

September 1, 2019

## Lesson 1: In the Beginning, God

Scripture: Genesis 1: 1-5, 27-29; 2: 1-4

### Context:

This new series focuses on the identity of God. The first several weeks look at God as Creator and what that means for today. Most of the scripture lessons in the coming weeks will be in the Old Testament.

The best place to start with God the Creator is the book of Genesis, which actually means “beginning” in Hebrew. From chapters one and two of Genesis, we learn that God and God’s creation are bound together in a distinctive and delicate way.<sup>1</sup> God interacts with creation and there is goodness in it.

An important note when reading the Genesis narrative is that this text is not to be read as a scientific account. This text is more of a theological affirmation that makes a faith statement about the nature of God.<sup>2</sup> Instead of focusing on every detail of how it happened, we are to see how God was in the midst of it all, creating something out of nothing.

The first five verses of chapter one establish that God was the one to create the world. From the formless void came the planet earth with the explanation of sunlight and darkness. The next step is the creation of humanity and the stewardship humans are given. Humans are made in the image of God and are called to care for the creation God has made. The closing passage concludes that God has made all of creation and that even God rested, affirming the human need for rest and recreation as well.

One might wonder how even these details were collected and recorded for humanity to study today. There is no doubt that this text takes older materials and several themes from the creation stories and cosmologies of Egypt and Mesopotamia.<sup>3</sup> However, there are clear points that distinguish that Yahweh is the only God responsible for the creation of the world and its people.

The texts of Genesis date from the sixth century B.C. and are mostly likely addressed to the exiles of the Babylonian deportation.<sup>4</sup> These texts would have given hope to the exiles that the Babylonian gods were not true and that Yahweh was still in control. Yahweh had made everything and creation was proof of that control, even if the Israelites could not battle the other forces they faced. Their God would still be God even in the face of adversity and tribulation.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Genesis,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1982), 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

## **Application**

Next to John 3:16, Genesis 1:1 is probably one of the most famous scripture verses from the Bible. The tone is set that God is the ultimate ruler of this earth and the entire cosmos. Everything that exists and comes into being comes from God.

The Genesis passage reminds us that God's fingerprints and brushstrokes are everywhere from the beautiful trees we see on a morning run to the animals we see in our yards to our bodies. All of it was designed and made by God. There is an inherent wonder to our everyday lives when we pause to think that God made everything we look upon today.

Usually these lessons have some practical focus that I think is imperative for us to seek as followers of Jesus. With every theory or concept we learn, there is some practical application that should guide us for daily living. We crave it as humans seeking to learn what we are supposed to do.

Yet this text from Genesis reminds us of two things. The first is that sometimes what we are called to do is not necessarily an act we can put on our to do list. It's more organic than something that formulaic. In this case, it is about appreciating the creation that is around us.

As we read of all that God created, there should be some time to marvel that God made all the things we come into contact with everyday. Have you ever studied a plant, particularly flowers, to see all the intricacies that form it? There are different colors, shapes, and patterns that compose these plants and flowers. God was in the making of those things.

Do you ever stop to watch the squirrel that runs across the yard? Look at how the squirrels differ from each other, the cues and patterns they use to communicate with each other. Notice how they forage and protect their food. God was in the design of those squirrels and their habits.

Do you ever stop to people watch? Look at how every person, even identical twins, are a little different. Notice that people have features unique to them. Even if a son looks like a father or a daughter like a mother, there is something that is special that offsets them. God was in the midst of those special features.

The point of looking at the details and simply marveling is to celebrate the greatness and grandeur of God. Sometimes we may be in such a rush to know all the details or to have a do list that we forget to marvel at what God has made. At times, we simply should appreciate it with reflection and praise.

The second point is that in this text we read that God rested. Even the Creator of the universe took time to say: "Look at all the hard work I've done. Time to rest!" And then God took a nice nap.

When humans do not rest, we regress. When we are anxious, ultra concerned with productivity, and focus on control of the world twenty-four seven, then we end up not being our best selves. God made us to rest, to take a day and make it Sabbath. If we choose to ignore Sabbath, we see it in our relationships and in our health. We resist the design that God made for us to rest and be replenished. If God can take a siesta and tell the world to figure it out for a day, then surely we can do the same.

When do you take time to marvel and appreciate all that God has made? How do you see the grandeur of God? What is a piece of nature that completely awes you and

gives you pause to praise God? What day for you is a sabbath, a day where you do not work? What boundaries do you create to make sure you rest?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh  
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge  
PO Box 71  
Brantley, AL 36009