks we should acknowledge that these chapters have caused many an interpretative problem. There’s a minefield of opinions and if you step the wrong way it can cause you grief.

- Theistic evolution v creationism i.e. 24 hour days and young earth
- History, partial history or no history. Fact, fiction or myth? Literal history e.g. light before the sun was made. If it is partial history If it is no history If Adam and Eve weren’t real people, then there’s no such thing as sin resulting in death.
- Social issues. Gay marriage, science, environment.

We approach Gen 1–3, as we do the whole of Scripture, as the Word of God. And therefore we read the whole of Scripture—from Genesis to Revelation—as one, unified story because God is ultimately the one author behind the human authors.

So each part of the Bible story helps us understand other parts of the Bible story. This won’t resolve all our problems but it will solve the important ones. Indeed, Jesus is the key to understanding the whole of Scripture. While in conversation on the road to Emmaus, as Luke puts it, “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24.27).

Jesus says the OT is ultimately about him. The OT points to him. The OT is the first part of a continuous story which begins with creation in Genesis 1 and ends in the book of Revelation. From creation to new creation. And at the centre of this story is Jesus whom the OT foreshadows and whose work is explained and applied throughout the NT. [Contrast with the synagogue, the Academy and our own proof-texting].

So Gen 1–3 not only introduces those first five books written by Moses, it provides the foundation for the rest of the OT which lurches into the NT which opens with the birth of the Lord Jesus who is the one who gathers for himself a new people to live in a new creation under God’s loving rule.

Who is the Lord?

With a rather long introduction behind us, for the rest of our time we shall consider the question, “Who is the Lord”? And with specific reference to Genesis 1. Israel themselves probably asked this question numerous times throughout their history. “Who is our God?” “Who is this God that calls us to follow him”?

- The famine that swept across the land forced Jacob to seek grain from Egypt. “Who is this God that calls us to follow him”?

- Israel bound in slavery in Egypt. Oppressed and beaten. “Who is this God that calls us to follow him”?
- At Mt Sinai, the thunder and lightning. The thick cloud. The smoke. Everyone in the camp trembling (Ex 19.16). . “Who is this God that calls us to follow him”?
- 40 years in the wilderness where a generation perished. “Who is this God that calls us to follow him”?

We ask similar questions. “Who are you God? What sort of God are you? Can I trust you? Can I trust you when the cancer test comes back positive? Can I trust you when my spouse is gone? Can I trust you to lead me through the valley of the shadow of death? Can I trust you in the car accident? Can I trust you, Lord, to lead me through the twists and turns of life”?

“Will I trust you, Lord, when I am teased for my faith in you”? So we come to Gen 1 with the question, “Who are you, Lord”? (slide)

First. The Lord exists (slide). There’s no point asking, “Who are you, Lord” unless there is a Lord. Gen 1.1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. Genesis opens with the God who pre-exists creation. We know that God exists because he speaks and he acts in history. Broughton Knox says in his wonderful little book, “Everlasting God” (slide):

God has spoken and in that address to us we know him—we know him to be existent, we know him to be living and we know him to be the only true God, because his Word carries conviction and he affirms that he alone is God.

In philosophy there are three classic arguments for the existence of God (i.e. teleological—design; ontological—if God exists in your mind then he must exist in reality; cosmological—an argument from cause and effect). These rational arguments say nothing. They assume we must discover God on our own. That God is more a concept than a person.

The obvious way to know someone exists, and to know something about them, is to listen to them and to watch them. Rom 1 says that God reveals himself in creation. Rom 2 says that God reveals himself in our conscience. Rom 3 says that God reveals himself through his Son.

God is not mute. He is a talking God. Creation declares his glory. He has left his imprint in our minds. And he especially talks to us through his Son. Hebrews 1.2, “In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he also made the universe”.

God exists because he reveals himself to us. We didn’t go looking for God. God made us and he reveals himself to us. The problem isn’t that God can’t be found, the problem is that we don’t want to find him.

Second. God eternally exists and he chose to create the universe (slide). “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. God creates matter, space and time. It is an absolute act of creation. Once there was nothing and now there is something. The Hebrew word for “create” is found nowhere else in the Bible other than in Genesis 1.1. It reflects the uniqueness of creation. It is creation *ex nihilo*. Creation from *nihilo*—nothing.

The cosmos has an absolute beginning and therefore it has an origin.

How do the Bible writers respond to God’s creation of the heavens and earth? They respond with praise and thanksgiving. The psalmist says,

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world (Ps 19.1–4).

Creation is not inert and lifeless. It is not passive and boring. As James Montgomery Boice says,

In Romans Paul says, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (v. 20). This is the meaning of *glory* in Psalm 19—a revelation of God’s existence and power so great that it should lead every human being on the face of the earth to seek God out, to thank him for bringing him or her into existence, and to worship him.

John picks this up in the Book of Revelation, ““You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev 4.11).

Charles Spurgeon writes in “Morning and Evening”:

The Lord always deserves to be praised for what he is in himself, for his works of creation and providence, for his goodness towards his creatures, and especially for the transcendent act of redemption

It is always beneficial to praise the Lord; it cheers the day and brightens the night; it lightens toil and softens sorrow; and over earthly gladness it sheds a sanctifying radiance which makes it less liable to blind us with its glare. Have we not something to sing about at this moment? Can we not weave a song out of our present joys, or our past deliverances, or our future hopes?

Creation is a testimony to God’s power, his providence, his goodness. Creation testifies to a relational God who enjoys relationship with all he has made and especially with his people.

Third. God is not only Almighty and worthy of our praise, but he is also a master planner, an artist, the architect supreme (slide). The act of creation from nothing produces an earth which is formless

and empty, unfit for human habitation. It rests awaiting the Creator's mighty hand. Much of the chapter describes God shaping and forming, making spaces and putting life into those spaces.

On Day 1, God creates light and sets boundaries to the darkness. On Days 2 and 3—verses 6 to 10—God moulds the earth into shape, so that it is no longer formless. He separates the waters and forms dry land. The oceans are set apart from the sky.

On Day 3 comes vegetation. Plants and trees are the first inhabitants of the newly formed land. Then on Day 4 God populates the sky with the sun, moon and stars. He fills the earth with fish and birds, then with land animals and that brings us to the end of Day 4.

Now the earth is ready to receive its first living creatures. On Day 5 God fills the sky with birds and the seas are filled with fish. And God saw that it was good. Then finally, as the apex of life, on Day 6 God makes human beings in his image. On the unfinished 7th day God enters his rest which he made to share with his people whom he created in his image.

God the planner. God the artist. God the architect.

An artist draws with purpose. An architect carefully lays things out, every piece fulfilling an intended purpose. When Jørn Utzon designed the Sydney Opera House he left no part to chance (slide). The Opera House is a beautiful reflection of its creator.

The heavens and the earth are a beautiful reflection of its Creator. Not one thing was made without purpose. Everything in its place. Everything working according to design. The imprint of the divine stamped upon creation. God is sovereign and he says what is right and what is wrong. There is meaning in life.

As one commentator says, "That is why you and I who believe in this God can very well say that our chief reason for existence is to glorify him and enjoy him forever" (E.J. Young).

Let's pause and pull a few threads together.

One. As Israel headed toward Mt Sinai they needed to know the God who was calling them into covenant relationship with him. The God who saves people is the God who brought the universe into being. The purposeful God—the powerful God—the God who brings order out of chaos.

God is bigger and better than we can ever imagine. Genesis 1 portrays a God of infinite proportion who has clear very intentions. In these last days his intention is to renew creation, to restore it to its former glory which he is doing through his Son.

Genesis calls us to account. It lays the foundation for all true belief. The God who redeems you eternally exists, he brought the world into being through a mighty series of acts; he imposes order and purpose on his world.

Two. In the days of the ancient Near East, at the time of Moses and Israel, there were other creation stories. But the small gods in the ancient Near East and in our world are nothing. In our inverted world, the small gods look in control and it is tempting to appeal to them. It's tempting to make sense of this world by listening to this world.

But that's like listening to the captain of the Titanic who said, "Even God cannot sink this ship".

Genesis 1 exposes the arrogance of humanity which claims god-like status. We are not god. You are not god. You try making something out of nothing! The meaning of life is not whatever we want to be, it has been laid down and determined by the God who created the heavens and the earth.

Three. The gospel begins with creation. 2WTL says, "The first point of the Christian message is that God is in charge of the world. He is the ruler, the supreme president, the king. Unlike human rulers, however, God always does what is best for his subjects ... God rules the world because he made the world. Like a potter with his clay, God fashioned the world into just the shape he wished, with all its amazing details. He made it, and he owns it".

The gospel begins with creation.

In the opening of his Gospel, John takes us back to Genesis 1. The word that brought creation into being is the Word that brings life even now. This Word was with God in the beginning. Just as the words of Jesus brought creation into being, so now his Words bring life to all who come to him.

Four. The God we worship each day is worthy of our worship each day. Genesis 1 gives us a grand and compelling picture of the God of creation and salvation. When the burdens of the world press down upon us our mind can jump to places where it should not go. We need to be prompted to return to right thinking.

Who is the Lord? He is the God who made the heavens and the earth, he loves us and he calls us to love and obey him.