

## Genesis 1:1-2 "Back to the Beginning"\*

Proposition: When we go back to the beginning and take a close look at Genesis 1:1-2, we discover the truth about two realities.

I. We discover the truth about God (1).

A. The God of the Bible has always existed.

B. The God of the Bible is the Creator.

II. We discover the truth about the world (2).

A. The created world was very different from today's world.

1. There was the first world.

2. Then came the fallen world.

3. There is the present world.

4. There will be the Millennial world.

5. Ultimately, there will be the eternal world.

B. The created world was fashioned in phases.

1. God took six days.

2. God was giving us a pattern.

C. The created world began as follows.

1. It lacked boundaries.

2. It lacked inhabitants.

3. It lacked light.

4. It was under the care of the Spirit of God.

Implications: If we take Genesis seriously...

1. It will affect the way we view ourselves.

2. It will affect the way we approach life.

3. It will affect the way we view God.

Just how did we get here? No, I don't mean here in this room. I mean *here* on this planet. Quite frankly, how you answer that question determines how you will approach many other, related questions. There is a lot of confusion these days about origins. Why are we here? Where are we going? How are we supposed to live while we are here? Is there a Creator to whom we are accountable, or are we supposed to make our own destiny?

I'm excited to announce the beginning of a new series this morning I've entitled "In the Beginning, God." You see, to make sense of life, we must begin with God. And to make sense of the question of origins, we must begin where God's Word begins. At the beginning, in Genesis.

In our English Bibles, that's the name given to the first book of the Bible. "Genesis" is Greek in origin, coming

from *geneseos*, the word that appears in the LXX of Genesis 2:4 and 5:1. The word "genesis," depending on its context means "birth," "genealogy," or "history of origin."

In the Hebrew Bible, the book is called *bereshith*. The Jews often identified the books of the Bible by the first word or phrase in the book itself, as in this case. *Bereshith* is the first word in Genesis 1:1, in our Bibles translated, "In the beginning."

I'm convinced we need to go back to the beginning. Our society today is like a ship without a rudder. We need the book of Genesis. Genesis is a foundational book. Indeed, Genesis provides the basis for the sixty-five books that follow in the Bible. The rest of the Bible assumes a proper understanding of Genesis.

It's true. Almost every doctrine developed later in the Scriptures is rooted in Genesis. In Genesis we discover who God is and what He's like. Genesis enables us to develop the doctrine of anthropology--who man is, why we're here, why we work, wear clothes, marry, and even why we die--it's all in Genesis. In Genesis we learn what sin is. In Genesis we're confronted with the doctrine of salvation, for there we see God provide for man's need and offer a promise of a coming deliverer.

But Genesis is not structured as a theology textbook, nor a scientific textbook for that matter. It's a narrative, an unfolding drama, a story. To say it's a story doesn't mean it's not true, nor that it lacks scientific accuracy. What it means, in part, is that it may not answer all the questions our western, scientific minds want it to answer. Indeed, rather than answering the questions we *might* ask, in Genesis God answers the questions we *should* ask.

Here's where we're heading. Our aim is to do an expositional study of Genesis 1-11. We want to *expose* what the text says by walking through it paragraph by paragraph.

This morning we'll look at the introduction to the creation event given in Genesis 1:1-2. In the next three weeks, we'll take a look at how God made the world, looking at days 1, 2, & 3 next week, days 4 & 5 the next week, day 6 the third week, and day 7 the fourth week.

Then we'll examine a series of "firsts," as they unfold in the text. We'll see the *first man* (2:4-17), the *first marriage* (2:18-25), the *first sin* (3:1-7) and the *first excuse* (3:8-19), followed by the *first sacrifice* (3:20-24) and the *first children* (4:1-16).

Our continuing journey will take us through the lives of Cain and Seth, then Noah and his sons, then Babel, and finally the arrival of God's chosen man, Abram (in chapter 11). And the goal of it all is this. We want to get to know God better by looking at the record of how He made and cared for this world.

So let's get started. When we go back to the beginning and take a close look at Genesis 1:1-2, we discover the truth about two realities.

### I. We discover the truth about God (1).

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

On February 5, 1971, Apollo 14 commander Edgar Mitchell deposited on the moon a microfilm packet containing these two things: one, a complete Bible; and two, one verse of the Bible written out in sixteen languages. *This* verse--"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

It's quite possible that these are the most widely read words in all literature. After all, for centuries the Bible has been the world's best seller, and most people who own a Bible have read at least the *first* words--though many have made it little further.

What do we learn about God from that statement? Two important insights...

A. The God of the Bible has always existed. "In the beginning, God." In the beginning of what? The beginning of time, of the universe. You can't go back any further than the beginning. You can't, and I can't. But there is One who does.

In the beginning, *God*.

The skeptic says, "Prove it. How do you know that God exists? Prove it." The Bible does not try to prove the existence of God. It merely declares it.

It is not an accident that *God* is the subject of the first sentence of the Bible. Indeed, this word appears thirty-five times in the first thirty-five verses of the Scriptures. The Genesis story, in fact, the whole Bible is first and foremost about *God*. And as Derek Kidner warns (43), "To read it with any other primary interest (which is all too possible) is to misread it."

In the beginning, God. Ponder the implications. God existed before time and space. God is not limited by or restricted to time and space. In fact, He created time and space.

I'd like to pose a stretching question. Before God created the heavens and the earth, where was God? The truth is, He was *nowhere*--because space had not yet been created. You see, we often have the notion that space is infinite. It's not. Time and space were created by God.

So where was God? Before God created there was no *place* outside of God. There was simply God. He didn't exist in a vacuum, but in an interpersonal, Trinitarian relationship. Before creation, there was God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There were the three Persons of the Godhead existing in perfect fellowship.

Why then did God create? Was He lonely? No. Bored? No. Did He lack something? No. He created because it was His will to do so.

Let's stretch a little further. Answer this. Does God *think*? The truth is, He doesn't need to *think* because He *knows*. He doesn't have to process information as we do, "Let's see, if I do *this*, then *this* will happen." Not so with God.

That's why a text like Ephesians 1:4 can say that God chose us in Him "*before* the creation of the world." He knew us *before* there was time. And 2 Timothy 1:9 states that He gave us grace in Christ Jesus "*before* the beginning of time." Wow! Before we even existed, indeed, before time existed, God gave us grace in Christ Jesus.

You say, "How can you give something to someone before they even exist?" You and I are restricted by time and space, but God isn't.

Answer this. When was Christ crucified? You say, "That's easy. He died on Golgotha one Friday nearly two thousand years ago, right?" Yes, but ponder this. Revelation 13:8 says that the book of life contains the names of the people who belong "to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."

When was the Lamb slain? From the creation of the world. Before God ever performed His work of creation, in His mind His work of redemption was done. How could God do that? He could because He is self-existent. Now a second insight...

B. The God of the Bible is the Creator. "In the beginning, *God created*." *Create* is a special verb. In the Old Testament it always has God as its subject, never man. Man can form and fashion, but only God can

create.

What did He create? The text states, "God created *the heavens and the earth*." Would you notice that the heavens are a created realm, too? They are not eternal. When a person dies and goes to heaven, he goes from one created place to another created place. Actually, Old Testament Hebrew had no word for "universe," so it utilized the phrase "the heavens and the earth" instead.

How did this universe get here? God created it. He fashioned it. He's the designer and owner.

Think about the implications. If you design, make, and own something, then you have the right to do with it what you please, right? It's yours. And as the designer, you know best how what you've designed is supposed to work.

Here's the fundamental problem with our world today. God made us for *His* pleasure, but we've chosen to live for our *own*. That's what sin is--going your *own way*. Choosing to live life as you please rather than as God pleases.

And that's why God sent the second Adam, Jesus Christ. To undo what the first Adam did. Jesus lived to please His Father. He did it perfectly and He did it in our stead. And then He died on a cross to pay the penalty for our self-seeking ways. He rose again, and offers new life to all who will turn from pleasing self and place their faith in Him as Savior and Lord.

Beloved, this is God's universe. This world is not here as the result of random acts of chance. God created it. He created *you*. Are you living to please Him or yourself? Life has purpose and meaning only when lived in a right relationship with God.

When we go back to Genesis, we discover the truth about God. Secondly...

## II. We discover the truth about the world (2).

"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."

At this point I need to comment on the *setting of the book* of Genesis. Moses wrote Genesis around the year 1400 B.C. Moses wasn't a scientist, but that doesn't mean that what he wrote wasn't true. It was. Moses was a prophet, a man who spoke for God. Moses himself wasn't around at the beginning, but he was a messenger for the One who was.

Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch. Indeed, the creation account must be studied in light of the whole message of the Pentateuch.

The heart of the Pentateuch doesn't really begin until Exodus 19--at Sinai. That's when God entered into a covenant relationship with the Israelites. Everything else revolves around that. The story of Abraham is preparation for Exodus 19. And so is the creation account.

The exodus had just happened, and the Israelites are preparing to enter Canaan, the Promised Land. What would they face when they arrived? *Polytheism*. The Canaanites worshiped *many* gods, including Baal and his cohorts, and they engaged in many immoral practices in their devotion to these gods.

Moses' intent in Genesis, at least in part, is to get God's people ready for this world-view clash. So he writes, "In the beginning, *God*." Who existed in the beginning? Was it Aton, the Egyptian sun-god? No. Was it Baal, the Canaanite fertility god? No. *Elohim* did--that's the word Moses used. In the beginning, there wasn't Aton or Baal or any other false God. There was just one God, *Elohim*, the true God, the Creator, the Redeemer of

Israel.

Watch how Moses attacks polytheism throughout Genesis 1. In verse 2 he refers to the "waters of the deep." Why? In other Semitic languages this word (*tahom*) is what gives birth to the gods. Other peoples in Moses' day believed that the *water* gave birth to the gods (such as Marduk, etc.). But Moses says, "Not so. God gave birth to water!"

In verse 16, Moses calls the sun and the moon the "big light" and the "small light" even though he knew their names. Why? In contemporary, polytheistic accounts, the Sun and Moon were gods who ruled. Moses wants his people to know that the sun and the moon are *just lights* to God!

In verse 21 Moses mentions the "great creatures of the sea." In other, polytheistic accounts, these sea creatures are seen as a threat to the gods. But not to the true God. He created them!

By the way, lest you're thinking, "Genesis can't help us. We don't face polytheism today.", think again. We're being bombarded in our society by pluralism and a "new age" approach to life. But it's nothing new. And Genesis can help us sort through the confusion. Genesis says, "In the beginning God--*the* God--created the heavens and the earth."

Now answer this. What was true about the world that God created? Three things...

A. The created world was very different from today's world. That is, the world we see in Genesis 1-2 was quite distinct from the world we know today. There have been changes, and the changes have come as the consequence of God's judgment. In fact, the Bible speaks of at least five distinct "worlds."

1. *There was the first world.* It was the *created world*. The only human beings who experienced life in this world were Adam and Eve. Theologians estimate that world lasted up to seventy years, from creation until Adam's sin in the garden.

2. *Then came the fallen world.* Answer this. Was the world *after* Genesis 3 different from the world *before* Genesis 3? Indeed, it was. As a result of God's judgment, the paradise of Eden was gone and the ground now produced thorns and thistles (3:18). In this new world, there would be pain in child-bearing and conflict between spouses (3:16). The created world was now a cursed world.

The second biblical world lasted from Adam to the flood in Noah's day. By computing the dates given in Genesis 5, we can conjecture that this world lasted 1,656 years.

3. *There is the present world.* Answer this. Is our world today any different from the world prior to the flood? Again, indeed it is. As we'll see in future weeks, prior to the flood the world had a canopy of water around it (1:7). It never rained, for a mist watered the soil (2:5). Animals as well as humans were vegetarians (1:29-30). There was longevity of lifespan (Adam lived 930 years, Seth was 912, and Methuselah was 969 when he died).

The modern skeptic cries, "That's impossible. Nobody lives to be 900 years old these days." But they didn't live in *these days*, did they? The evolutionist asserts that the *present processes* have always been in existence. That's not what God's Word says.

The first world was very different from ours. There was a water canopy around the globe. There is none today. All animals were vegetarian. That's not true today, as some are carnivorous. Man enjoyed dominion over the animal kingdom. Does he today? Go to the zoo, put your hand inside the lion's cage, and you'll find out!

But one day this present world will undergo a radical change, too. When? At the second coming of Christ.

God will judge and then refine this world for the kingdom age.

4. *There will be the Millennial world.* After Christ returns, He will establish His kingdom on this earth for 1,000 years (Rev 20:1-3). Will that world be different from our world? Most certainly. In that day the wolf will live with the lamb, and the lion will eat straw like the ox (Isa 11:6-7).

But that world, too, will change. How? In the great and final judgment of God, a judgment by fire will occur in which the heavens and the earth shall melt by a fervent heat (2 Pet 3:10). Then what?

5. *Ultimately, there will be the eternal world.* Peter calls it "a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness" in 2 Peter 3:13. In the eternal world there will be no death, sorrow, nor sin. In fact, the sun and moon won't be needed there because the "glory of God gives it light (Rev 21:23)."

I'm intrigued by the warning Peter gave Christians in 2 Peter 3:4. He said scoffers would come in the last days and mock the Lord's second coming, saying, "Where is this 'coming,' he promised? Every since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." And then Peter goes on and says, in essence, "No it hasn't. They forget what happened to that first world. They forget that the created world was very different from today's world."

It's the created world that will be our focus in this series. What else is true of the first world? According to Genesis 1...

B. The created world was fashioned in phases. The structure of the creative week jumps off the page in Genesis 1. Verse 5, "And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day." Verse 8, "And there was evening, and there was morning--the second day." The same phrase appears at the end of day three in verse 13, and day four in verse 19, and day five in verse 23, and day six in verse 31.

Moses said that God performed His creative work in phases. How many?

1. *God took six days.* Could He have done it in six minutes? Yes. How about six seconds? Yes. But He took six days. That raises the question. *Why* did He do it in six days? The answer...

2. *God was giving us a pattern.* Notice what happened on day seven according to Genesis 2:2-3, "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."

God is not subject to time, but He used time. He performed His creative act in six, successive phrases--six days. Why? In order to give mankind a pattern. God intended for man to have one kind of activity for six days, and then stop and experience an activity of a qualitatively different kind on the seventh day.

Moses picks up that truth in the record of the fourth commandment in Exodus 20: Remember the Sabbath day (8). Work six days, but don't work the seventh (9). But why? Here's the reason--verse 11, "For in six days the LORD made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

We'll delve into seven day cycle further as we move through Genesis 1-2. For now we're seeking to answer the question, "What was true about the first world?" We've seen that, 1) The created world was very different from today's world. 2) The created world was fashioned in phases--God didn't make it in one split second, but took six days.

Verse 1 states that He created the heavens and the earth. In verse 2 Moses puts the spotlight on the *earth*. What was true of the earth right after God spoke it into existence on day one? By taking a close look at verse

2 we learn that...

C. The created world began as follows. Moses records four characteristics of the newly formed earth.

1. *It lacked boundaries.* The NIV says that the earth was "formless" [KJV "without form"]. In other words, it didn't have the order it now has.

2. *It lacked inhabitants.* It was "empty" ["void" in the KJV]. The word indicates that nothing inhabited the world yet--and wouldn't until God put it there.

At this point the earth was *tohu* and *bohu*--the Hebrew words actually rhyme. It was formless and empty.

Concerning those words Ronald Youngblood offers this helpful insight (25), "The phrase itself is the key that unlocks the literary structure of the rest of Genesis 1: The acts of separating and gathering on days 1-3 give form to the formless, and the acts of making and filling on days 4-6 give divine assurance that the heavens and the earth will never again be 'empty.'"

In other words, when the world first came from the hand of God on day one, it didn't have boundaries and inhabitants. That's exactly what God will give it--boundaries on days 1, 2, & 3, and inhabitants on days 4, 5, & 6. A third characteristic of the newly created world...

3. *It lacked light.* The text says, "Darkness was over the surface of the deep." Is darkness bad here? Some think it is. They assert that since darkness is a symbol for evil later in the Bible, it must be here, too. I disagree. Isaiah 45:7 states that God created darkness--remember, *nothing* existed before God created it.

Some hold to what's called the "Gap Theory." They see a "gap" between verses 1 & 2. They believe that verse 1 refers to an original creation that went sour, so God judged and destroyed it. They translate verse 2 as, "Now the earth *became* formless and void." And it stayed that way until God *recreated* the earth beginning in verse 3. So, for the gap theory proponent, the picture of the earth in verse 2 is that of a chaotic, judged earth.

I see several problems with that interpretation. One, the words used in verse 2 don't describe a *judged* earth, but an *unfinished* earth. Two, though it's possible to translate the Hebrew verb as "became," the most natural rendering would be "was." Thirdly, and most importantly, there's a theological problem with the gap theory--and any other theory that has death in the world prior to the creation of man (i.e. evolution, even theistic evolution). According to Romans 5:12, when did death enter the world? Not until Adam sinned, right? The second Adam, Christ, came to undo the curse of death brought on the world by the first Adam. If there was death in the created order prior to Adam, how do you explain it? And what's the remedy for it? A fourth characteristic of the created earth...

4. *It was under the care of the Spirit of God.* Verse 2 concludes, "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." What does that mean? Commentator G. Aalders makes the helpful observation that the word "water" in Hebrew usage is not limited to the substance we usually think of as water. It can refer to anything that is in a *fluid state* (54-5).

That's the idea here. When God first spoke the earth into existence, it lacked boundaries and inhabitants, lacked light, and was a fluid, unsolid consistency. But even then, what was happening? The Spirit of God was "hovering over" [KJV "moved upon"] the yet unfinished creative work. The image speaks of a mother bird watching over her young as they learn to fly (Aalders, 56). And so the Spirit of God cared for God's creation. How? By preserving God's creative material and preparing it for the creative activity of God which was about to take place.

## Implications: If we take Genesis seriously...

God didn't give us Genesis merely to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. I'm convinced we need this book. I'm also convinced that if we take Genesis seriously, three things will happen.

*1. It will affect the way we view ourselves.* According to Genesis, God is the Creator. We are creatures. We were created to live for His glory. We are made in His image and are to reflect Him in this world. Is that happening in your life?

*2. It will affect the way we approach life.* Realize this. There's a stark contrast between the world-view our culture promotes and the one presented in Genesis 1-11.

Our culture says that man is divine and has infinite worth. Genesis says we are creates who belong to God who alone has infinite worth. Our culture says we are to make our own way in life. Genesis says we're to live God's way. Our culture says that marriage is outdated. According to Genesis, marriage is good. Our culture says that children are expendable (so we kill them in the womb), but Genesis reveals that having children is good. Our culture looks for ways to do less and get paid more, but Genesis says that work is good. Our culture views the environment as sacred (save the whales!--it practically worships the environment, but Genesis indicates that man is to develop and use the created order for God.

Will you submit your life to the teaching of God's Word in Genesis? Thirdly...

*3. It will affect the way we view God.* We'll be learning how in the weeks ahead.