

Genesis 1:1

Last week we introduced the book of Genesis and I noted the book could be divided in three ways,

- a. The Two -Division structure: the first comprising chapters 1-11 dealing with mankind and the nations in general, and then the second, chapters 12-50 which deals with the origins and early life of the Jewish people.
- b. The Toldot structure, which divides the book into eleven family histories.
- c. Geographically, which divides the book into three sections, dealing with Babylonia, Canaan, and then Egypt.

We are going to use the toldot method for our study which conveniently divides the book into 12 sections: the eleven toldots (from 2:4 to the end of the book) and the material that leads to the first toldot, which starts in 1:1 through 2:3. This first section, Gen 1:1 through 2:3, deals with creation. It can be divided as follows:

- a. The Original Creation, Gen 1:1.
- b. Chaos, Gen 1:2.
- c. The Six days of Creation, Gen 1:3-31.
- d. The Seventh Day, 2:1-3.

Today we will start with the Original Creation in vs 1.

Vs 1, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

There are really only two world views concerning the origins of our world and the universe we find ourselves in. By worldview, I mean a way of explaining or making sense of the things around us. It is a lens through which we see our world, organize it, and draw conclusions about it. Specifically, a world view answers questions regarding where we came from (our origin), where we are going (our destiny) what is the nature of the world around us (is it material, spiritual, or both?), what does it mean to be human (who are we?), what is right and wrong (does it give a system of morals and ethics), how do we acquire knowledge (is it through reason, experience, or is it revealed?), and what is the meaning of history (is mankind moving towards something or not?).

The first worldview is what we can call the Theistic worldview, or what the philosopher Peter Johnson calls Twoism (which distinguishes between a creator and the created). Though it has some other cultural variations, we will stick with the traditional Judeo Christian view which is stated here in Gen 1:1, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. Just looking at this ten word sentence we see there is a being greater than we, who in time past, divinely brought forth our material world. We can also infer God has a purpose for his creation and gives meaning and a destiny to it.

The second is the predominant world view of today which we can label the Secular or Post-modern worldview, which states that self-appearing material, plus time, plus chance, plus the random forces of the universe, combined to form life in all its complexity. Johnson calls this view, Oneism. In this view there is no supernatural world, no objective truth, no moral or ethical framework to make decisions, no universal purpose, no overarching destiny, and no meaning. There is only you.

All world views stem from these two basic ideas. Either the world and all its life forms were the deliberate creation of an infinite, powerful, and knowing God, who gives purpose, meaning, and destiny to life, or we are the random product of chance and impersonal forces for which we must ourselves define meaning, purpose, and destiny. There are no other worldviews to explain why we exist or why the world around us exists. It is either by some Divine Creative Purpose, or it is by impersonal forces which govern self-appearing matter that have combined to form our living world.

Which lens you choose to look through, has profound implications for your life and how you interact with it. One view places you within a divine order, under a divine purpose, under a divine destiny, with a God given meaning, with a moral framework in which to operate, and where you ultimately are accountable to your maker. In the other, meaning and purpose are self-defined, there is no objective truth, order is dependent upon personal and collective power, destiny is self-determined, ethical, and moral decisions are relative, and accountability is only to those with greater power than you.

Douglas Kelly, who has written on this subject with great insight, says, "There is no doubt that the biblical vision of man as God's creature whom He made in His own image has had the most powerful effect on human dignity, on liberty, on the expansion of the rights of the individual, on political systems, on the development of medicine, on every other area of culture. How different," he writes, "from the humanistic viewpoint of man as merely an evolved creature, not made in God's image, because there is no God. Such a premise has enabled the Marxist totalitarian states conveniently to liquidate millions of their citizens because of the assumption that there is no transcendent person in whose image those citizens are created, no being to give those citizens a dignity and a right to exist beyond what the state determines."

Therefore, let us conduct a more detailed analysis of verse 1.

Vs 1a, In the beginning

The verse does not tell us when the beginning was, only that there was one. This phrase is also used in Jn 1:1, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*. Jn 1:3 tells us that by means of this Word, the world was created (*through Him all things were made, without Him nothing was made that has been made*). So, both Gen 1:1 and Jn 1:1 use the phrase, *In the beginning*, and although we don't know when this beginning was, we know that the *in the beginning* of Jn 1:1 precedes the *in the beginning* of Gen 1:1, because the Logos, the Word, the Messiah, preceded the creation of the heavens and the earth.

Vs 1b, God created

The Hebrew word for God here is *Elohim*, which means God. It is also in the plural, which notes the plurality of the godhead. God, from the very beginning of his written word, introduces the concept of the trinity.

Also note the text simply says, *God*. It declares His existence. God is self-sufficient, self-existent, and unknowable unless He chooses to reveal Himself.

The word *created* is the Hebrew word *bara*, which is used only of God and only of the work which God does. It is never used to describe anything man does or makes. The word is used both to describe something created out of nothing (i.e. the universe) and to create out of something (Adam from dust, Eve from his rib). Here in Gen 1:1 it denotes the heavens and earth were created out of nothing. The Latin term is *ex-nihilo* which means from nothing. This idea is also confirmed in Rm 4:17, *the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not*, and Heb 11:3, *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible*.

Vs 1c, *the heavens and the earth*.

The final words of the verse describe what God made. The word for heavens is in the plural indicating all the components of the parts of the universe other than the earth. Paul states in 2 Cor 12:2, *I know a man (referring to himself) in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven*. So, Paul, under the power of the Spirit, acknowledges he was taken to the *third heaven*, indicating there are two others. The Bible speaks of three heavens.

- a. The first is the Atmospheric Heaven, or the area surrounding the earth (note Gen 6:7, *and Jehovah said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground, both man and beast, and creeping things, and birds of the heavens; for it repenteth me that I have made them*. ASB).
- b. The Second Heaven is the Celestial Heaven. This includes the sun, moon, and the stars of space. Mt 24:29, *But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken*.
Deut 4:19, *and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun and the moon and the stars, even all the host of heaven, thou be drawn away and worship them, and serve them, which Jehovah thy God hath allotted unto all the peoples under the whole heaven*. The Bible also speaks of the heavens of heavens in Ps 148:4, *Praise Him ye heavens of heavens*, (see also Deut 10:14) and this refers to stars beyond our vision here on earth.
- c. The Third Heaven is the Home of God. Heb 8:1, *Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven*.
Heb 9:24, *For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf*.

The second thing God created was the earth, the planet upon which we live. Ps 8 declares God's purpose and his design centers on Man, and since only man is found on earth, some have claimed there can be no other life forms anywhere else. I am not dogmatic on this. C.S. Lewis wrote his space trilogy with the idea in mind of other planets with life God had created and was involved with. No one knows.

One other thing: Ps 115:16 states, *The heavens belong to the Lord, but he has given the earth to all humanity*. God has created the Heavens for himself whereas he has given the earth to mankind. The heavens and the earth are two distinct places with two distinct inhabitants.

Genesis 1:1 also refutes some human theologies.

It refutes Atheism: Atheism states there is no God, but Gen 1:1 states God exists, that the universe has a beginning, that God created all matter, and that there will be a purpose for it.

It refutes Agnosticism. Agnosticism teaches that one cannot know whether God exists or not. But Gen 1:1 teaches God has revealed himself through what he has created.

It refutes Pantheism. Pantheism teaches that everything is part of God and God is present in everything. Gen 1:1 teaches us God created the world and is distinct from it.

It refutes Polytheism, for only one God created all things.

It refutes Materialism. Materialism teaches that everything that exists is material in nature and is self-existent. Gen 1:1 teaches matter was created and thus had a beginning and is not eternal.

It refutes Naturalism. Naturalism is the view that only natural laws and forces (as opposed to supernatural or spiritual ones) operate in the world. It proposes that everything, including human existence, can be explained by natural processes. Gen 1:1 states nature, both the matter it consists of, and the forces that run it, are God made.

It refutes Dualism, which states good and evil have always co-existed. Gen 1:1 is clear God alone made the universe and evil had nothing to do with it.

It refutes Humanism. Humanism states man is the ultimate reality and the center of all things. Gen 1:1 states man is a created being, and God is the self-existent creator.

Lastly it refutes Evolutionism which holds to the idea that matter self-appeared, and self-organized. Gen 1:1 is clear; God created matter and is the source of life.