

“GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT”

SESSION #2

Before we plunge into Genesis, let's get a quick overview of the books in the OT. The OT is made up of a number of different divisions, major sections of literature if you will.

There are 5 books concerning the law. There are 12 books of history. There are 5 books of poetry and there are 17 books of prophecy. All of these different sections combined together in these 39 books, make up our OT.

The first are the books of the law written by Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. We're going to get into all of these in the next few sessions.

And then having established that foundation for the rest of the books, we take a look at the historical books, a dozen which especially focus on the history of the people of Israel. What happens to them and why.

Then we'll look at some books of poetry, wonderful books of music and poetry and wisdom literature from Job to the book of Song of Solomon.

And then the books of prophecy which are generally split up into 2 sections: 5 of them called the Major Prophets, not because they are more important than the other prophets but because their books are longer. That's all. So, 5 so-called major prophets.

And then the OT 12, the 12 minor – so-called – prophets. I don't think they would appreciate being called minor. But again it's just because their books are quite short. Sometimes, as in the case of Obadiah for example, as short as only 1 chapter. Much different than what we see in very long books like Isaiah and Jeremiah. We're going to look at all of these 17 prophetic books in terms of what is the message of each book, the theme of the book, how it is organized, the structure, who wrote it, when and why and where. And how they all fit together.

So with that introduction in mind let's begin with the book of Genesis. And what better place to begin than the *book of beginnings*.

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It's the first book in the 5 books of Moses, a set of books called the Pentateuch. *Penta* means 5; *teuch* means scroll or the old ancient way of writing books. So in other words, the *Pentateuch* means the 5 books – the 5 books of Moses. These are called the Law. Or as the Jewish people refer to them, the Torah. This is such an important foundational book, so crucial to understanding the rest of the Bible, that we have to give considerable time to the book of Genesis.

St Augustine, the 4th century early church father, wrote 15 commentaries on the book of Genesis alone. 15 commentaries! He just got finished writing one, and then he realized, “Ah, I better take another shot at that.” And then he'd write another one, and then conclude “That doesn't quite do it either.” Even after writing 15 he felt there was so much deep truth there that he still never thought that he'd done this book justice!

Genesis is actually the Greek title of that OT book, meaning *beginnings*.

The Jewish people called it by the first word in their language, in the record of Genesis 1:1. It's only one word in the Hebrew (*bereshit*); in the English it's translated into 3 words: “*In the beginning*”. The beginning, not just in terms of time. First in time, but especially first in terms of importance.

So this word in Hebrew means the beginning of a series of things, a series that will be important. And this beginning of the series in Genesis is especially important.

So “*in the beginning*” – Genesis is going to start for us a whole series of important truths about God, about man, about sin and salvation. Along with other things, but those truths in particular. So, the first Hebrew word.

Then the first 4 words in English “*in the beginning GOD*”...*ELOHIM*. That is the absolutely crucial word to show up next in the Bible record. “In the beginning – *genesis* – GOD”. In other words, God existed prior to Genesis 1:1. He has always been, he is the eternal One. No beginning, no ending. Genesis makes that clear right here in the very beginning, the 2nd Hebrew word in the biblical record. “*Bereshit Elohim - In the beginning ...GOD*” – God was already there. Psalm 90:2 tells us, “*Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*”

1. The Creation

Now we come to the 5th word: “*In the beginning God CREATED...*” God willed & brought everything there is into being; this is what is called the root of biblical doxology, praise to God (...from whom *all* blessings flow). In the beginning, God created.

And the purpose for which He created is clearly stated for us in Scripture: “*All things were created through Him and **for** Him*” (Col. 1:16; see also Rev. 4:11).

The existence then of a **personal** God who created everything for a **purpose** gives meaning to mankind. Francis Shaeffer explored this concept in his book, “*Genesis in Space & Time*”. It’s an extremely important concept because we know something of who God is as a personal being who created things not just out of whim or fancy, but for a particular purpose. And we are the result of some of that creative purpose. We have meaning; it’s built into us.

The world is not an extension of the essence of God, as some Eastern religions and certain philosophies teach. No, as the Bible clearly states, our world is a separate, objective reality completely apart from who He is.

But at the same time, what He has *made* helps us understand something of what He is *like*. The creation which He has produced is something like a mirror reflecting His characteristics. Here are four of them:

- 1) He exists (such a complex universe must have had a Designer). It’s far too complex for it to have just come about by chaotic chance.
- 2) He is "reasonable" - and we see that in the creation because the universe has order. It isn’t just a chaotic scrambled egg of all kinds of atoms, protons, electrons and so on. It has order. It moves in an orderly fashion. He, the Creator, is a reasonable God.
- 3) God's character is good. The original creation was "good" as the first chapter of Genesis declares 7 times. And as you see what God, the personal, powerful Creator has produced, we see much elegance and beauty here. Here is a God whose character is good. What He has produced is indeed good.

4) God is a person - who cares and is involved in His creation.

And God's personhood is reflected in the personality of humans. MAN (the ADAM) is a combination of two things: dust & deity. Genesis 2:7 tells us, "*the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being*". Therefore, human beings are not just another species of animal. We are much more than that because the Creator "breathed" His own life into us. And that gives us the possibility for something absolutely awesome: we have the unique possibility of a direct, personal relationship with God!

So we can say that "*created in his image*" may not be so much a statement about our capacity, but our *essence*; in other words, not so much telling what we can DO but who ARE...beings with a relationship to God. That is central to who we are, and what we were created for. Genesis and the record of creation makes that abundantly clear.

Notice also the significance of "WORD" in creation: "*then God said...then God said*" – 9 times in Genesis 1! Psalm 33:6 says, "*The LORD merely spoke, and the heavens were created. He breathed the word, and all the stars were born.*" Verse 9 adds: "*When he spoke, the world began!*" All it took was His spoken word and everything came into being.

Pop legends, the Bee Gees, wrote a song that includes this line: "*It's only (!) words, and words are all I have to take your heart away*"... Ah! but that's all you need; words are powerful!

Words also make *relationships* possible. French philosopher and theologian Jacques Ellul wrote: "*the word is the essential relationship*".

No wonder Jesus is called "the Word", most notably in John chapter 1. God's intention for mankind has always been focused on personal relationship, a relationship with God made possible by the "Word", Jesus Christ.

In Psalm 27 the Psalmist said to God, "*My heart has heard you say, 'Come and talk with me.' And my heart responds, 'LORD, I am coming.'*" May we have hearts like that! Build this relationship. Make it strong. Use words!

Okay, let's get back to the creation story. One Bible scholar has suggested 5 important features to note:

- DIFFERENTIATION - God never uses a divine "cookie cutter"! He is supremely creative!
- DOMINION (different levels of authority and responsibility)
- DIVERSITY – from huge (eg. our galaxy spins at 490,000 mph but it takes 200 million years for 1 cycle to complete! -- and scientists tell us there are 140 billion galaxies in the entire universe!)

-- diversity: from huge to microscopic -- there is mind-boggling detail at the microscopic level – from quasars to quarks! Our God is a God of wonderful diversity.

- DEPENDABILITY – as you see the world we live in; there are cycles of day and night. There are seasons.
- In creation, God is also showing us His DELIGHT – God *cares*. God declared His creation to be "good". And His crowning creation in whom He delights is MAN, male and female, made in the image of God. In vs. 31 God pronounced that the creation of Man was "very good". When He finished making man that was His pronouncement. For the other elements of creation, He simply said "good". But when He made man – that was "very good"! This truth has deep implications for self-worth. Because people around the world, in culture after culture, struggle perhaps most often with this particular problem, the problem of self-worth.

Genesis 1 provides an answer. You are made "in the image of God"! Your worth is utterly beyond calculation. As a T-shirt once said, "*God don't make no junk!*" It may be lousy English, but it's absolutely true. God doesn't make junk; He makes things "good". And we see His delight in creation.

In this course we don't have time to get into "Creation controversies", of which there are many. I would simply mention three things to remember when considering the subject of Creation.

First, note that Gen. 1 points not to the created world but to the CREATOR. A wrong focus here can create problems.

Secondly, remember that the Bible may not provide us with *exhaustive* truth, but it does give us *true* truth. And the Bible repeatedly declares to us that God created everything there is, that “*without Him nothing was made that was made*” (John 1:3).

Thirdly, don't subscribe to any view that is not in agreement with the Gospel of salvation. For example, the New Testament clearly refers to a “first man” and a “second Man”. One of those references is 1 Corinthians 15:47 which says, “*The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.*” The second Man is Jesus, a real Person. Clearly, the first man is Adam, also a real person whose disobedience to God brought the entire human race into spiritual death.

If you're interested in the subject of Creation and science, you might find this website helpful: Answers in Genesis (<https://AnswersInGenesis.org>). In our next session we will explore the origin of sin and some important beginnings found in Genesis.
