

JANUARY 1

Genesis 1-3

Welcome to your very first day of ___Project 4:4___? Whether you are watching online or listening in the car, I want to thank you for taking on a big challenge. This very well could be the absolute most growing year of your life, biblically speaking. I am glad that you are making this devotional material a part of it!

What you read today - Genesis 1-3 is some of the most important material in the Bible. As a matter of fact, some scholars have said that you can split the Bible into two sections. Genesis 1-3 and the rest. Genesis sets up the way God intended things to be and the way we messed it up. The rest of the Bible is God's solution to this big problem.

Our first two days of devotions will be way longer than the rest because of that fact. Hang in there, though. The rest will be much more reasonable. Also, I will include some introductory material to Genesis in other parts of Genesis in order to not overwhelm the content of the first day. Thanks for rolling with that.

Who am I? What is wrong with humanity? Where did everything originate? Those are pretty basic questions and Genesis, the "Book of Beginnings" is devoted to answering those big questions for us. Bereshith, Bara, Elohim – "*in the beginning God created.*" These words alone set the Biblical worldview apart from most views that exist in religions and universities world wide. By mentioning a beginning, it teaches that time, and therefore history, is linear and not cyclical - like most religions would teach. There is a single creator "Elohim" he is called. So this world did not spring from a battle and is not the secondary result of a polytheistic union. Further, we know that God is the mastermind behind it all AND that he preceded the beginning of time and creation. Thats alot of theology to pack into the first five words!

The first reality that we must recognize and acknowledge is that God is the creator and that everything that exists in all of its diversity and uniqueness, with all of its power to amaze and enrapture us, exists only through an act of God which brought it into being. Did you notice how often the word 'God' appeared in your reading this morning? More than 30 times in the space of just the first chapter of Genesis, the word 'God' is used. God created; God said; God saw that it was good; God called the light, day; God said, and God, and God, and God, over and over again. Moses fairly hammers us with the simple fact - God is the creator. He is the source of everything that is. He stands behind all of creation. Before there was anything, God was there and only because He willed for it to be so, did anything else ever appear. This fundamental truth can never be overstated because everything else in the Christian faith ultimately rests upon it.

Why does God have the right to dictate how we should live? Why is it that you should be answerable to Him? How can we justify His having sovereign authority over our lives? The only possible answer to those questions is simply this - because

He created us. He is God! He is the creator! I guess that is the very reason that men and women have such a hard time sometimes accepting that God created us. It is not comfortable to accept the Bible's answer, because if it is true, then there is someone out there who is infinitely superior to us and to whom we are in the most ultimate of senses accountable.

When you start asking really big question like, "where did all this come from", there aren't really too many options in terms of answers. In fact, really there are only two. You either have to say "God created it", and by that answer admit that you are accountable to Him, or you have to say, "It happened by chance." Both of those answers demand a great deal of faith. I think that some people opt for chance, not for intellectual so much as for volitional reasons. If I say chance is the answer, then I can go on being accountable only to myself. If I say God created, then there are a whole lot of other questions that start asking themselves.

The next thing that I want you to notice about this chapter is that the creation of this vast universe, in which we live, was accomplished by the simple act of God speaking. *"And God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light. And God said, 'Let there be an atmosphere', and there was an atmosphere. And God said, 'let there be dry ground', and there was dry ground."* On and on it goes.

There are two ideas related to this that I want to underscore. The first is that the creation of this entire universe, (which we know is AT LEAST 10 billion light years long), was simply a matter of God speaking. God spoke and worlds came into existence. No wonder the Psalmist is filled with wonder at the thought of God's creation. It is an awesome revelation of the power and majesty of God. That sense of awe is made even greater when you realize that the word 'create' is a word that is used significantly in this passage, but it is only ever used of God in the Old Testament because it carries with it the sense of bringing something into existence out of nothing. Theologians call that creation 'ex nihilo' – out of nothing. You and I can create some wonderful things by shaping them out of pre-existing materials, like Michelangelo created that marvelous statue of David. But God created out of nothing. Our God is an awesome God!

There is a lot of difference of opinion about the word 'day' in this passage. Biblical scholars debate whether it refers to a literal 24-hour day or simply to a set period of time that could have been very long indeed. There are many outstanding Bible Scholars and scientists who hold to the view that our planet and this universe are billions of years old. This makes sense with the poetic document of Genesis 1 that is primarily communicating truth about God and his relationship to the world as creator. Interestingly, this 'old earth' theory fits both the Biblical order AND the scientific data quite well. The size and scope of the universe make sense. The age and dating techniques of all branches of science make sense. Most current Bible scholars and Christian professors in the sciences believe the old earth theory. It draws some Biblical support from some passages like the one in II Peter 3, which says, "that with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are

like a day." The many questions that science can't answer, like "what started the universe in the first place?" are answered well by the Genesis account.

On the other side of the question, it is certainly true that if God wanted to create the earth in six literal 24-hour days, it would naturally be no problem for Him to do it, and it would be reasonable to expect that just as He created Adam as a full grown man with the appearance of age and maturity, the earth would have been created as a mature earth and would therefore carry an appearance of age. Many Christians and a few scientists hold this 'young earth theory' as to the age of this planet and the universe. I will leave you to research such matters for yourself.

There are many other fascinating things to know and think about in the first chapter of Genesis; The first hint of the Trinity in Genesis 1:26, that says, "*Let us make man in our image*" (Who in the world was God talking to at that point if not to Himself?) The explicit nature of the fact that God created humanity male and female - both in his image. The concept of a Sabbath - a six-day pattern in which work is done and then a time of rest and recreation follows. Did God need to take a rest after He did all the arduous work of creating the world? I don't think it was all that arduous for Him - He did not need a rest. The creation account is given to us in this form and God created the earth in this fashion in order to set a pattern for the way in which we should live. That Sabbath concept is going to reappear over and over again.

Another beautiful thing to note in Genesis 1 is the poetic beauty of the literature. There is a great repetition of phrases like "there was evening and morning" and "God saw that it was good." There is a parallel structure between days 1, 2, and 3 and days 4, 5, and 6. Days 1 and 4 discuss what happens in the sky. Days 2 and 5 talk about the water. Days 3 and 6 tackle what happens on land. This demonstrates all at once both the beauty and power of God in creation. He is matchless.

The last thing that I want you to think about is the fact that when God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in an absolutely perfect environment in the Garden of Eden. He gave them 'work' to do - the work of supervising and overseeing His creation (and 'work', by the way, is of great importance to us as God's people because it is one of the things that God has put into our lives to provide us with a sense of significance and purpose. If we are not able to derive a sense of fulfillment from our labor, we are missing out on one of the primary things God has given to bless us!) I believe that God mainly means for us to derive fulfillment in our lives from three things: First, from our relationship to God and that is most important. Secondly, from the relationship that He has given us in our families with our spouses, our parents, our children, and then in a broader context with the family of God that He has given to us in the body of Christ. Finally, I believe that He means for us to derive our sense of personal worth from the work that He has given us to do. He has gifted us, He has given us opportunity to labor, and from this labor we derive a certain amount of our own personal worth and significance. I think that whenever you eliminate any one of these three things that God gave to give us

significance in life, it is like cutting out one leg of a three-legged stool. That forces us to place more emphasis on the other two legs of the stool, and if we are only depending on one, as so many people in our society are, because they get no sense of purpose or fulfillment from their work and they don't even know who God is, they are left depending entirely upon their families for their own sense of worth and significance, putting too much weight on one leg of the stool. The inevitable result of that kind of pressure is that that leg of the stool is going to break. That is what is happening in our society today.

The work God gave Adam and Eve to do was not especially onerous work. It wasn't terribly heavy or arduous because all of creation cooperated with them in fulfilling God's purpose. And we learn in Ezekiel 47, Romans 8 and Revelation 22 that one day the earth will be renewed in such a way that people will live in that great harmony with creation. It will be a great day! More about that later...

Tomorrow, we will tackle the fuller nature of the second critical event in these opening chapters, the fall.

Take some time today to focus on the amazing creative power of God.

This is Mark Ashton, reminding you that "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.[a]"

Peace be with you.