

# Genesis 1.1-25

## Introducing God

The first chapter of Genesis is fascinating and mysterious. It is fascinating because of what it does tell us, and mysterious because of what it does not.

Who wrote this account ? The book of Genesis doesn't tell us. Tradition has it that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible and certainly Jesus refers to these books as 'Moses'. But even then the question remains, how did we get this account ? No human witnessed the events of creation (unlike most of the events of the Bible). There are two possibilities: someone made it up or somehow God inspired this to be written. The chapter itself helps us to answer this question by the way it presents God, so we'll be in a better position to understand after we have studied the chapter.

This is an interesting way to introduce God (or for God to introduce himself). How would you do it ? You might begin the Bible by saying "There is a God and this is what he's like: he's good, he's all-powerful, and he knows what you did last summer".

But the Bible doesn't do it that way.

Genesis 1.1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth".

The Bible leaps straight into the action. If you want to know what God is like – watch this ! We get to know God by seeing him in action. But we don't just get God's actions, we get his words.

Have you ever watched Jamie Oliver ? As he goes about his cooking he explains (with enthusiasm) all the things he is doing. You couldn't understand Jamie Oliver with the TV on mute. The words are the key to understanding the actions. So it is here with God and his creation.

## God and his creation

God is the subject of the very first sentence of the Bible. He is centre stage from the very first words. All the action, all the initiative is with God. Everything revolves around him. If you want to understand the world, or human life, then Genesis 1 is saying "God himself provides the explanation".

The first verse is like a heading or title. We would set it out by putting it in bold type: "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth**". It summarizes the action of the whole chapter in just 7 Hebrew words. Then verse 2 sets the scene for the account of God creating, which actually begins in v 3.

The question we need to ask ourselves is this: *What is this account trying to tell us about God and his creation ?* That is, what is the author's purpose ? What does the author expect us to gain from reading this chapter ? To answer that question, let's look at the way the account *works*, how it *operates*, how it *proceeds* to explain things.

## How Genesis 1 works

We get a clue from verse 2:

The earth was formless and empty and darkness covered the deep, while the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

‘Formless’ and ‘empty’ are words that describe something like the situation you find in a desert. Certainly, it is a situation unfit for life or habitation.

To put it another way, you could think of a lump of playdough as ‘formless’ and think of a glass as ‘empty’. Then the rest of the account shows us God giving form to what was ‘formless’ and content to what was ‘empty’.

This is what happens over six days in verses 3-31. If you look at what happens on each day you discover that the first set of three days are all about God giving form to things, and the second set of three days are all about God giving content to the form he has created.

Form		Content	
Day 1	Light – day and night	Day 4	Lights in heavens
Day 2	Water and Sky	Day 5	Fish and birds
Day 3	Land and vegetation	Day 6	Animals and humans

You can see how Day 1 and Day 4 match up. The lights in the heavens (sun and moon,) fill out the day and night. Fish and birds (Day 5) fill out the sea and sky (Day 2) and humans and animals (Day 6) fill out the land (Day 3) and use the vegetation.

Can you see the author’s purpose ? He wants us to learn something about God from this arrangement. He is showing us that God is a God of order (form) and fullness (content). God loves both of these. They express his character.

At the same time, form and content are vital to life. Order is what makes life possible. How could we live without an order to day and night, seasons, and a separation of the land and sea ? The order God gives to creation is good ! Life depends on it. Meanwhile, fullness is what makes life wonderful and enjoyable. There is an abundance in God’s creation:

Genesis 1.20-22: And God said let the waters bring forth *swarms* of living creatures ... God blessed them, saying “Be fruitful and multiply and *fill* the waters in the seas”.

The author is saying this world is *purpose-built* for habitation ! It is a wonderful gift from God to his creatures, a marvelous provision for our benefit. And on top of that God blesses everything so that it all increases and multiplies. What a stunning picture !

It stands in complete contrast to the stories of creation written by other cultures in the Ancient Near East. In those accounts humans were made to serve the gods. You can still see this in some countries where people place food at the shrines of their gods. In the Bible it is God who provides for his creatures.

## The God Who Speaks

The *second* thing the writer wants us to see comes clearly into view from the very first act of creation.

Genesis 1.3 Then God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light”.

We must see this key thing about God – *he speaks* ! God speaks the world into being. Everything in the universe owes its existence to the Word of God. Everything operates in an orderly and fruitful way according to his command. So it is not merely at the beginning, but throughout time that the Word of God is central to the life of creation.

The author really makes a point of this by structuring the whole story of creation on the basis of the formula “And God said ...” (which occurs 10 times). It is central to who God is that he takes the initiative to speak. This is the means by which he relates to his creation.

The God presented in Genesis 1 is not hidden or inaccessible or unknowable. He can be known truly because he speaks and makes himself known. He is not distant and removed from his creation, but involved with it by his Word. (We can now see that it makes sense to see Genesis 1 as inspired by God and not simply the guess work or imagination of humans).

We’re going to see how the Word of God is vital to understanding human life in the talks that follow (so stay tuned to this thought as we read Genesis 1-3), but for now let me jump ahead and say that the author wants us to see that it is *this* God, the God who speaks the creation into being, who calls Abraham and makes promises to him of a land, a people and blessing for the families of the earth. If the whole existence of creation rests on God’s Word, do you think Abraham can trust his word ? Absolutely ! In fact, at the core of human life is believing God’s Word. This is the essence of ‘faith’ in the Bible. To relate to God means first of all to be a listener.

As you can see, the implications of Genesis 1 are far reaching ! We could easily carry this theme through to the NT and especially John 1 ... but that is for another time.

## The Power of God

The third thing the author wants us to see is the power of God.

Genesis 1.3 Then God said, “Let there be light”, *and there was light*”.

When God speaks, it happens ! There is no effort or exertion involved. There is no obstacle which God needs to overcome to make his will happen. God is completely in charge with no rivals.

This is a great source of confidence to those who believe in him. In the ANE there were lots of gods. You had to placate each one to succeed in the area they had under their control (eg. the rain, the crops, fertility etc). But in Genesis 1 there is only one God who provides all that his creatures need. The other things that people worshipped as gods

(the sun, the moon, the stars) are shown not to be gods at all, but simply the handiwork of this God. Since God made everything he can be trusted as the one in control over everything, and life can be lived with confidence and thankfulness to God.

## A Good Creation

The fourth thing that stands out in Genesis 1 is the refrain that begins in verse 4:

And God saw that it was good

Let's keep in mind that there is no standard against which to measure goodness apart from God himself. So for God to declare the creation "good" means that it suits the purpose for which God made it. It fits the bill. It's exactly the way God wants it to be. It's like a well-tuned instrument – completely suited to its purpose.

This of course implies that creation *has* a purpose, a goal which God has created it to reach. It is only on the seventh day that this goal becomes explicit: it is the goal of 'rest', which does not mean being stationary, but the enjoyment of creation by God and his creatures in perfect relationship with each other.

We live in a world gone wrong (we have to wait until Genesis 3 to see why), so it is a great assurance to us to know that creation not only has a goal, but that it was designed to reach it ! You can see what a positive and hopeful picture we have in Genesis 1. When something fulfills its purpose – you have meaning. When something doesn't – you have frustration and futility. God declares that his creation is "good" – it is designed to fulfill its purpose perfectly, and we know it will, no matter what humans do, because God will fulfill his purpose.

## Responding to God

I've been seeking to discover the purpose of the author of Genesis 1 by seeing *how* he constructed his account, and *what* he has highlighted for us. We have seen that the author wants to tell us about God, first and foremost. "Understand God", he says "and everything else will make sense ... the world, human life, our purpose, our destiny".

We've seen how Genesis 1 shows us that God is (1) a God of order and fullness, whose creation is purpose built for life (2) the God who speaks and relates to his creation through his Word, (3) the sole power in the universe, and so the one to trust and thank, and (4) God is the God of a good creation so that everything has purpose and meaning.

Again, let me say that Genesis 1 presents a marvelously *positive* picture ! The whole chapter exudes a joy and wonder. There is a sense of the way to respond to God woven into the story of God's creation. Life is all about relationship with this wise and generous God, living in line with the way he has made things to be. (We will develop this in the talks that follow).

Finally, it becomes clear that the author is more interested in the *who* question, than in the *how* question of creation. The six day schema is designed to provide us with truths about the character of God (order and fullness) rather than a chronology. There is no reason to pit science versus the Bible. At the same time, no scientific approach, however accurate, can be used to avoid the God of creation. It is with him we have to do !