

# Genesis 1 – 2

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## Creation

Christ Church Selly Park


Sunday 15 September 2024


Covenant & Kingdom [1]

### Series Introduction

Today we are beginning a new series: Covenant & Kingdom. It is a 15-week tour of the Old Testament, starting today with Genesis and the creation of the universe, and ending the week before Christmas with the prophets looking ahead to the coming of God's promised Messiah.

I realise there is quite a lot of the Old Testament, so I've designed a couple of tools that I hope will help us navigate and understand how it all fits together.

The first is  this overview. There is a huge amount of information on it, but actually it is quite straightforward because each strip is repeated.

 At the top you see the week number and title – so today we are on week 1 and the title is 'Creation'.

Underneath that is a graphic which represents the main theme of that particular week. So today we have a picture of a brand-new world. I had to ask a friend to do those for me because my doodles were so awful!

Next is a line that shows the development of God's Covenant with his people. First we have Noah – the rainbow after the flood – God's universal commitment to all humankind. Next we have Abraham – God's blessing to the nations. After that we have Moses and the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai – God's holy people. Finally we have David and the promise of God's everlasting King.

I don't see these as four covenants, but four sides of one covenant which we see fully and finally in Jesus. So the colours get darker to show how they are building towards Jesus.

Underneath that we have God's Kingdom, which is various states during the Old Testament. In a short while we will see the pattern of God's kingdom, next week how the kingdom perished, and so on – building towards Jesus announcing (Mark 1.15), **'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'**

¶ Next we have a *very* (emphasis on the word *very*) approximate date for when these things took place. It's hard to date much of what happens before David, so to reflect that I have deliberately rounded the dates. You don't need to point out to me that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, not 50 years.

Under the dates we have a line show where God's people are at any particular moment, as God's kingdom moves and changes.

The final two lines show which Bible books, people and events relate to a particular week. We cannot cover everything and everyone you know about the Old Testament, but hopefully that will help you see a broader picture than we can cover in sermons.

¶ So that's how the infographic works. It is not something to look at once and take everything in – it is designed to be studied and used week after week, so I hope you find it helpful.

The next tool to help us connect everything together is ¶ this: six building blocks that we will see come up time and again: creation, love, relationship, holiness, sin and forgiveness. Each week we will highlight which building blocks are relevant to that section.

¶ My prayer is that this series helps us see how the Old Testament not only points to Jesus, but is vital for understanding who he is.

## Creation

Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson were on a camping trip. After a long walk, a hearty meal and a good bottle of wine, they lay down to sleep.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, Holmes woke his trusted companion and asked, 'Watson, what do you see?' Rubbing his sleepy eyes, Watson replied, 'I see millions and millions of stars.'

'Correct, Watson, and what do you conclude from that?'

Watson thought for a moment and then answered: 'Well, temporally I conclude it is about 3.30am; astrologically I conclude that Venus is showing in the sign of Aquarius; astronomically I conclude that we are on a planet, orbiting the sun in a spiral arm of a galaxy' and religiously I conclude that God wants to show us with this splendour that we are but a small, insignificant speck of dust in the infinite grace of His creation. Why, Holmes? What do you mean?'

'Watson... somebody stole our tent.'

It is easy to look at the world and come to the wrong conclusion. Genesis is given to help us see the truth and the one *behind* it all.

## Who... was there? (1.1-2)

The first words of the Bible are: **In the beginning** (1.1): **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.** That gives us the answer to the first of three questions we will be asking this morning: **Who** was there **in the beginning?** The answer? **God.**

That might seem like a silly question. But, as we shall see, one of the most important things when reading the Bible is learning to ask the questions that it actually answers – the things we *actually* need to, not just what we *want* to know!

And there is a bit more to it than, simply, ‘God!’ Verse 2:

the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

*Genesis 1.2 (NIV)*

Suddenly there isn't just **God** there is also **the Spirit of God.** But this is not like the pantheism of the nations that surrounded Israel when Genesis was written. Unlike the creation myths of Babylon and Canaan, where the world came to be through infighting and accident, in Genesis there is no great battle, there is simply **God** and **the Spirit of God.**

But, because we have the benefit of the New Testament *we* know another famous **In the beginning**:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

*John 1.1-3 (NIV)*

So as well as **God** and **the Spirit of God**, we have this **Word** with a capital W, who **was *with God in the beginning***, but who also **was God**. The Word is, of course, a title for Jesus.

So the answer to the question – Who was there? – is not simply ‘God’, but ‘God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’

## **Who... made everything? (1.3 – 25)**

Our first question was ‘Who’ – let’s move on to the second question. **J**

Ah, that’s embarrassing. It turns out the second question is ‘Who’ as well. This time, it’s ‘Who... made everything?’ And the answer is... God.

I wonder what you would do if we were walking along the Pershore Road and we needed to cross to the other side – only, instead of walking to one of the pedestrian crossings I proclaimed, ‘Let there be a gap in the traffic!’ and then began to walk into the road... I hope you would grab me.

I wonder what you would do if we were on a hiking trip and the clouds grew dark and heavy, and the rain started to fall – and instead of taking shelter I threw off my waterproof coat, kicked off my boots and ran into the storm yelling, ‘Let there be sunshine!’

I think if I did stuff like that one or two of you might pick up the phone to the bishop or take me to the nearest A&E.

I'd be mad. I don't have that kind of power.

But God does. **God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light** (1.3). **God said, ‘Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.’ And it was so** (1.9). God said, **‘Let there be,’** and the sun, moon and stars were made (1.14-16). God said, **‘Let the water teem,’** and it did; God said, **‘Let birds fly,’** and they did (1.20). **God said, ‘Let the land produce living creatures.’ And it was so** (1.24).

The passage is deliberately repetitive, because it's making one, single point: God made everything; everything was made by God; or in Yoda style: make everything, God did. That's the point.

How could God make light before the sun – is the writer an idiot? Of course not, and that's an arrogant way to read the Bible – and anyway that's not the point. The point is: God made everything.

How could God make trees before the sun? And how can there be evening and morning on the first three days without the sun and moon? Surely the writer is a moron. No: it's not the point. God made everything.

Did he do it in seven days? Not the point. God made everything, and he could have done it in seven *seconds*, let alone seven days.

We cannot comprehend such awesome power, simply wonder at the beauty and mystery of it. The disciples saw a glimpse of this awesome power when Jesus calmed the storm with a simple word. **'Quiet, be still!'** he said – and it was (Mark 4.39). We don't have that kind of power, but God does.

**J** Here is a cake. As you can see, it is a birthday cake. What you can't see is that it is a chocolate cake. The design is the cake from a game called Runescape.



But who made it? And who is it for? You might guess given it's my picture and most of you know my wife likes to bake cakes. But you can't *know* that until you are *told*.

Genesis 1 is the beginning of the answer to the question, 'Who?' Who made everything? God. But not any god: *this* God, whom the Bible reveals is called Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We can't work *that* out for ourselves: we have to be told.

## Who... are we? (1.26 – 2.25)

Our first question was 'Who' – and our second question was also 'Who.' And the answer to both was 'God.' Let's try our third ques... Is this broken? It turns out our third question is 'Who' as well: Who are we?

The most obvious answer from Genesis 1 and 2 is: not God. Again it might sound silly and perhaps obvious – but it is also profound, because often we humans act as though we think we *are* God: so often in our hearts we think we can decide whether or not to listen to God – which places ourselves *above* him.

A scientist approached God and said: 'God, we don't need you anymore. Science has finally figured out a way to create life. We can now do what you did in the beginning!'

‘Oh, is that so?’ replied God. ‘Yes,’ said the scientist, ‘We can take dust and form it into the shape of a human, breathe life into it, and thus create a human being.’

‘Well, that’s very interesting,’ God said, ‘Show me.’ So the scientist reached down, grabbed a handful of dust, and started to mould the soil into the shape of a man.

‘No, no,’ interrupted God, ‘Get your own dust!’

The first and most important thing about human beings is that we are *made*, we are **created** (1.26-17). Verse 27 in particular makes that abundantly clear:

So God **created** mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he **created** them;  
male and female he **created** them.

*Genesis 1.27 (NIV)*

How we need to learn the wisdom of this truth. In Romans 1 Paul diagnoses the human problem like this:

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is for ever praised.

*Romans 1.25 (NIV)*

The **they** Paul talks about isn't people 'out there' – it's *everyone*, including the people in here.

Do you know what? The last two mornings I haven't done my quiet time. Instead I fired up my computer: two days ago I updated our household budget spreadsheet; yesterday I worked on the Covenant & Kingdom overview graphic.

I served money and I served work – both created things. And that's just two mornings, let alone the attitude in my heart towards other things that in themselves might be good – but even good things take God's place in our lives when we serve or worship them instead of God.

Friends, we are **created**. We are creatures who have a **Creator** – yet how often we act as though we don't: as though we can do what we like without consequences; as though we know what's best, right, just, true; as though we can decide for ourselves which bits of his Word we can disregard, instead of submitting to the lordship and authority of God – who is good, and for ever praised.

The truth is: God stands before and above it all – and we are but a tiny speck, a brief moment in the vastness of time and space.

We are not God – but that doesn't mean we are nothing.

Genesis chapter 2 is quite different to chapter 1, except it answers the same questions, simply in a different way. The answer to questions 1 and 2 is: **the Lord God** (2.4). He was there when **the heavens and the earth were created**, and he was one who **made the earth and the heavens**.

Verse 7 describes how **God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life**. God took him and placed him **a garden in the East** (2.8): a garden with **all kinds of trees – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food** (2.9). There was plenty of water, too (2.10).

The man was put in the garden, not to twiddle his thumbs but **to work it and take care of it** (2.15). This helps us understand *how* humans are supposed to **rule over** creation (1.26, 1.28): to help it be fruitful, beautiful and tasty (!). Humans have God-given authority over creation – but we must not forget that the world isn't *ours*, we are stewards looking after it for God.

We see another example of the authority humans have in the next section of chapter 2. God begins the search for **a helper suitable for** the man, so he isn't alone (2.18). He brings **all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky to the man** (2.19) and the man **names** the lot (2.20).

When I was five we visited Scotland – in part for a holiday, and in part to collect a golden Labrador puppy from some of Dad’s relatives. We were there in the summer holidays... which meant there were a *lot* of midges. Evil creatures.

Anyway... having collected the puppy Mum and Dad asked my sister and me what we thought we should name the new puppy. Now, five-year-old Ben was not the most creative person in the world. I thought and thought, but couldn’t come up with anything. I looked out of the car window as we drove along, and was struck by sudden inspiration. ‘Lamppost!’ I cried.

Thankfully, the dog was eventually – and appropriately, given the week we’d just had – named ‘Midge’, not ‘Lamppost’.

That sort of naming is not what Genesis 2.20 is all about. Adam did not see a horse and name it Hetty, or a badger and name it Brian. He was recognising the order of things – noticing which animals were similar, grouping them, identifying them. But also in the ancient world – and to an extent still today – naming something meant exercising authority over it. To us that might sound bad – but it’s only bad if the authority is abused. Good authority exercised well is releasing, like Jesus naming Peter.

But **no suitable helper was found** from among the creatures (2.20) so **God made a woman from** one of the man's ribs (2.22) – and at last he had the **helper** he was looking for (2.18, 2.20).

(The word **helper** has no sense of subservience. It is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament: twice in this passage, but seventeen of the twenty-one times it is used of God. It means something like 'indispensable companion'.)

Here, then, we see the **pattern** of God's kingdom: God's people in God's place living under God's rule. The pattern of Eden is good **J** relationship: man and woman living in harmony together, walking and talking with God, obeying his command to **work** and **take care** of the place he had given them. Of course it doesn't last... but we'll find out more about *that* next week.

## We need a miracle

For now I'd like to finish with this thought – and it's about you (and me). Without God the earth **was formless and empty** (1.2). Without God that is what we are like: stuck in the **darkness**. All we have is what's within our hearts – and that isn't good stuff.

But God – God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – *this* God spoke and **said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light** (1.3).

My friends, there is nothing in this world that can chase away the spiritual darkness that's in each of us. We need a miracle; we need *that* miracle. Quoting Genesis 1.3, Paul put it like this:

God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

*2 Corinthians 4.6 (NIV)*

God shines so we can see him in Jesus, and so we can know him. And as he shines **his light in our hearts**, so he chases the darkness away. It takes time, and we need to ask God every day to **shine his light in our hearts** because the darkness is a persistent little devil – especially when we let it back in.

The same **Spirit of God** that **was hovering over the waters** (1.2) is here, today. The same Word that in the beginning was **with God**, the Word that **was God** – Jesus Christ – is here, today.

The same God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – who said, '**Let there be light**' on the first day of creation is here, today.

So the final question is: **!** Do you want him? Do you want him to shine his light in your heart? Do you want him to remake you, to make you into the person he's calling you to be?