

MAN ON EARTH

Genesis 1:3–2:4

Dr. George O. Wood

We continue our experience today in the Book of Genesis—particularly Genesis 1:3–2:4. There is magnificence in this account in Genesis that should never escape us as Christians. Three things in particular I'd like for us to see that point to the magnificence of the account. First is the revelation of God. Second is its description of the creation of the earth. And third is the place of man on God's earth.

Last Sunday we looked at the revelation of God—the God who stands outside of space and time, who lives in another dimension, of whom Jesus says, “God is Spirit and they who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Throughout these early verses of Genesis we see the decisive action of God. God says and it is done. God saw and it was good. God separated and it became so. God calls and that which He calls comes into being. God makes and what He makes there is no miscarriage. God creates. Hebrews 11:3 so eloquently points out that it is by faith that we understand the worlds were framed by the Word of God. They were not created out of anything material, but simply by virtue of God speaking. By the energetic effect of His person, the worlds as we know them came into existence. The magnificence of God is seen in these verses.

I. What was the order of creation?

Particularly as we come to Genesis 1:3 on through chapter 2:3, we also see the magnificence of Earth's creation. Let's look for a moment at the order of creation. The seven created days, as they are called, involve this sequence:

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A. First day is the creation of light. Light is necessary for any photosynthesis to take place, making possible the growth of living things. Light is foundational; it is first.

B. Second day is the creation of the firmament. The world before its current shape and form would perhaps be seen as vaporous, watery substance. God divides, makes the water congeal on the surface of the planet, and creates an atmosphere that has within its powers the ability to hold water in vaporized form. The fact that the clouds are able to contain moisture guarantees the existence of life on planet Earth.

C. The third day we see the making of the land, which we call earth, and the formation of plant life.

D. The fourth day is rather unusual. To many it seems out of sequence because plant life had already emerged on the third created day, before the sun and the moon and the stars are created. This has been a real bone of contention by those who look casually at the scriptural record and suspect it as myth. How could anyone be so ludicrous as to put the creation of the sun after plant life had already appeared? I think two things could be pointed out as possibilities here, which perhaps may not be normally seen.

First of all, Genesis indicates the creation of light, which is the necessary prerequisite for anything to grow. Then, as the Bible closes in the Book of Revelation, you'll find that God is light and His light outlasts the planetary system. Lamps on earth will go out. The sun and the moon and the stars themselves will go out. Modern theories of the universe pretty much confirm that eventually there will be a contraction, and everything that began with a bang will end with a bang. But light itself will outlast that which is created in the dimension of light as we know it.

Second, a special light was there before the fourth day—a light that is reflective of God. From Earth's point of view, the sun began to appear through the vapor and for the first time it could be

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observable from Earth's standpoint. Perhaps that's another way to understand this fourth created day. God could have sustained plant life on planet Earth through the first three days by creation of special light, which made it possible. Or it may be that on the fourth created day the sun and the moon and the stars became observable from Earth's vantage point.

What a tremendous thing, by the way, is the creation of the sun. Deep in the interior of the sun, contained by a blanket of 400,000 miles of matter, a hydrogen bomb is exploding continuously at a temperature of 40 million degrees. Every second the sun explodes 650 million tons of hydrogen into helium. Before man knew how to make fire, God knew how to make it—and control it!

What a tremendous act of creation!

If you look at the perspective in which the Scriptures were written, you'll recognize that in these early centuries there were people in other cultures who were astrologers, bowing down and worshipping the sun. The Scripture in one blow wipes all that out. It is God who made the heavens and the earth. It is God who made the sun. Why worship that which was made? Worship the God who made it. His Word deals a deathblow to astrology by saying that the purpose for the lights in the heaven is to exist as signs. Basically we see in the New Testament how those signs come to pass. The star at the birth of Christ. Christ indicates himself that at the close of the age there's going to be signs in the heavens—not that men might find their own personal fortunes and destinies but that they might have an appreciation of who God is and what His plan is for the ages. More than that, the lights He has placed in the heaven are lampposts and timekeepers. They measure days and years and seasons. The Hebrew account of creation is beautiful in that it shows such an exalted understanding of the created order compared to anything that existed contemporaneous with it.

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E. On the fifth day, fish and birds were created. This account is a blow against the worship of sea monsters. It is God who created leviathan, the great whales that romp in the deep, according to Psalm 104.

F. The sixth day we see the animals and man.

G. Finally, on the seventh created day, “God rested” (Genesis 2:2). We shouldn’t understand this as if God got tired of doing all this work and lay down and took a nap. Rather, the Scriptures are telling us that God ceased from His activity of creation at that point. Man is the apex of God’s creation. When God created man, He stopped creating. There has never been anything “evolve” beyond man. There will not be a superman. God’s work was complete; therefore, He rested.

In the New Testament, the Sabbath becomes understood in the deeper dimension—particularly in Hebrews 4 where we are called upon to enter into God’s rest. The idea is that when Christ’s work was accomplished on the Cross, God had completed the provision of the plan of redemption. Because Christ’s work is now complete, we can enter into rest from our labors. Rest from sin. We’re invited to enter into God’s rest, a state that is perfect, a condition that is fully acceptable before Him. Therefore, the Old Testament Sabbath is but a shadow and a portent of the New Testament age. We are called to participate in the finished work that Christ has accomplished on the Cross.

So this is the order that unfolds. As you look at it in its sequence, it is not so out of kilter with modern scientific assumptions that hold the development of the simple to the complex, with man being the last stage.

II. What was the length of creation?

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A. We have before us the Genesis account of six created days and a day of rest. Some understand the created days as days of revelation—God spoke this revelation to Moses in a period of seven days. Each evening he got a revelation and continued working on it. For the Hebrew, the day began at evening and continued till the next evening at sundown. So each day was a new day of revelation. The problem with this point of view is the text itself does not give the impression that it is being conveyed in the form of a vision. The order of things being created also suggests flow of creation rather than a flow of a vision.

B. One of the longest-held views toward these chapters is that the days of creation constitute literal 24-hour days. If this is the case, then a modern principle called “uniformitarianism” would not be true. Uniformitarianism is a theory, not a fact. It’s the theory that the present is the key to the past. For example, if you go to the Gulf of Mexico you’ll find 28,000 feet of sediment. Presently, this sediment is being laid in at the rate of a few inches a year. If climatic conditions, volcanic conditions and sediment conditions have been sustained throughout the ages as they are right now, then one can calculate that the Gulf of Mexico is about 100,000 years old based on 28,000 feet of sedimentations. But others hold the catastrophic viewpoint that says all of these things could have happened in climatic events and the sediment could have been deposited suddenly rather than over a long period of time.

C. The third possibility is that the created days in Genesis really represent ages. There is much within the text to suggest this viewpoint. For example, in Genesis 2:4, the word “day” is used in a very significant sense: “In the day the Lord God made the earth and the heavens” (KJV). By that, all seven days are summarized in the singular word “day.” In that atmosphere and context, day has a wider usage than 24 hours.

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Another thing that can be noted is the first created days are not solar days. They are days that existed before the creation of the sun—before you have the division of time into 24-hour periods. Therefore, the possibility exists that there is a greater length of time.

Also, it should be noted that Adam, created on the sixth day, is given the mandate to exercise responsibility over Eden and has enough time to grow sufficiently lonely. This involves some kind of passage of time.

It should be noted here that the seventh day is still going on. The seventh day is not a 24-hour period. God is still resting from creation. The seventh day has been going on since God was through with the creation of man. Very clearly, the seventh day is an age. God has chosen to rest from His creative works.

There is much to commend the viewpoint that these creative days should be seen as ages. That viewpoint is certainly allowable and permissible within the Scriptural viewpoints and does much to reconcile many theories with the biblical account.

III. What is man's place in creation?

One thing could never be reconciled in modern assumptions of Scripture. That has to do with man himself. When we look at the magnificence of the creation account, we must understand that part of its magnificence is related not only to the revelation of God—the God who stands outside time and space—and the fantastic creative work that was accomplished, but also in the understanding of man's place. If you start from a modern humanistic, deterministic, or scientific without-God perspective, you have this understanding of man and human life in general:

Mankind started low. He reached for the heights. But he will descend and crash to the depths.

This viewpoint is established in the idea that human life has been a culmination of over one billion years and that gradually things appeared.

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If you had a time clock of the ages and put it on a 24-hour period, man has emerged on the scene on only the last one-tenth of a second during the 24 hours. If you take a long concept that the universe is about 10 billion years of age, this makes mankind, who just appeared on the scene for one-tenth of a second, feel extremely insignificant. Man rates but one of the million pages—maybe only a word in the million pages—used to describe the whole created order. Man must trace his ancestry through a gnarled and twisted family tree—through mammals and amphibians to the lowly fish and then to some anonymous, if not miraculous, molecule. As you track man backward, his lineage becomes lost in the evolutionary cycle. He started low. But he has reached for the heights in his poetry, in his philosophy, in his theology, in his culture. Man has reached out to try to make something of himself—this unusual being called “man.” But, alas, what he has reached out to do will eventually come undone. The thing that we have willed to do in reaching for falls short.

Eventually man crashes to the depths. Other animals have become extinct. Homo sapiens, the man-animal himself, will one day become extinct. Life, which began in the huddling windbreak of a cave, will wind up huddling, watching nuclear blasts obliterate his world or ecological disasters cave him in.

What a difference the biblical view of man presents for us! Scriptures teach us that man started high. He fell to the depths, but he has the possibility of being raised to the heights. What I say of man in general I say of life in particular—you and me. Man started high. In Genesis, the account of man is not that he’s appeared in the last one-tenth of a second of the geological time clock. Rather, look at how much time has been given to man. He is the king and the glory of all of God’s work, the summation, the brilliance, the magnificence. He is the purpose for which everything else has been made—that it might somehow serve man’s purposes. His answer is not

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lost somewhere in an evolutionary trail, but somehow traced to God in whom he stands, created in the image of God.

I know sometimes we have a tough time with that phrase, “created in the image of God.” But it’s simple if you remember that when you dictate a letter, the words, which cannot be seen, become transcribed onto that which can be seen. The unseen God in man transcribes His invisibility onto something that is visible. Through the molecules He used, God made us in His image. We have a consciousness of who we are and where we are and whom we should serve. God has created us in His image to seek after Him. This is the glory of man—man who started high.

Not only were we created in the image of God, but God also placed man on the earth to be His regent. That is a theological term I didn’t understand until this week. What is a regent? The University of California has regents. They’re really a board of directors. Everything that goes on within the University of California educational system is run by the regents. Nothing happens unless they ordain it or give it the power to take place. They’re supposed to manage. When God gave man responsibilities—populating the earth, managing the earth, subduing or exercising direct government over the earth—He placed man on the board of directors of planet Earth. The reason why the earth is all gummed up is because it has a lousy board of directors. Man started high. He falls to the depths.

Because of sin our lives have been fractured and broken. The things we wanted to do, the peace we wanted to have, is not possible. That’s why Jesus Christ came to make us new, to create us again in the image of God.

The Bible holds out the hope and the promise that God can raise man again to the heights. John 3:16 is the most eloquent statement: “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” God intends for you—and

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for all men—to escape the limitations of life and of sin and be with Him in His presence forevermore. He intends to raise you to a glorious height. As mankind had a glorious beginning, so God ordains that you and I may have a glorious end made possible through the work of our Lord.

When you think about a glorious end, you begin to realize that the Scriptures and science really have much in common. They appear to differ on beginnings. But both the assumptions of modern science and Scripture dovetail when they talk about the disillusion and the end of the created order as we know it. Things are headed eventually for collapse and ruination.

In the universe there are large masses of tremendous density—so dense that light itself cannot escape the mass. Therefore, light falls back in on itself. If a modern view that the universe is expanding is true, then it may also be true that eventually the universe will collapse. In other words it will, like a rubber band, someday lose its spring and begin to pull back upon itself so that literally what began by creative order of God in a big bang will someday end with a catastrophic bang. Space and time will curl back upon itself. Time shall be no more.

In this law of nature, God has placed a way of escape. That escape is through Christ our Lord, who stands outside of space and time and invites us as His children to enjoy that dimension ourselves. He wants us to be His sons and daughters, heirs with Him of eternal life.

Today you may feel that God is speaking to you personally. You're saying, "I too am not the person that I set out to be. I need Jesus Christ to give me eternal life and form me after His image." You want to open your life to Jesus Christ, to be put together by Him. You want to make a confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Closing Prayer

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Lord, I pray for my brother now as he opens his life to You. By the power of Your spirit, come to the very throne room of his heart. Lord Jesus, take that invitation that has been given and give to my brother forgiveness of sins and eternal life. We praise You, Lord, that even as we pray and our faith unites, You're accomplishing this for all who will believe. We thank You and we praise You.

All of us here today stand so much in need of seeing You as God, almighty Ruler of all, and sovereign Lord, who by Your power creates the worlds and flings them into space. Your great creative power has destined that we should exist for some higher purpose than simply living in misery, sin, failure, or regret. You've created us that we might love You, that we might be free and open and joyous as we move on to a glorious conclusion. We're thankful, Lord, that You have entered in and that this day has been a glorious time that we have shared together. Thank You for Your presence and for Your living Word. Amen.