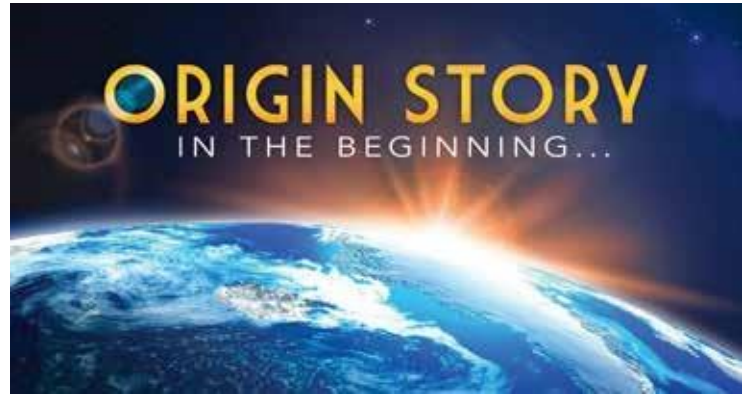


WEEK OF JUNE 11



THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

1 Genesis 1:1–2:3

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth... That is how the Apostle's Creed starts. Christians have been saying those words since the 3rd century. Chapter 1 of Genesis is foundational for our Christian faith. All the great worldview questions have the beginning of an answer in this chapter. The chapter continues for three verses into chapter 2. In July we will study Genesis 2:4–25, a second creation story that adds much more about humanity.

Genesis 1 is NOT making a scientific statement about origins. Science as we understand it did not exist then. Genesis 1 was not written to answer our scientific questions. Instead, Genesis 1 is a profound theological answer and alternative to the many religious cosmologies (stories of origin) and mythologies that were prevalent in the time of the Exodus.

To the best of our knowledge, Genesis was most likely written by Moses to help the people of Israel know the true God who had delivered them from Egypt and from the powerful gods of Egypt. Egypt, along with the region known as Mesopotamia (Babylon and Assyria), and Canaan (where they were headed) had well-established myths of creation. Genesis 1 has similarities with the Ancient Near East (ANE) religions, but the differences are far greater, especially about the God of the Jewish people and the gods of the ANE. Remember that Moses received an Egyptian education, and he was well-acquainted with Egyptian religion and gods.

The people of God had been delivered from Egypt. Now they need clarity about the far greater God so they would reject all other gods. The purpose of Genesis 1 is to explain WHO made everything and WHY everything was made. It is not interested in HOW and WHEN. Genesis 1 is intricately constructed theological prose verging on poetry. The famous first words are: *In the beginning, God...* This God will be named 31 times in the chapter. Who is this God? What is he like? What kind of creation did he design? And why? That is Genesis 1. The answers are exciting and life changing, then and NOW.

IN THE BEGINNING—GOD! 2 Genesis

1:1–2:3; Psalm 104

It will be useful to read Genesis 1 each day this week. You will feel its rhythms, see its structure, and absorb the ideas as you reread it. Every day has additional texts to read. Psalm 104 is a long reflection and prayer, inspired directly from Genesis 1. As you read Psalm 104, notice the qualities and attributes of the Lord of Creation. Today's reflection looks at three qualities of God.

1. God IS. In the beginning—God. Before the beginning—God. God is. God was. God is eternal and infinite. Before there was anything there was nothing, but God was always. God is outside time and space. God is eternal and infinite. We can't wrap our minds around the immensity of God.
2. God CREATES. God does not work with a creation that is already there. God makes everything—matter, energy, the elements, the laws of physics—everything! God is the Creator God. The creation is NOT God. The Creator and his creation are distinct from one another. Creation is NOT divine. It is not self-originating or sustaining. It is always dependent on its Creator.
3. God is ONE. All the ANE mythologies have many gods (a pantheon). Some of the gods are already a part of creation. Others are born; some of them die. In the ANE mythologies, each god is associated with one aspect of creation (the god of earth, water, the sun, the moon, and so on). In Genesis 1 there is only ONE God. God is not associated with any aspect of creation. God is transcendent above all of creation, and yet intimately involved with his creation.

Genesis 1 proclaims before anything else was, there was the ONE CREATOR GOD, and then there was his creation. The new age spiritualities of today, at their core, are similar to the ANE religions of biblical times.

Psalm 104 is filled with wonder at our Creator God. What moves you to wonder at God's creation? Pray a prayer of praise and thanks for all that God has created.

PRAISING GOD IN HIS CREATION

3 Genesis 1:1–2:3; Isaiah 40

Isaiah 40 is robust creational theology used to promote trust, dependency, and faithfulness. It is applied theology. As you read it, what do you learn about who the Creator God is and how you are to respond to this God? Today we continue with three more qualities of God.

4. God is SOVEREIGN. God is all powerful. God is the Almighty. All the ANE religions had many gods, and those gods were in conflict. Creation develops out of conflict, battle, war, death, and defeat. One of the gods emerges as the strongest of the gods. In Genesis, there is ONE God who has no equal and no competitor. God creates the universe effortlessly. He simply speaks “Let there be” and it is/was. God’s word is God’s will, and it is God’s way.

5. God is LOVE. The word love doesn’t appear in Genesis 1. So, why say this? Because God did not need to create, God wanted to create. Because love is creative. And love creates the very best. As you read Genesis 1, you realize there is abundance, flourishing, and fullness. That is what love gives. God is generous, lavish, benevolent, and gracious. And...

6. God is GOOD. Six times God says “It is good” and the 7th time God says it is “VERY good.” Creation is good because the God of Creation is good. God delights in his creation. God is honored and glorified in his creation. God is to be worshipped by all creation. As you have time and interest, look up these passages and see the summons to love and worship the Creator God: Psalm 8; 33:6–9; 74:13–17; 89:1–18; 148.

Creation reveals the Creator God (Romans 1:18–25). The heavens declare his glory (Psalm 19:1–3) and so must we. As vast as creation is, its Creator is infinitely greater. Praise God from whom all things flow.

This week, as you slow down and observe creation, take time to praise God from whom all creation flows. How can you rearrange your time this week to spend time praising God in his creation?

ONE GOD IN THREE PERSONS **4** John 1:1–5, 10; Colossians 1:15–17; Hebrews 1:2–3

Genesis 1 teaches us there is One Creator God and not many gods. God is ONE and there is not a separate pantheon of gods involved in making or fighting over creation. So, what about Jesus?

What about the Holy Spirit? Genesis 1:2 says the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

What about Genesis 1:26, where God says, “Let US make mankind in OUR image, in OUR likeness...”?

What about Proverbs 8:23–31, where Wisdom is personified and claims to have been with God at the founding of creation?

It is remarkable that a rigorously monotheistic Jewish faith had such potentially messy language about God, especially since Genesis 1 is a strong statement against the many gods.

Christians don’t have this problem because they are Trinitarian—believing in not three gods, but ONE God in three persons. The language of Genesis 1 sets the stage for a robust Trinitarian theology of creation. The New Testament is absolutely clear that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, was involved in creating creation, as was the Spirit of God.

What appear as hints and clues in the Old Testament are presented as clear truth in the New Testament. Father, Son, and Spirit are all involved in the work of creation.

Remember, Genesis 1 is concerned about explaining the WHO of creation and the WHY of creation. Next week will have more about the WHO and much more about the WHY, or the purpose behind creation.

Pray: Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, thank you for your creative work in creating the world. Thank you for the beauty that we see around us. Thank you for everything you have made.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & LIFEGROUP DISCUSSION

You can always pick any idea from the sermon or the daily readings and biblical passages and talk about those ideas. A good format is to have each LifeGroup member share one idea from the sermon that was most powerful for them.

DAY 1: How often do you think about the beginning of life? Does it matter to you? Why or why not?

DAYS 2 AND 3: Which of the six qualities of God jumped out at you? How often do you think about these truths? How central are these to your faith?

DAY 4: Read Colossians 1:15–17 together as a group. What does this passage teach you about Jesus? What does it mean that “in him all things hold together”?