

GENESIS

1

Genesis 1:1-5

1:1 *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

The Bible opens with a bold declaration of God's action when He created the heavens and the earth. The opening states simply but profoundly, "In the beginning God created."

The very idea that there was a beginning implies that there was a moment when the earth and heavens came into existence. Before that moment, time and matter did not exist. Some outside force had to act in order for history to begin. Thus, Genesis states that, "In the beginning, God created." The preexistent eternal God spoke, and the universe sprang into existence. By the power of His spoken word, God brought everything into being.

"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." (Hebrews 11:3)

“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” (Psalm 90:2)

This means that the material world is not eternal. It is not self-creating. It is not self-perpetuating. It has no power to mold or change its primary characteristics. The best science in the world can only speculate on how the universe came into existence. However, all theories, whether scientific or philosophical, fall far short of answering the quest for substantive, definitive answers. The quest itself demonstrates that the human race troubles itself, because it does not want to believe in a moral, eternal Being Who holds man accountable for his thoughts and actions.

The writer of the New Testament letter of Hebrews quoted Psalm 102:25: *“And, ‘You, LORD, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands’” (Hebrews 1:10).*

John’s Gospel opens with this prologue: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1–3).*

God created the heavens and the earth without any pre-existent material. Only God has the capacity to create something. Theologians call this *creatio ex nihilo*, that is *creation out of nothing*.¹ *“as it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations’—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Romans 4:17).* Perhaps it would be better to understand that God created the universe out of His own creative sovereignty. God Himself was the only Entity that was present before the world was created. God simply spoke creation into being. Creation was an act of the Creator’s sovereign determination, not subject to human innovation or speculation. Because God is the initiator of creation, nothing could prevent what God had ordained by the power of His spoken word.

1:2 *The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

The earth was “without form and void.” This Hebrew phrase *Tōhû wābōhû* conveys the sense of characterizing the earth as uninhabitable and inhospitable to human life.² The earth at first was covered with water and shrouded in darkness for the Lord had not yet created light. The sun, moon, and stars were not created until the fourth day. Darkness was not and is not inherently evil. Darkness cannot hide or limit God. “...even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you” (*Psalm 139:12*). Humanly speaking, we might think that this stage of earth’s creation was rather primitive. However, the author of Genesis is simply informing the reader of this stage of earth’s development. Whatever we may visualize, the earth was constituted exactly the way God intended. It was created in such a way that it supported everything God did in the following days.

Despite the condition of the earth at this time, Isaiah understood that God had a purpose in creating the earth, bringing shape and substance to this formless mass, and making a place for those He would eventually make “in His image.”

“For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): “I am the LORD, and there is no other.” (Isaiah 45:18)

The formlessness of the earth and the desolate emptiness were simply the initial conditions of earth’s creation. The Spirit of God hovered over the “face of the deep,” expressing God’s sovereign authority over His creation. The language of the verse reflects the presence of the fullness of the Godhead hovering over the face of the deep. This verse portrays the Holy Spirit as an integral part of God’s presence, acting creatively as He hovers over the waters. It is painfully obvious that human language has great difficulty when

it attempts to fully explain the essence of the eternal God, Who brought everything into being simply by the power of His word.

No matter how we attempt to interpret *how* God created the heavens and the water-covered mass of the earth, it is essential that we understand that God, the eternal and infinite One, is the sole Author of this aspect of His creation. As the Psalmist wrote:

⁶By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. ⁷He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. ⁸Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! ⁹For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. (Psalm 33:6–9)

1:3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

This is the first instance in all of Scripture where the narrator indicates that God spoke. That does not mean that God did not speak before this time. Rather, this verse leads most commentators to conclude that the power of God's spoken word brought the entire universe into being. In fact, Calvin argues that the Word of God was present from a time before the beginning of Creation. The Gospel of John testifies that nothing was created without the Word, Who was with God from the beginning and, indeed, is God (*John 1:1–3*).

It is very difficult to say what this light is. It is not the light of the sun, moon, or stars, because God created those celestial bodies on the fourth day. It probably is not light as we think of light, that is, a measurable source of energy in the spectrum visible to the human eye. Rather, it is likely the energy that animates all creation. It comes forth from God and gives life. It is essential to the existence of all matter and energy. It is the stuff that energizes the sun, moon, and stars that God creates on the fourth day. It energizes all plant and animal life. It is the light that gives life to everyone who comes into this world (*John 1:4–5*).

1:4 *And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.*

God looked at the light and saw that it was good. Light was brought into existence by the spoken word of God, Who is perfect, so that the light energy was declared *good* according to the supreme standard of God Almighty. Of course, there is no question that God knew that this was good. Rather, the Genesis narrative is telling its readers that the creation of light was approved by God, and we, the readers, have only one thing to do—bow to the judgment of God and acknowledge the glory of what God has called good.

God then separated the light from the darkness. We have said the light that God created is not the light we see with the naked eye but, rather, might be the light that animates all life and matter. Thus, this light cannot be a celestial body since the sun, moon, and stars had not yet been created. However, the language helps us understand what God is doing here. God created the heavens and the earth. He created the formless mass called earth, as well as the darkness of the deep. He then created light, which He clearly distinguished from the darkness that originally covered the earth.

1:5 *God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

Eternity has no boundaries. Time and space did not exist until the eternal God created them. The moment He created the heavens and the earth, He placed a small dot in the timeless expanse of eternity. Time and space were born, with all creatures thereafter captive to the regimen of time. Time and space are merely a segment of eternity, having a beginning and an end. For the first time, God begins to define a unit of time—night and day, the first day. The first day is born, and God establishes evening and morning as markers for a 24-hour day. Before the sun and moon were created as the earthly markers of day and night, God here begins to define time in language that humans can understand.

Notes/Applications

“In the beginning God created.” This short phrase affirms that heaven and earth did not exist before God brought them into existence. More important, the very statement affirms the preexistence of an eternal Being Who had the capacity to bring about a material entity to exist in time and space. After all, He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending of all creation (*Revelation 22:13*). He is eternally complete in His own Being, yet acts in precise detail, defining both the expanse of the universe and the microcosm of each living cell. He Himself lives eternally outside of time, yet creates a universe that is dominated by a time frame that He alone sustains (*Colossians 1:17*). In this beginning passage, the Lord God first created the heavens and the earth, and then animated everything He had made with the Light. He, the eternal One, creates a universe so precisely defined by time and space that it astounds our human minds. It brings us, His creatures, to our knees in praise and adoration.

Mankind’s inability to comprehend the universe in which it resides does not diminish the power of the Creator Who brought it into being. The desperate attempt of science to explain the origins of the universe inevitably ends with a huge question mark. Even science disagrees with its own ideas, unable to satisfactorily answer the questions it raises in its own query.³ If the heavens and the earth began at a point in time, what was the factor that brought them into existence? The writer of Hebrews probably says it best: “*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*” (*Hebrews 11:3*).

As we understand it, nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could! It is essential that we understand this. These opening verses of Genesis provide the only answer that satisfies man’s query about his beginnings. Behind the magnificence of an awesome universe is the eternal God, more powerful and magnificent than the creation that bears His signature. There is no other conclusion that makes sense. The opening declaration of Genesis tells us every-

thing we need to know about the world in which we live: “In the beginning God created.”