In the Beginning God
Genesis 1-2:3

Today's the day we get to begin our study in the book of Genesis. The word Genesis is a Greek word, and it means giving birth or formation- the root word is the word from which we get our English words begin, generation, and generate from. In Hebrew, the book is known as Bereshit, which translates as "in the beginning"- which are the very first words written, and later on today I'm going to circle back to this Hebrew word as it contains something pretty interesting in itself. The authorship of Genesis is attributed to Moses, and since Moses lived after the events recorded in Genesis, he most likely wrote the book through a combination of direct revelation from God, from oral tradition passed down, and from other compiled written sources.

Now, we recently walked through the book of Revelation, and there is a lot of mystery and different opinions out there on things contained in the book of Revelation, and in similar fashion, Genesis is like that as well. Especially in the first couple of chapters, outlining the account of creation- there is a lot of mystery and things we don't know for sure, and a lot of different perspectives to consider. We're going to do our best to highlight some of the differing views, the questions out there, interesting nuggets of truth, but also try not to get us too lost in the weeds- but one thing that Pastor Dave and I really want to aim to do through this study is to highlight *Jesus* in Genesis. In the book of Revelation we got to see how it all ends with Jesus, and now we're going to see how it all begins with Jesus. If we look closely, *all of the Bible* is pointing us to God revealed through Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:16, speaking of Jesus, says this "for by Him [Jesus] all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him [Jesus] and for Him [Jesus]. Jesus is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, He is the Author and Finisher of our faith- so our goal is to know Him more deeply and follow Him more closely, even as He reveals Himself to us in the book of Genesis. Follow along with me as I read the first 5 verses… **(Genesis 1:1-5)**

Now, we know from what Colossians 1:16 says, that I read earlier, as well as from other verses- that somehow this entity being referred to as "God" or actually "Elohim" in Hebrew is the same entity we know as Jesus Christ- the difference is that here Elohim has not clothed Himself with human skin- that happens later in the New Testament. And it's worth noting that the Hebrew word "Elohim" is actually a plural word. El is the noun, translated in English as "God," and as I mentioned a couple weeks ago, "iim" is the Hebrew plural suffix. But the Bible uses the word "Elohim" to refer to the single one Creator God of the universe (even though the word is plural), and at other times it does use the word Elohim in the plural sense to refer to spiritual beings in general, translated in English as "gods" with a little "g," or sometimes it's translated as "angels." Some have noted that this plural word Elohim seems to convey the idea of the creator God being 3 persons in 1, what we would today describe as the trinity- God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son. Even these first 3 verses perhaps convey this idea through more than just the word Elohim- in verse 1 we have God (Elohim) mentioned, and then the *Spirit* of God (Elohim), and then in verse 3 we have God speaking- perhaps we could say now this is the Word of God (Elohim)- there's a bit of a 3 in 1 type reference here- God the Creator, God the Spirit, God the Word. **John 1:1** tells us that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and in the verses that follow, John goes on to tell us that this "Word" he is describing is *Jesus*. John says that all things came into being through the "Word," through Jesus, who is God. So there's probably a pretty strong arrow pointing us to think about a triune nature of God here, but at the very least it seems like humans are one class of beings, and Elohim are a different class of beings, and what the Bible tells us is that there is a distinct Elohim amongst the Elohim. God is a distinct Elohim spiritual being, different than other Elohim spiritual beings like angels, demons, and/or other spiritual beings described in places like Ezekiel and Revelation.

Let me point out some other things I was thinking about and that I found interesting in this passage- if you're like me, maybe you've wondered what was God doing before He started creation? Anyone ever had that question? Some might answer that He was living in perfect community with Himself, or that He had already created the hosts of Heaven- the myriads of angels as Pastor Dave described last week- and was interacting with them, or maybe there's some other universe or dimension that is God's reality and creation was like the opening of a new portal *within* God's reality- those are probably all true to some degree, but

it's probably a slightly illogical question to ask. This question might be akin to "Can God create a rock so heavy that He can't lift?" We know God exists eternally, He's outside of time, in fact time is a construct that He created, so asking what God was doing before time was created probably can't be answered in a way that would make any logical sense to us as humans, and along those same lines, we probably can't logically ask the question of how did God come into existence- it's illogical, God is eternal, always was, always is, always will be, so to attempt to describe Him in terms of the created construct of time just doesn't work so well.

I think it's interesting to note that water is just kind of understood as already existing during this creation process. Anybody catch that? We read that the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters, then in the next section we'll see that God separates the waters into waters above and waters below, then gathers the below waters into the seas. I don't know if there's any thing to be gained spiritually from that observation, but I thought it was interesting that the waters were just *there*. Last night I was thinking about this again and I think what makes sense is perhaps that the universe already existed- God had already created it previously, and there was a planet that was formless and had water on it, and from that planet God then began creation on that planet, which we now call Earth. Maybe? Let me know what you think about that after service.

Maybe it's interesting too that light is created and then separated from the darkness, and that there is evening and morning- yet the sun doesn't seem to get created until later on, on day 4? One answer I found is that the light was God, because God is light as the Bible tells us, and He will be the light that replaces the need for the sun as Revelation describes, but I don't know- if God exists out of time and wasn't created, then why would a part of Him (light) then be created at this time? That answer doesn't seem to fit. Maybe it's that the sun *is* created here at this time, but it's just referenced on day 4 along with the other stars that were created then? Some contend that the light was some essence of the sun, but was not gathered into it's true form or purest substance until day 4, others have made the case that maybe angels are being referred to here, like in the sense of messengers of lights as they are described, or was there a temporary light source until the sun was created… there are lots of different questions like this, and people have been debating the answers for literally thousands of years- and I don't think I have the ability to figure out the right answers to all the

questions, but what I want you to realize is that God created all that there is, including science, and modern day science points to His reality and existence, and even confirms so much of what the Bible tells us- and while this is true- this creation account is not written in a scienced-out documentary type form. It's actually written in poetry form with repeated refrains and repeated cadence. Our western minds want to science out stuff, we want the facts of who/what/when/where/why/how all detailed out, but for the eastern mind, for the Hebrews first reading this account- this passage emphasizes and points more to the *Who* of this situation- and that Who is God the Creator. "In the beginning God…" Verse 6… **(Verses 6-8)**

This is super interesting. We don't know for sure, but I think this passage perhaps explains for us the difference between the environment that existed before the flood (that event is described later in chapter 7) verses the environment that existed *after* the flood. Here the waters are split- as I mentioned earlier, there are waters below that will be gathered together into the seas, and then there are waters above the "heaven"- and I think the idea is not "Heaven" as in where believers go after they die, but rather it's "heaven" as in the sky, space, the heavens above Earth. So what this is saying is that there was a layer of water above the heavenly atmosphere of the earth. This, in theory, could produce a protective barrier around the Earth's atmosphere, and could create a super oxygen rich environment for the Earth, in which people could live super long, animals could grow super big (dinosaurs)- and what I would thus assume happened in the flood event described in Genesis 7, is that God caused this protective water barrier to fall from above the skies- in Genesis 7 it says the floodgates of the sky opened and the rain fell upon the earth for forty days and nights. And after this event, humans began living shorter and shorter lives, and eventually the dinosaurs died out. Again, we don't know for sure, but I think there's some legitimacy to that theory. Verse 9… **(v 9-11)**

Note here that God creates things that can create. God designed it so that the plants and trees would grow and replenish themselves according to their kind. God is the author of biology. Verse 14… **(v 14-19)**

If you've ever spent anytime reading about astronomy or astrophysics, you've probably experienced having your mind blown. The lights- the stars, the planets in the heavens are absolutely incredible, and they do just what the Bible

says here, they serves as signs, they regulate the seasons, they define days and years. There is amazing mathematical precision that occurs with these lights of the sky from which we are able to navigate and mark time- all set up from the beginning of time by God the creator. God is the author of astronomy and astrophysics. Verse 20… **(v 20-25)**

Again, as was the case with vegetation, God now creates animals with the ability to re-create, to populate, to reproduce on their own according to their own species. This flies in direct opposition to the theory of evolution, which presents the idea that plant and animal organisms are able to mutate across kinds and species. Now, there are Christian evolutionists who believe in the same Creator God as do we, but they would say that evolution was just the means through which God created- that if there was a "big bang" it was God who orchestrated it. Yes, there is a decent sized group of Christians out there who believe in what is termed an "old earth." These would agree with secular scientists and say that the earth is 4.5 billion years old, that God orchestrated things slowly over time, and these that believe this have some decent scientific arguments to defend this viewpoint. They point to things like the expansion of the universe and fossil layers to support the idea of a 4.5 billion year old earth. These would argue that the days mentioned in Genesis aren't to be considered as literal days, but rather they are blocks of time- they would say that the meaning of "day" is more like how we would use the word in saying "in that day"- referring to a broader season of time. Some would also propose that if the creation event is still to be considered as occurring over 6 literal days, then they would say that there was perhaps a large gap of time in-between verses 1 and 2, insinuating that verse 1 describes an original perfect creation, and then millions or billions of years happened, and verse 2 begins a recreation of sorts.

Now, in contrast, Young Earth Creationists believe the earth to be around 6,000 ish years old, and they point to the genealogies and timelines mentioned in scripture and they examine a lot of the same evidence that Old Earth Creationists do, and have equally good arguments and counter arguments that defend their view of a *young* earth. This viewpoint has been the majority viewpoint of the church historically. Young Earth Creationists primarily point to the flood event in Genesis 7, noting that this event greatly disrupted the fossil layers, and that this disruption could very much give the *impression* that the earth is much older than it really is. Answers in Genesis is an organization dedicated to defending this

young earth viewpoint, and if you've ever visited the Ark Encounter in Kentucky, then perhaps you've seen some of the exhibits that support young earth arguments. Alright, verse 26 to the end of the chapter… **(v26-31)**

Here in verse 26, again we are given the idea that God is not alone, God says "let *us* make mankind in *our* image," and I could be wrong, but I think this is more than just a trinity reference, I think the idea is that the one Creator Elohim, fashioned mankind to resemble in physical body, the basic structure of all the spiritual Elohim. And here is another topic that has been debated for literally thousands of years- in what way does humankind image God, or image the Elohim, in what way are we "like" our creator? Over history, some have argued that this "likeness" refers more to characteristics- as in mankind is like God and distinct from the animal kingdom in that we have the ability to be self aware, relational, we can use wisdom and make moral judgments, be creative, etc; but others would argue that Adam and Eve were considered to have been created in the image of God even *before* they were made aware of right and wrong, and that even newborn babies are created in the image of God, *before* they are able to express these type characteristics, therefore it would seem that being in the image of God means more than just characteristics, actions, or thought processes. Perhaps there is some way in which we actually resemble in physical form God and His Heavenly council of angels and beings.

Perhaps too, part of the imaging Him, is through what is described in the verses that follow, we are created in His image in that we too have ruling responsibilities to care for and govern over this world. We are to image Him in His good authority and leadership. Now, it could very well be that we are created in God's likeness through *all* of these ways that I have mentioned, but the really important thing that we must note is the bottom line that we are unique in this world because we are tied to our creator in ways that the rest of creation is not. We are special- out of all creation, we are the most "like God" in our image; and yet it is quite obvious that we are *unlike* God in many ways as well. But I think it's really important, especially in this current day and age that we live in, for us as followers of Jesus to recognize that even the worst of the worst in humanity is still to be considered created in the image of God. It would be good for us as believers worldwide to humble ourselves and remind ourselves that even the rapist is someone created in the image of God, even the terrorist is created in the image of God, the sexually confused is created in the image of God, our political

opponent is created in the image of God- and I'm not saying that I think these are reflecting God's character, but even when they are *not* reflecting His character, they are still loved as ones who bear His image- ones for whom Christ was sent in order to redeem and bring back into right relationship with the creator God.

Verses 29 and 30 tell us that mankind and the animal kingdom were designed to eat vegetables and fruit- I guess the bumper sticker is right, I don't know if you've seen it or not, but there's a bumper sticker that says "God's original intent was to hang out in a garden with a bunch of naked vegetarians." I guess there's some truth to that… Now, if you read this and feel like you need to become a vegetarian, personally I would say don't do it because of this passage- it seems that when sin later entered the world and corrupted the human race, that also the plant kingdom became corrupted as well, and the time ended in which one could receive all the nutrients needed to support healthy living through just eating vegetables, grains and fruit- thus meat was introduced perhaps in order to balance out mankind's diet. I ate vegetarian for several years, and for a time it was ok, but after reintroducing meat into my diet, balanced out in moderation with fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, cheese cake, birthday cake- I felt better over all. All this to say, no hate towards vegetarians, God may lead you to eat vegetarian for a time and/or for specific reasons, I just want to caution you not to do it based on this verse alone thinking that it's more Godly or that it's better in today's time because it was God's intent during *that* time. As a side note, this is a really good place to mention that God's revelation to mankind is progressive. The Biblical story, meaning and application, unfolded over time, as God reveled more and more information, and clarified misunderstanding and misapplications along the way. So we have to be careful, and make sure that we are applying the whole counsel of the Bible, and not just stop learning after digesting a single verse in the Old Testament. We can't stop there, we have to keep going and see how scripture interprets scripture, and let the whole counsel of scripture define our interpretations and applications. Ok, let's look at just 3 more verses, **chapter 2, verses 1-3…**

God rested on the seventh day- not that He was tired, but just that the world was complete and that there was nothing more that needed to be done in regards to creation. It was all *very good* as verse 31 says. And so as verse 3 here tells us, God sanctified the 7th day- and that word sanctified means *set apart*. The 7th day, from the beginning of time was deemed different,

purposefully unique. Later on in scripture this concept is clarified, we read that the 7th day of the week is to be set aside to rest from the typical routine work and activities of the week; to rest- honoring the Lord in our rest on that day. It's wild that mankind images God in His likeness; but even time itself and the concept of a 7 day week was set up and constructed, in a way, to image God as well.

The Hebrew mind understood the 7th day as a day to honor the Lord by trusting that He would provide, remembering that they weren't created to be human *doings*, but rather human *beings*, the Sabbath is a day to reconnect with the Lord through rest, to recognize dependency on Him, remembering creation and God's work in the universe. In this line of thought, it's interesting that 1 day is phrased as evening through morning. Today we typically think about the day starting at sunrise, but because of this chapter, the Hebrew mind thought of the day as beginning at sundown. Each day was to begin with rest, and then each week was to end with a full day of rest on the last day of the week.

Ultimately, this is what God wants for us: *rest*. How many of us could use some God ordained, redeeming rest? Probably all of us, in some capacity feel we need rest. Taking one day out of the week to not do ordinary routine work- to rest, and do life giving fun things is huge in helping us to experience better balance in life and better rest, peace, fulfillment. If you've never practiced a Sabbath day of rest, or its been a while since you have, I want to encourage you to find a way to do that, take a step towards it, trust God with work or with your duties, or whatever it is that is preventing you from resting 1 day a week- and go ahead and just say I'm going to trust God with this and consistently set aside every 7th day as different, one that doesn't look like the other 6, and see the difference it can make in your life. From the beginning of time, it was programmed by our creator into our DNA and into time itself for us to experience a Sabbath day each week.

Ok, I want to now circle back like I said I'd do, and revisit this first word written in Hebrew, Bereshit, which in English we translate as "in the beginning." Some of the most ancient languages used alphabet letters that were symbols representing objects. Letter symbols represented words or concepts in addition to just individual sounds. For instance, you probably recognize this concept in Egyptian Hieroglyphs. These Hieroglyphic symbols you can see on the screens each individually represent something, but they are used together to form

sentences, ideas, stories, meaning, etc. We call these type letters *"pictogram*" letters. Some of the symbols in the language of China and Japan are pictograms, or at least were derived from pictograms. If you look to the screens now, you'll see the Japanese symbol for woman, and you'll notice, it kind looks like a human figure, 2 legs, 2 arms, a head. Now, check out the Japan symbol for noisy…

The Hebrew alphabet also consists of letters that originally were pictograms, and now on the screens is the Hebrew word Bereshit, in the beginning, the very first word of the Bible. Each of these individual symbols, has a unique meaning or idea that was the reason behind their formation. The first letter is the Hebrew letter "Bet," and note that Hebrew reads right to left, so the letter "Bet" is at the "end of the word," according to how we'd typically see it, and so we'll work our way in reverse through this word. We would pronounce this letter "Bet" as a "b" in English, but the symbol itself has meaning beyond just conveying the "bu" sound. "Bet" pictographically represents a house or a tent. If you look at it, you can see it has a roof, wall and floor, with perhaps a window or door opening on one side. And the Hebrew word for house actually sounds really close to "bet," house in Hebrew is pronounced "bait." Betlahem, in English we would say Bethlehem, but Betlahem means house of food.

The second letter of Bereshit is called "resh." It produces an "r" sound, and it actually looks like our letter r, but backwards. This letter pictographically represents a head- you can imagine it as a super primitive stick drawing of a neck and a head hanging off the neck- and the idea conveys not just a head, but rather a person, a man. When combined together Bet-Resh forms the word picture of a man coming out of the house, or the son of the house.

The next letter is Aleph, and it symbolizes an ox head, you can kind of see the "horns" on either side of the stick head. The idea behind this symbol is strength, authority, and it is also the first letter of the alphabet, hence, in Jewish tradition the Aleph is widely consider to represent God- who is the first, the chief, the strong authority.

Shin is the next letter, it looks like 2 front teeth, and it symbolizes sharpness, consumption, destruction.

Yod follows, and is considered to be symbolic of an extended arm with a open hand. This letter is traditionally associated with divine authority, as in the hand of God, or something occurring by His own hand.

Finally, we'll wrap up our Hebrew lesson today with the last letter of Bereshit, and that is the letter Tav, producing our "t" sound. It is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and consists of 2 sticks that have been crossed by a third stick. Originally this letter was written in more of a plus sign type cross shape, or even an X shape, and this letter was used to represent a covenant as well as the cross of Jesus. The dead sea scrolls actually contain the Tav mark in the margins beside verses that the copiers believed to apply to the Messiah. Ok, so here's where it gets kind of crazy, if we combine all the meaning of these individual letters together in one sentence in an attempt to convey some kind of meaning, what you could get is this: The son of the house of God destroyed by God's own hand on a cross.

Encoded in the very first Hebrew word of the Bible is God's plan of salvation: God coming out from His Heavenly home, in the form of a man, willfully being subjected to destruction on a cross. And the Bible *ends* with the Greek word "amen," meaning truly, surely, trustworthy, or so may it be. And every word contained in-between this first word Bereshit and the last word Amen is telling the story of these 2 book end words: God coming out from His Heavenly home, in the form of a man, willfully being subjected to destruction on a cross- this is true. Bereshit, Amen. It all goes together, it's for the Hebrew Jew, it's for the Greek Gentile- the true plan is this: the Creator of the universe left His domain to enter ours in order to sacrifice Himself for those who bear His image.

Each of you are uniquely and wonderfully made, you image God. And He loves you dearly, so much that He subjected Himself to an absolutely horrific experience to express to you just how much you are loved, and to express to you what great lengths He was willing to go to in order that you could have the opportunity to live with Him in a kingdom paradise of blessing, provision, and peace.