



The Beginning Genesis 1:1-26 By Pastor Paul Hudson Sept. 7th, 2025

*** This original sermon was not written by A.I.*

We're beginning a new series on the first four chapters of Genesis, titled "The Beginning," which will last until Thanksgiving. The first chapters of Genesis are foundational to our Christian faith. Everything in the Bible seems to point back to or derive from the beginning of Genesis. When I was studying biblical theology in Seminary, I was amazed at how the first few chapters of Genesis constantly came into focus. Genesis is the seed of the whole story of the Bible.

As the seed of the Bible, Genesis weighs heavily on all things pertaining to life, as the Bible would define life. I don't think you can understand life apart from Genesis— You definitely cannot understand Jesus without Genesis. The ideas of work, rest, dominion, ordered patterns, sexuality, good and evil, sin and redemption, our nature and purpose, God's nature, his relationship with his creation and us, and so much more, are all strategically introduced in the early chapters of Genesis. You can say that Genesis snatches all that is important about life and places it in the palm of God's hand.

Since Genesis speaks so ingeniously to the questions about life that we have, we tend to come to Genesis seeking answers to the questions we have learned to ask from scientific inquiry. Scientific inquiry has taken over how we seek to understand the world. Well, we need to understand that the creation story in Genesis is not meant to be a scientific account of creation. We will come away empty-handed if we try to scrutinize it through a scientific lens. We should not allow science to guide how we read and interpret Genesis.

Far from a science book, Genesis is meant to be understood in the context of God's interaction with his creation and the purpose that he has given it, which is first and foremost founded upon faith and trust in God. In addition, Genesis is written using temple themes. As such, we need to read it in the context of God making a place to dwell in fellowship with humans. Most importantly, Genesis is meant to teach us about our relationship with God, with others, and with his creation. As such, Genesis is a book about meaning and purpose per God's definition.

So, when we approach Genesis, we should approach it asking the questions, "how does this speak to my purpose as a human?" "How does this point to God's nature?" "Through what lens should I seek to understand the world around me?" Or "How should I shape my understanding of life and this world?" "What type of relationship can I have with God?" "How am I meant to function as a human being?" "Is God approachable now or not?" If you come to Genesis with these kinds of questions, you will find an infinite reservoir of answers and guidance.

I invite you to open to the book of Genesis, chapter one.

Genesis 1:1-27.

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

3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

6 And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” 7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

9 And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

11 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. 12 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. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. 16 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. 17 God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, 18 to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

20 And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 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.” 23 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

24 And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ge 1:1–26.

The Word of God for the people of God.

Let’s pray.

The opening sentence of the Bible is quite possibly the most important sentence we will ever read. Let’s quickly break down this first verse word-by-word. “In the beginning...” tells us that

our world and everything we see and hear had a beginning. “God...” tells us that God was already there from the beginning and that the beginning had a divine purpose; the beginning was brought about by God.

The next word is “Created.” The Hebrew word for created is “barah.” This word is never used in the Bible without God as its subject. In this context, we should understand that God “Barah,” or “created” out of nothing. That does not mean that there was nothing before that... the Bible tells us that God is eternal without beginning or end. We don’t know what wondrous creations from God existed or still exist that are not a part of our universe, but we should understand that our world—the world Genesis is talking about—was created by God out of nothing. And it was created from nothing but his Word. Hebrews 11:3, says, “by faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” In other words, God spoke existence from non-existence.

The final words in this foundational verse are “the heavens and the earth.” The word heavens in the Bible has several meanings. It can mean the sky. Or it can mean outer space—though the ancients did not think of it as outer space like we do; instead, they thought of it as the abode of the stars, which were all associated with deities. Also, heavens can mean the spiritual dwelling place of God and the angels. The Bible using all of these definitions of “heavens” interchangeably, and we have to rely on context to know which heaven is being referenced.

Which heavens did God create in this beginning? That’s a tough question—I would suggest that this sentence covers all of God’s creation. The first verse is simply telling us that in the beginning, God created the heavens—both the spiritual dwelling place and the expanse of the sky and entire universe, everything in outer space—and the earth.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now, as I said, this is not intended for scientific inquiry. We don’t need to try to reconcile the creation account with science. All we need to understand is that the origin of all that we see and don’t see is from God.

Verse two zooms in on the earth at creation. The earth was intentionally created by God formless and empty, with darkness. The Hebrew terms for formless and empty are “tohu-va-vohu,” describing a wilderness of chaos. Calvin translated this phrase as “confused emptiness.” Add darkness to that and it’s easy to understand what the earth was like at the beginning—a dark, confusing, oceanic wasteland that appears without purpose in its initial state.

V. 2 continues on, saying, “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” The picture is that of a potter leaning over a formless lump of watery clay readying to shape it into something beautiful and valuable. The Spirit of God hovered over this dark, confusing mess that God had created with the intent of turning it into a wondrous world of life and beauty. Let’s pause right there for a minute.

What these first few verses of Genesis tell us is that God is sovereign over his whole creation. There is one Creator God who made everything. This one God rules over his creation. In other words, he owns and will do with it what he wishes. He created a formless, empty, dark world and he could have left it that way, but he did not—he created it formless, empty, and dark to show that he can give that which is meaningless, meaning; that which is without purpose, purpose; and that which is confusing, clarity.

Meaning, purpose, and clarity out of confusing chaos. The earth began empty and void by design. It was God's intention to hover over a meaningless void that he created just to give it a divinely inspired purpose. This should tell us a lot about God and our own lives.

When we came into this world, none of us were given a manual that stated exactly why we were born and what our purpose in life will be. I remember when my first child was born, Sam. When it came time for us to go home from the hospital, the doctors and nurses wrapped our new little baby up and released him to us. I remember thinking, "that's it? Isn't there a manual?" We don't come into this life with a tailor-made handbook that outlines everything we will be gifted at and what our purpose in life will be. From the beginning we are all a confusing mess! A beautiful, confusing mess. God created us that way so that we will come to know that a purposeful, meaningful life can only come from the Spirit of God. Life without God is ultimately "tohu-vavohu," formless and empty.

My friends, if you are faced with darkness and confusion, with a meaningless and purposeless void in the middle of your soul, know that the Spirit of God can speak a world of beauty into that void. Never believe that what you're facing or who you've become is hopeless. God will never look at you and say, "sorry I can't help you now, you're too far gone." He's not going to say, "dang bro... you should've come to me long ago, this mess is too far along for me to do anything about... you've made your own bed and now you're gonna sleep in it."

No, you are his creation, and the Spirit of God is sovereign over his creation. If you put your faith in God and trust him, his Spirit will hover over the meaningless void in your life and speak purpose to darkness. My friends, your life, by God's sovereign design, will have voids of darkness so that you will see and know that the Spirit of God alone brings light to darkness and gives beauty from ashes. Amen!

Moving on quickly, verses 3-26 give an account of the creation. We see something of a three-tiered world arise out of the waters. The language and some of the depictions of the creation account are in conversation with ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian cosmologies. In the ANE (Ancient Near East), it was common to explain the world from the human perspective looking out and up. Essentially, the sky was thought to be a dome, or a vault, with waters beyond the vault, and there was a circle of land below, which rested upon pillars over the cosmic sea. The sun, moon, and stars were set within the vault. Actually, a snow globe submerged in water would be a perfect representation of what the world was in the ANE mind.

You might be tempted to say, "surely God knew they were wrong, and the earth is not a submerged snow globe!" That is missing the point. God would not give a creation account to correct the flawed science of the day. When God speaks his Word, he most often works from the personal experiences of his messengers so that the principles of his message can be clearly understood by the hearers of the time. He most often approaches humans in their own language and understanding to help them understand his meaning and purpose.

On days 1, 2, and 3, God creates the environments. Day 1 is light, which is separated from darkness in a daily cycle, the beginning of time. Again, don't try to apply scientific principles. It's tempting to wonder how there can be day and night before the sun was created. It's also tempting to wonder how plants and trees created on the third day could survive without the sun. Or how could there be a sky, which was created on the second day, with no sun? Really all we

need to do is accept that God created light first, and with it the concept of time, and he made the sky, land, and vegetation before he made the sun, moon and stars.

Now, If you want to get scientific— if God created everything in a literal six days, then the order of creation is not a problem. Genesis 2 tells us that plants had not sprung up until God created man. So, God creates, perhaps in various forms of seeds, before the creation springs into existence. The initial light that God created on the first day could be an inherent glow in the universe, or it could be primordial seeds of light. If you hold that the creation account was not a literal six days, then problems arise. There are no earthly plants that we know of that could survive thousands or millions of years without sunlight. For that reason, I personally believe and trust that God created everything in six literal days, with a seventh day of rest.

On days 4, 5, and 6, God creates the inhabitants, which are the luminaries (sun, moon, stars), living creatures in the sea and on land, and finally humans— male and female, both made in the image of God. We will talk about that next week. So, days 1, 2, and 3 were the creation of environments, and 4, 5, and 6 were the creation of inhabitants, culminating with humanity, which is the crown of his whole creation.

With each day of creation, God looked on what he made and saw that it was good. When he finished creating humans, he looked upon all that he made and saw that it was very good. My friends, that is one important distinction about God's creation that we cannot miss. God has made a very good world for us, and he did not call it very good until he had created humans. I know too many people who might think this world would be far better if other humans weren't in it. Of course, they don't mean themselves— they simply don't like people. Well, what pushes God's creation from good to very good is people.

I want to encourage you to see God's creation as he sees it— very good— and take responsibility in respecting all of God's creation. Take care of creation and respect people. I don't want to preach too much of a social gospel, but the Genesis account guides us to be responsible in caring for all that God has made because from the beginning, God declared it to be very good. Amen.

In sum, Genesis is not to be approached as a scientific textbook, instead it is a foundational narrative that reveals God's purpose, his relationship with creation, and our human identity. It is a narrative about life and purpose. We are to trust in God's sovereignty and his ability to bring order from chaos. His Spirit can bring meaning, purpose, and beauty to voids and confusing messes. Think about how the Genesis account defines human purpose. Finally, respect and care for creation because God has declared it very good and has given the responsibility to humans to be his stewards.

Let's pray.

Study Questions

Read Gen. 1:1-26

Observation

1. Per Genesis 1:1-2, in what condition did God create originally create the earth?
2. In the creation account, what pattern do you notice in how God creates and then evaluates what He has made?
3. What is different about God's declaration after creating humanity compared to the other days of creation?

Interpretation

1. The image of the Spirit of God "hovering over the waters" is described as a metaphor for our own lives. What does this suggest about how God interacts with our confusion or emptiness?
2. The sermon says Genesis is not a science book, but a story about meaning and purpose. Why is it important to read Genesis this way, and what could be lost if we only look for scientific answers? How much does faith play a role?
3. In the sermon, Humans are called the "crown" of creation, and they are made in God's image. What does this mean for how we see ourselves and others?

Application

1. Genesis 1:1-2 indicate that God created an earth that was formless and void, and full of darkness before he made it into something 'very good.' How might this progression of creation encourage you in your life right now?
2. The sermon says our purpose is rooted in being made in God's image. What is one area of your life where you struggle to believe you have purpose or value? How might Genesis 1 speak to that struggle?
3. The sermon mentions that God communicates in ways we can understand. Can you think of a time when God met you in a way that made sense to you personally? How did that impact your faith?
4. The message warns against trying to force Genesis into a scientific mold. Have you ever felt tension between faith and science? How do you handle those questions, and does the sermon's perspective help?