

## *In the Beginning God Created the Heavens and the Earth • Genesis 1-2*

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* It is one of the most amazing stories in the Bible. It is one of the most significant stories in the history of the universe. Other ancient cultures have stories and legends about the creation of the world in which we live, but there is nothing like the one that appears in the Bible. The Bible has no reports of battles between deities or gods having offspring. There are no hints that the sun, moon or stars are deities to be worshipped. The Bible starts with God. When there was nothing and no one else, there was God. It is God’s story of how our universe began.

There were no reporters or historians there to record what happened, so the information comes totally from God. It is found in Genesis 1:1-2:4:

*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.*

*And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.*

*And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening and there was morning—the second day.*

*And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.*

*Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.*

*And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.*

*And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And*

*God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.*

*And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock accord-*

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*ing to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.*

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”*

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

*God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

*Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.*

*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.*

*Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.*

*By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

*This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.*

Before the very beginning there was only God. He spoke the universe into existence.

On a clear night with the naked eye we can see ten thousand points of light. A few are nearby planets of our own solar system shining with reflected light. Thousands are stars in the Milky Way. Thousands more are entire galaxies far distant in the universe. The ten thousand we can see are only the smallest fraction of the heavens.

An average galaxy has billions of individual stars—our galaxy has 200 billion. With telescopes and photographs we can see far beyond what the naked eye could ever possibly see. The distance from

one side of an average galaxy to the other side is 600 thousand trillion miles. The distance between galaxies averages 20 million trillion miles. In “light years” (measured by the speed of light at 186,000 miles per hour a light year is approximately 6 trillion miles), the average galaxy measures 100,000 light years and the distance between galaxies is 3 million light years.

Stars are hot and stars are moving. They reach 20 million degrees Fahrenheit. It takes 250 million years for our sun to make a complete spiral rotation through the Milky Way.

The next closest galaxy to our Milky Way is the Andromeda Galaxy at a distance of 2 million light years. That means that the light we see is 2 million years old when we see it. We are seeing the way it was 2 million years ago. The heavens are huge and magnificent, far beyond our comprehension or control. *“In the beginning, God created the heavens. . . .”*

When God created the heavens he also created the earth. But initially the earth was *“formless and empty.”* For some great unspecified eons the earth was here but unlike the way we know it today. Then God began to turn the formless empty earth into a paradise for human habitation. We are not told when or how. The history of the rest of the vast universe is left unreported. This is not the story of someone or somewhere else. This is our story, the story of earth and humanity.

In six creative days God turned a mess into everything we know as our earthly home. They are called days, but details are not given. We are not told if those days were long or short, 24 hours or millions of years. The focus is not on the clock but on the Creator.

Day 1 God created light. It was not the light of the sun; that was to come later. Perhaps it was the light of God or, as modern astronomers would say, it may have been the light that was brought about by the Big Bang origin of the universe. Whatever it was, God made the light.

Day 2 God created atmosphere. Water covered the earth. Now God separated the water between the surface of the earth and the moisture that surrounds our earth. He set up a system whereby rains would come from the sky and moisture would come from the lakes and the seas and there would be an ongoing cycle repeated.

Day 3 God created land and plants. God was creating a home for humans—dry land as a place to live and vegetation for food and shelter. God’s creative

power was moving from the vast to the intricate. He was artistic and varied in the plants he made.

On Day 4 God created the sun, moon and stars and we see a system-taking form: a pattern for nights and days; a primary source of energy for life; an organizing of everything that previously seemed to be chaotic.

Day 5 God created birds and fish. Again we see his brilliant creativity and variety at work as God fills the seas and sky with animals and provides for them to bountifully reproduce.

In God's last and greatest burst of creativity on Day 6 he created animals and humans. We were made in God's image—like God! We were designed to be God's representatives on earth, to manage his masterpiece. He provided food for us to eat. He made us as males and females and designed sexual intercourse as a source of pleasure, intimacy and reproduction.

Every day God stopped and surveyed what he had done and observed that it was good. He did not make an evil world but a good world. It is carefully designed and ordered to work well and to be beautiful. This was God at his creative best—and it resulted in us!

However, it is important that we not mistakenly misplace the center of importance. God is the subject of every creative act. It is God who created, not us. This is about God. We are the beneficiaries but God is still central. Everything is about God and his greatness and goodness.

On the Day 7 God rested. That is not to say that God took a nap or that God slept or that God abandoned his responsibilities of running the universe he created. But God did stop what he was doing. He was finished creating his wonderful world. He was pleased. This great God had done a marvelous job and it was very good.

The significance of this is in the creation itself. Every time the verb “create” appears in the Old Testament it tells what God did; it is never about what we do. We are not creators. As much as we may be impressed with our human ability to invent machines and medicines, we are merely the stewards of what God has already created. We do not even pretend that we can speak a galaxy into existence or imagine into reality a whole world that does not already exist. Everything that is finds its origins in God and his

creativity. In Colossians 1:16 in the New Testament it says, “*For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.*”

We are all well aware of the debate between believers and unbelievers over creation and certain theories of evolution. It is a debate between intelligent design and chance. Was this simply the result of a whole series of billions of coincidences that happened over enormous periods of time or has all of this happened because of the creativity of a brilliant architect?

It is not primarily about the details of the creation story and scientific evidence. There are prominent scientists who strongly believe that God created everything, but there are different opinions about the details of how God did it. Many say the days of creation were long periods of time (which is one of the ways that the Bible uses the word “day”). The Bible is not seeking to present a modern scientific academic paper or a detailed account of creation. It is a story for all ages and cultures—communicating simple truth about how everything began with God.

Unfortunately, there are some who won't even consider the possibility of the biblical story. An article appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* that told about a Chinese paleontologist who was traveling the world giving

lectures about recent discoveries in his country that are not consistent with the Darwinian Theory of Evolution. When his lectures upset some American scientists he said, “In China we can criticize Darwin but not the government. In America you can criticize the government but not Darwin.” He was saying there ought to be an open mind to consider the possibility of the biblical account that “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*”

Creation defines ownership. Because God made everything God owns everything. Psalm 24:1-2 says, “*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.*”

The ownership of God quickly became a major source of conflict or harmony between God and humans. God wanted to generously share his creation with his creatures. He made everything very good

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and wanted us to enjoy it. Tragically, long ago and now as well, many insist they are the owners. We talk and think as if we are accountable only to ourselves—that it is up to us how we treat the earth, what we do with our bodies, how we handle our money. But, if everything belongs to God the Creator then we are accountable to the owner. This is one of the most basic questions of life: Do we think and behave as if we are the owners or God is the owner? This influences and impacts absolutely everything we do. It is an essential difference between a Christian and a non-Christian.

Ownership determines control. The truth is that if God created everything and God owns everything then God is in charge. He owns the world and he runs the world. If we understand God's ownership, his control and his goodness we will do everything in our lives to align with God. This is good; it is smart; it pleases God; and it gives us the best life possible.

Interestingly, the rest of the story of the Bible is that God allows rebellion against his control. He allows us to pollute his environment, refuse to believe his truth, behave immorally and otherwise try to take away God's control of the world and our lives.

Some may think that God is too tolerant and allows too much latitude that causes huge pain and problems in our world. The truth is that no matter how much freedom God has given to us he will never relinquish his ultimate authority. A pagan emperor named Nebuchadnezzar went through his own rebellion against God. He learned the hard way and eventually admitted in Daniel 4:34-35:

*(God's) dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"*

It is important to say something here that may be uncomfortable for some but it needs to be said. It is that God is in ultimate control whether we like it or not and whether we believe it or not. Some of us may not agree with him. We may not like him. We may not believe in him. The truth is that we can say or do or believe whatever we choose but God is still in charge and there is nothing we can ever do to change God's power and authority. We may kick and

scream and try to run away but God is still God. God is the creator, owner and boss.

The good news is that this is a boss who loves this world and loves all of us who are in his world. The great declaration of Jesus is in John 3:16 where we read, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." God loves our world. God loves us. God always acts toward us for good. It is absolutely amazing and wonderful that the God **who** created the heavens and the earth loves us and our world. He loves us enough to allow us the freedom to rebel and loves us enough to pursue us for redemption. He loved us enough to sacrifice his beloved Son on our behalf.

Think about that. Realize how small and comparatively insignificant each of us is in a universe so vast. Realize how easily God could forget about us or destroy us like an irritating Minnesota summer mosquito. Instead, this great God cares for and loves you and me. It is stunning that God would even know who we are. It is amazing that God would care about the details of our lives.

Our response should be to worship him. Worship is acknowledging greatness and behaving accordingly. It is only logical and normal that we should say that God is great, God is good and we fully commit our lives to him. This is our duty. This is our destiny. This is our honor and privilege.

The last book of the Bible, Revelation 4:11, describes a magnificent scene in heaven. The angels of heaven have crowns that by earthly standards would be beyond value. They approach the throne of God and take their crowns and place them before God. Then in unison they speak saying, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Our design, our destiny and our privilege is to worship our Creator!

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