



## Creating God's Kingdom

### **Genesis one as good news**

Archaeologist William Dever from the University of Arizona teaches many, many American college students. In his estimation, 90% of his students are ignorant of the Bible and its contents. What is worse, they are not only uninterested in the Bible, he cannot even arouse interest in them with regard to the Bible.

Ignorance of the Bible in general and Genesis One in particular leaves a spiritual vacuum that competing worldviews and secular philosophies are only too eager to fill. This ignorance is fertile soil for the rise of cults with their strange beliefs and practices.

The cultural air we breathe in North America is one of religious pluriformity, syncretism, and deism. This was sadly evident at the prayer service held in Yankee Stadium on a Sunday afternoon, September 23, 2001. The prayer service was one of many responses to the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Representatives from all the major religious groups of New York were represented: Romanist, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and various Protestant bodies. With rare exceptions, the Christian representatives imposed on themselves self-censorship so that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was hardly mentioned, even cut out of the reading from Romans 8, as done by a New York City fire fighter. But without Christ, what or who is the God being addressed by these various clergy-persons?

The religious and cultural climate of present-day America is that of a great civil religion in which all religions are tolerated as long as they do not challenge America or each other. Thus, we are being told that Islam is a peace-loving religion, and that the god "Allah" is simply the Arabic name for the God of the Christians. The details of worship are simply different, that's all, we are led to believe. All of this is a lie.

First of all, as Christians we hold to the infallibility and absolute authority of the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testament. These two Testaments are the written Word of the Triune God. Contrast that confession with Islam, in which Muslims claim that the Bible, including the accounts in Genesis, is full of errors. Genesis is obsolete to a Muslim, while the Qur'an, it is claimed, is directly from Allah.

### **What do we mean by "Kingdom"?**

The sovereignty of God is announced in Genesis 1:1 with clarity and without ambiguity. The kingdom is that realm or region that is under the absolute power and regal dominion of the LORD God Himself. This truth was celebrated in the Old Testament as the following psalms demonstrate:

*"For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a skillful psalm. God reigns over the nations. God sits on His holy throne. The princes of the people have assembled themselves as the people of the God of Abraham; for the shields of the earth belong to God." (Psalm 47:1, 2)*

*"The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty ... Thy throne is established from of old; Thou art from everlasting." (Psalm 93: 1a, 2).*

*"The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many islands be glad... The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth." (Psalm 97:1, 5)*

*"The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake!" (Psalm 90:1)*

*"I will extol Thee, my God, O King and I will bless Thy name forever and ever ... All Thy works shall give thanks to Thee, O LORD, and Thy godly ones shall bless Thee. They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom, and talk of Thy power; to make known to the sons of men Thy mighty acts, and the glory of the majesty of Thy kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endures throughout all generations." (Psalm 145:1, 10-13)*

God had created mankind in the beginning to rule and have dominion over all things. When mankind rebelled against the Word of the heavenly King, then the LORD Himself reclaims the creation realm for Himself through the Sovereign might of His own Son (cf. Psalm 110) in the power of His Holy Spirit.

## **An announcement of good news**

In the Greek world, when a new king came to the throne it was called an *evangelion*, a 'good message' or 'good news.' The written Scriptures are the announcement in text what are true in fact. The divine King reigns over all things, and He has ruled over His creation and all its inhabitants from the very beginning.

Not all subjects in the world believe or acknowledge this fact. Many of the world's inhabitants do not approve of God's rule. But Genesis One sets the record straight with a 'good message' that our God is both creator and true Universal Ruler. Genesis One opens the windows to allow us to look inside matters and see what is really going on. It is a breath of fresh air. It is sunshine in the midst of darkness. It is clarity in the midst of muddle and confusion. It orders and reorders our worldview and thus our priorities.

Genesis and its opening chapters are going to define who God is, what the world is, who man is, and what our role is before this God in this world. All of that is the opening overture, the definitive melody that sets the stage for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we do not get this right, then there are vast areas of the Bible that go dark for us. The good news is already being announced, trumpeted, in these opening verses of the Bible.

## **Genesis 1.1: God the King clears the deck of false views**

### ***The reality of an eternal God: no atheism***

The first subject of the Bible's first sentence is God. The reader is not given any cosmogony that seeks to explain from where God came. His existence is simply posited and assumed.

*"Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God," writes Moses, the man of God (Psalm 90:2).*

Atheism as a worldview was hardly an option in the ancient Near East. Still, atheism is the professed faith of some today. Even ancient man might live as if God did not exist, saying in his heart, *"There is no God"* (see Psalm 14:1; 53:1).

Yet atheism requires a great deal of "faith" as it seeks to maintain itself against the vast and overwhelming evidence written in "that most elegant book" of creation. Everything that *"may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them,"* writes Paul in Romans 1:19. Genesis 1:1 reveals in text what the creation says without words: God exists, and thus atheism is not an option.

*"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).*

### ***The reality of one God: no polytheism***

In Moses' day this was truly a sign of mankind's rebellion against the heavenly King. The Egyptians worshiped thousands of deities, and the Canaanites were ensnared in the service of many Baals and the Asheroth. The pagans had their many myths about the creation of the gods and the creation of the world, including how and why man was made.

Having knowledge of the pagan views of Moses' day does provide some enlightening insights into how Moses wrote Genesis One and following. For instance, God created the sun and the moon on the 4th day. But notice that in the text the words *sun* and *moon* are not used. Rather, the words "greater light" and "lesser light" are the preferred terms. Why? Because when you said "sun" in the ancient world, you meant 'sun god.' And that is not what God created, the sun god. God is revealing the marvels of His handiwork as He is refuting the false gods of the pagans. God through Moses does not even name the false gods.

### ***The Creator — creature distinction; no pantheism***

The first verb of the Bible is the word "*create*." This already should set the pace for the vocabulary of our Christian speech. We speak of *creation*, not nature in a secular sense. The one and only God created everything. All that exists is a creation. Thus we cannot speak of "Mother Nature." The world does not give birth to us. There is no earth goddess that is the source of our life or existence. Everything is created. God is now known as the Creator.

What follows from this is that the creation is distinct from the Creator Himself. Dr. Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia) pressed the phrase upon his students the "Creator — creature distinction." Henri Blocher (*In the Beginning*, p. 61) says the following:

*"For creation to take place, in fact, God must be free and distinct from the world, and that is the case only with the God of Genesis."*

The entirety of what exists is there and is kept intact not because of some impersonal laws of a far away deity, nor because the creation is itself god. Pantheism, the belief that god is everything and everything is god, is refuted or denied by Genesis 1:1. New Age philosophies do not get a great deal of press or attention today, but this does not mean that they are not around to influence many in the modern-day environmentalist movement.

The Bible clearly breaks with all the false religions of Moses' day. It also denies the lies of our present time.

## **God the King sets up His Kingdom**

### ***The days of creation: time Created 'in the beginning'***

The first subject of the Bible is God. The first speaker of the Bible is God, as well. By His words, "*Let there be light*," He wills light into existence. So it will be with the other events of the creation week and with the other elements that are made in these first six days of history.

In Genesis One these phrases are often repeated: "*And God said*," and "*God blessed them and said*." Creation begins with divine, royal words. Later, at Mount Sinai, the Ten Words will come from the heavenly King, covenantally binding Israel as a people, divinely-created, to their royal Master and sovereign Father. In the beginning God's Word creates His kingdom; at Sinai God's word creates His kingdom of priests, Israel. The Spirit of God will hover over the deep in the beginning (Genesis 1:2) to give order and life to the creation, just as later at Mount Sinai the great glory-cloud will descend upon the mountain to manifest God's presence as He will give order through His Law-Word of sacred covenant.

Israel's life is organized according to six days of labor with a day of rest and refreshment, patterned as the creation was from the very beginning of time, when God created the heavens, the earth, the seas, and everything in them, while then resting on the holy day of rest.

### ***The structure of the creation: divine patterns of division and population***

God did not create a chaotic mess. In fact, the rest of the creation week will be God's work that will *divide* the various areas of the earth (understood broadly as that all that which is not "the heavens," God's special throne room), and then He will *populate* the areas that have been formed through division. What is formless receives form through separation on roughly the first three days, and what is empty receives occupants on the last three (or four) days of the creation week. The wisdom of divine design is about to be held up before the believers' eyes! Thus "formless and empty" are not seen as something inherently evil, but rather the phrase describes "the earth" as it was in the beginning, at that initial point when our God brought it into existence.

### ***The divisions within Creation: orderliness 'in the beginning'***

God speaks, it happens, He gives it an identity. He judges it good, and then He does it again! In this way the inspired writer keeps pressing upon the reader certain critical matters. Genesis One is not written in classic poetic style, nor is it a flat, two dimensional reporting of "just the facts." He is busy putting together His Kingdom in place, stage by careful stage.

The various kinds of vegetation (plants, trees, etc.) are said to be produced by the land, and the plants and trees are made "*according to their kinds.*" Admittedly, the ancient world did not work with the precise categories of species that scientists use today, but the ancient peoples knew for example, the differences between the palm and the oak, the myrtle and the thorn bush. We should also recognize that diversity and differentiation within God's creation are already in place from the very start. It is not the case that all life forms (plant, bird, animal) evolved out of one single primitive cell. Many of God's creatures may be like each other in many different ways (e.g. they breathe oxygen, have two legs, etc.). Such similarities do not constitute proof of development from the one to the other. Diversity in the plant and animal realms (Genesis 1:24, 25) of God's creation was from the beginning. "*And God saw that it was good*" (Genesis 1:12).

Whatever else we want to say about this - and a lot could be said - we see clearly that the modern-day myth of evolutionism is undermined and cast down. In the kingdom of God, all things are created by the Word of the Lord after their kind, and they are maintained providentially by God's Law-Word. Evolutionism leads to either the denigration of man to the level of the animal (and its 'law of the jungle'), or, to the elevation of animals to the level of people. After all, the "baby seals are people too," we might hear it said.

Genesis 1:26-28 demonstrates the goodness of God in that He reveals, first of all, His claim to the whole earth by placing His very own image in the territory He made. Man-kind, male and female, is that very image! That truth shows mankind's exalted beginning as that crowning entity placed into office in the beginning. All the races of mankind are descended from one set of parents. That image-bearing couple knew God's will from the beginning, thus constituting mankind a prophet. That image-bearing couple had access to God's very presence, thus making them serve as priest. That image-bearing couple was charged with rule and dominion, thus installing them as king and queen. The new covenant of grace in the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, must then recreate God's elect in true righteousness, holiness, and knowledge of God so that God's elect may be reinstalled in Christ to share His anointing as prophets, priests, and kings (see Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 12).

### ***The evaluation of creation: no dualism***

Creation is evaluated on a daily basis. After each day, the Lord gave His own verdict, that everything was good. But the Lord concludes the entire creation process with the verdict in Genesis 1:31, "*very good; excellent!*" The Lord evaluated His handiwork and pronounced it very, very fine!

In doing this, God has undercut all ideologies and philosophies that declare evil to be an eternal principle or eternal force in the universe. The stuff, the material, the earth that was created was good in every sense of the term. There are very subtle ideas that hover in some Christian circles that see physical things as less than good, less than serviceable in the Kingdom of God. But God saw light, the skies, the seas, the tuna fish and the starlings, the dogs and the cats, the lions and the oxen, and He saw the crown of Creation, man, as very good in the beginning.

Consider then this announcement as good news: man's most basic problem is not that he is human. We sometimes hear this said: "I just can't help it; I'm only human." While it is true that man was not created infinite in knowledge and power, nevertheless we were created morally good. Our profound problem is not that we are human; our problem today is that we are sinners, dead in sins and trespasses until God's gives us new birth (see Ephesians 2:1-10).

The consequence of this is the following: in God's sovereign redemption one can be truly Christian and very human at the same time. We are not saved to escape our skin. We are saved to serve God in our skin. In the light of Christ's own resurrection from the dead, and with the prospect of our own glorious resurrection in Him, we now live in the light of Paul's mandate,

*"Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58b).*

By body and soul, the totality of me, belongs to God (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 1).

Genesis one is genuinely good news as it breaks with false worldviews and rearranges our thinking and hopefully, our priorities. Not a square inch or a single acre of this world may be treated apart from God's holy Will as revealed in His Word. Thus our labor and our recreation must be conducted in the light of the end, when the Garden-City of New Jerusalem will descend from heaven so that God's redeemed people might live in the joy of the Lord forever.

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