

MORE THAN A MAN CAN MAKE

Genesis 1:1–2

Dr. George O. Wood

As we look at the beginning of our experience in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, I simply want to share by way of introduction the first two verses of Genesis 1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (NIV).

As we share together today, I want us to look at four questions that can be asked as we approach these two verses.

I. The first question is one that has to be tackled by any person who begins to look into the Book of Genesis. Are these eleven chapters mythological?

The first eleven chapters in Genesis really concern prehistory—that is, the time before records. Beginning in chapter 12 we can follow Abraham through the course of civilization. But the first eleven chapters are known as prehistory. Of course, these eleven chapters are probably the most open to challenge by agnostics and critics of the Scriptures.

In the 1920s the famous Scopes trial in Tennessee represented a kind of turning in American culture regarding where people stood on the subject of creation versus alternative theories that are available to modern man. In that trial Clarence Darrow, who represented the interests of those who were seeking to debunk the biblical record, argued for the cause of teaching evolution as a competitive theory in the schools of Tennessee—right alongside the viewpoint of creation. William Jennings Bryan, who eloquently—but in some ways inadequately—represented the cause of evangelicals, argued against him. Bryan won the case, but Clarence Darrow won the nationwide victory. Looking back over the past, we now find ourselves in exactly the situation

MORE THAN A MAN CAN MAKE

Genesis 1:1–2

where court suits are pending regarding creation being taught as a viable alternative to evolution.

As we approach these chapters in Genesis, it is very much an issue that we come face to face with the question: Are they mythological?

Let me site two consequences for Christians if these chapters are mythological—two consequences that maybe you’ve thought of and maybe you haven’t.

A. If these chapters are mythological, then Jesus Christ erred in His teaching and is a fallible human when it came to talking about the origins of the universe and specifically His references to the creation of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and the mandate that was given to them.

B. If these chapters are mythological, then the Scriptures themselves cannot be depended upon fully and authoritatively in every area in which they speak. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is inspired by God.” The word *inspired* really doesn’t do a good job of bringing us the original force of the language. The original verb can better be translated “All Scripture is *expired* by God.” The phrase means “God breathed it out.” It was a product of His activity. Therefore, if on the one hand Scripture contains a statement flatly saying that it can be relied upon and depended upon, and on the other hand we embrace a mythological approach to Scripture, we affect the witness of Scripture against itself. Jesus says that the Scriptures cannot be broken—that is, they cannot be set against themselves.

Some historians get really uptight when someone who is anti-Scriptures or anti-Christian comes up and says, “You don’t really believe all that malarkey in the first eleven chapters, do you?” All of a sudden you get the feeling they just punched you down and you don’t really have any rational grounds to stand on. You feel weak, and all these doubts within your mind about the Scripture begin to rise. You say, “I was afraid my faith would have a weakness somewhere—that

MORE THAN A MAN CAN MAKE

Genesis 1:1–2

there would be a point of logic that was misplaced. Then the whole house of cards would come down and my faith would come tumbling down.”

On the other hand, one can have this attitude: I have met the Jesus of whom the Scriptures speak. He has entered my life. He has changed me. He’s made all the difference. I have found Him as a friend and Savior. I’ve learned I can trust Him. Bring me a report that He’s not faithful, that His Word is filled with errors. I will choose initially to hold your viewpoint in abeyance until there’s more evidence that shows me you are right. But I have found Him so faithful, how could you in one blow expect me to change?

Because of the validity of Scripture and its experience with our hearts, that’s the approach I take and share with you from these chapters.

The Genesis account of creation is the only such record from ancient civilization that can compete rationally and intellectually with the modern mind’s theories of the origins of the universe.

Religiously, the Hebrews were in a totally different league from any of their contemporaries. The gods and goddesses of the ancient world were simply personifications of nature or the warlike and sinful and sexual tendencies within man. But the God who speaks in Scripture is far different. It is time we recognize that. I’ll assume from the beginning we’ll take Genesis at face value, and when we’re through with these eleven chapters you can draw your own conclusion.

II. The second question I would ask in reference to Genesis is this: Is Genesis a scientific treatise?

My response to this question is no, it is not a scientific treatise. But that doesn’t mean it’s inaccurate. God has spoken in our language. Until the last hundred years the Bible spoke to a world that was nonscientific. The majority of men living today cannot understand complex

MORE THAN A MAN CAN MAKE

Genesis 1:1–2

terminology. If God had wanted to give us complex terminology of how He created the world, He could have done that very easily. But He wants to speak in a language we understand.

One of the great truths of Scripture is the condescension of God. He is so concerned for us that He speaks our language. He knows every language that exists, every way to communicate. There are no limitations to His vocabulary. Because something is stated simply does not mean it is stated inaccurately.

Obviously, God could have told us much about creation. Instead, He chose to limit it to 750 words. Is Genesis a scientific treatise? No, it's not. But that does not mean it's inaccurate. It speaks in language we can understand.

III. A third question that can be asked about the Book of Genesis is: What is declared concerning the existence of God?

It should be noted that perhaps a more accurate way of translating the first verse would be, “In beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” There is no definite article “the” in the Hebrew language. Not “In *the* beginning,” but “In beginning.” This is, of course, the Scripture writer’s way of saying that God does not have a beginning. He is eternal. It is the universe that has a beginning point.

It is fascinating to note as you start the record of Genesis—and indeed throughout all of Scripture—that there is never an attempt to prove the existence of God. It would insult God for somebody to have to try to prove His existence. Instead, it is everywhere assumed. “In beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” That assumption is foundational to life. The writer of Hebrews said, “He who would come to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him” (11:6). Paul says in Romans 1:20 that by the created order men are able to

MORE THAN A MAN CAN MAKE

Genesis 1:1–2

look at the invisible power and deity of God. So the writer of Genesis begins through the revelation God has given him: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (NIV).

Two important things are noted in Genesis 1:1 about the existence of God.

A. One thing that can be noted is there is no limitation of God regarding space. He stands outside the created order because He is before it.

Genesis says God made the sun. The sun is 860,000 miles across. If the sun were hollow, one million earths could fit inside it. Another star in our galaxy is 150,000 million miles across. Into that star we could fit our entire solar system out to Mars. Is God contained in the sun? God made it. Is He confined by the sun? Obviously, the answer is no. He stands outside the sun.

When you look at the created order and the whole universe, you can ask the question: Is God inside of it or outside of it? Scripture says since He created it, He stood outside of it before it was made. Then you begin to get into modern scientific calculations that are mind-boggling. Our galaxy, for example, has 100 billion stars either greater or lesser in size than our sun. We are only one of a billion galaxies that can be seen. Someone has said that on a clear night you can see only as much of the universe as an amoeba can see of the ocean in which it drifts. Yet God in His vastness and greatness stands outside the created order.

A great fact of Scripture is that although God is outside the created order, He has chosen to enter within time to communicate to us men and women. That communication has been most excellently demonstrated and finished in the person of Jesus Christ. Genesis is saying that God exists outside space.

B. Genesis also is saying that God exists outside time. You cannot limit God to hours and days.

The sun and the moon—these things that chronicle and clock the movement of time for man—do not chronicle the movement of time for God. He stands outside of time.

MORE THAN A MAN CAN MAKE

Genesis 1:1–2

I noticed in a *National Geographic* magazine that what has been observed of the universe is ten billion light-years across. God is incredibly vast. When I pray, does it take ten billion light-years to reach God if He is at the end of the universe somewhere? No. You pray and He's here. He's here in this room this very moment. Why? Because God stands outside the captivity of time.

There is no past, no future, no present. He is *now*. That's an incredible thing for a human mind to boggle with because we have nothing to compare it to. But the Scriptures teach this clearly.

There is no variableness, no shadow of turning with Him. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

It's fascinating that in Exodus 3:13,14, Moses began to protest God's call. Moses said, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" God said, "Moses, I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel: I am has sent you." I am. Not I was; not I shall be; but the ever-present God who fills every moment of time and space. Your God may be too small.

In his book *Your God Is Too Small*, J.B. Phillips commented on how many times Christians have gods that are exceedingly small in their minds and in their imaginations. But the God spoken of in Scripture is incredible. He is greater than anything that can be imagined or conceived. Jesus said that God is Spirit, and He must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

That phrase, "God is Spirit," means that God exists on a different plane than the existence of the heavens and the earth. No wonder the Scripture writers staggered to follow God and His thinking. They made comparisons such as "Thy thoughts, O Lord, are as high from us as the heavens are above the earth" (see Isaiah 55:9). That's the feelings one get when plunging into the Book of Genesis.

MORE THAN A MAN CAN MAKE

Genesis 1:1–2

What is declared concerning the existence of God? He stands outside of time and space. He is the great, omnipotent, eternal, omnipresent God.

IV. What is declared about the existence of planet Earth?

Genesis 1:2 says, “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the waters” (NIV). Some hold that there is an abrupt difference between verses 1 and 2. This is called the catastrophe theory of creation, which assumes that in the beginning God made the heavens and the earth. Then He didn’t like what He made so He destroyed and re-created it. The first creation included everything that can explain dinosaurs and things like that. Some people who believe in the Scriptures hold this viewpoint, but it has difficulties.

A. First, those who translate verse 2 as “The earth became without form and void” mistranslate the Hebrew verb for “was.” “The earth *was* without form and void,” not *became*.

B. Some translate “without form” as simply meaning the earth became empty. The only problem here is the Hebrew word for “without form” means “without shape.” It was without structure.

C. A third key reason for not embracing that viewpoint is Revelation 21:1. This verse talks about the passing away of the heaven and the earth and the new age that God is going to institute.

Specifically, the writer of Scripture says that the first heaven and the first earth have passed away. What, then, was planet Earth like before its created day? In Genesis 1:2 you simply have some gaseous expansion or something in existence prior to the created days spoken of in verse 3 and following.

Four characteristics stand out about planet Earth.

First, it was formless or shapeless. Note the term “without form.” You could not draw it as a circle. You could not see it as a globe. It did not have that kind of a structure to it.

MORE THAN A MAN CAN MAKE

Genesis 1:1–2

Second, it was empty. There was nothing on it. No animal life, no plant life, no reptile life, no sea life. It was empty.

Third, it was dark. That explains why there was no life. Life cannot exist where there's no light.

Fourth, planet Earth is described as being brooded over or moved over by the Spirit of God. It's fascinating to look at that passage: "The Spirit of God was moving—or brooding—over the face of the deep." There are two ways in which the verb translated "moving" or "brooding" is used in the Old Testament. One way is in Deuteronomy 32:11: "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young." "Flutters" is the word that corresponds with moving or brooding. The idea is of hovering. There is action, yet the eagle that hovers is in a stationary place. So one image that we have of this verse is that the Spirit of God is hovering over the uncreated order to bring something into existence. The Spirit of God is in intimate contact with what is to emerge as planet Earth. Right from the beginning God has had an intimate contact with Earth.

Another possible way of understanding this is in a complementary way. In the phrase "Spirit of God," the word for "Spirit" is "wind." The Spirit expresses the absence of solid substance. God is substance, but not like visible material. Therefore, what this expresses is the Spirit of God like a strong wind moving through the chaotic abyss of Earth before its creation days.

What was God seeking to do? He was going to speak peace to the abyss. Even as Jesus on Lake Galilee quieted the waters, so God in the beginning looked over the chaotic abyss of the earth and formed the beautiful planet on which we live.

I deliberately purposed in heart and in prayer that in these times with the Book of Genesis we would always come down off the larger plane of trying to understand the book intellectually and come also to an application of the book spiritually. There is a powerful way we can do this by looking at the existence of planet Earth before the created days.

MORE THAN A MAN CAN MAKE

Genesis 1:1–2

IV. From the material level, God often has lessons for us to learn on the spiritual level.

There are four things that describe a person's life without the created activity of God. A life without the creative touch of God is formless or void. It has no shape, and it is going nowhere.

And when death comes, its purpose will be recognized to have been nothingness.

Not only is life without God formless or shapeless, but it is also empty—no matter how full it may appear to be. God has made us with a hunger for himself, and there is no part in all the universe that can satisfy the vacancy that is created within us. Until we have found Him, we are empty. As Augustine said, “Thou hast made us restless until we find our rest in thee.”

Life is dark without Him. We have no understanding of who God is or what morals are or how we relate to one another and to God.

But the Holy Spirit also is moving, fluttering, hovering over every life that is without God. It is the ceaseless activity of the Spirit of God to hover over us so that in His hovering we somehow might sense and feel His presence and open our lives to Him. The creative burst that brought the world into existence will be experienced with a creative burst in our lives—a change in creation after the image of Christ Jesus who makes all things new.

This is God's purpose in the Scripture: to see the Holy Spirit bringing to birth the new creation.

How beautiful it is when this event is seen. Did God complete His creation all in one moment?

No. Genesis says there is an order of the created days. But the important point is that God has begun to create a new thing. In Genesis, only God creates. Man never creates.

The word “create” is used three times in Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 2:3. It is used in Genesis 1:1—the creation of the heavens and the earth. It is used in Genesis 1:21—the creation of living things. And it is used in Genesis 1:27—the creation of man. Man does not create. Man may procreate, but man does not create. Only God creates.

MORE THAN A MAN CAN MAKE

Genesis 1:1–2

Look at your life and what it can be. If you seek to make it yourself, if you seek your own way, if you seek your own designs and ambitions and plans, your life will never be created. But if you yield yourself to Him, to the hovering Spirit of God, He will through your invitation come in and begin to create so that you are His children—His sons and His daughters. God, who created the heavens and the earth, repeats the miracle of creation when through Jesus Christ He enters our lives.

Closing Prayer

The awesomeness, Lord, of Your power strikes us in this moment to recognize that You—the One who created the untold galaxies, planets, and universes—do not see your primary purpose in the creation of things but in the salvation of men and women. It is too great for us. It is too marvelous. It is too magnificent. How can we understand it? But we thank You that through Your word You have chosen to speak in language we can understand and follow. We know that You have plans and purposes and dreams of creativity for each one of us. As we yield ourselves to You, You will bring to pass all that Your heart longs for and desires. I pray especially for young men and women, some of whom are wondering as they look into the uncharted future if You will be there, if You will form in their lives those things that will cause them to stand in You and find a place in You and in the world. I claim and thank You for Your promise of creation and for the new creation in Christ Jesus. Through Christ our Lord, we give our praise. Amen.