

Origins: Creation

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[0 : 0 0] well in his 2010 book 2010 a grand design the late Stephen Hawking claimed this he said because there is a law like gravity the universe can and will create itself from nothing spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing why the universe exists why we exist it is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going well that's a big claim isn't it to declare that the universe can create itself from nothing Stephen Hawking's grand design has no place at all for God it's interesting that the subtitle of his book is new answers to the ultimate questions of life because we do all have big questions about life don't we we want answers to these ultimate big questions questions like where have we come from why are we here who are we how should we relate to the world around us and these are timeless questions that humanity has always asked but how should we tackle them well we've got a choice either we believe there is no God and wonder whether our lives have got any purpose at all or we believe there is a God who does give purpose to our lives and our existence in this world which of these options makes best sense of our world and of our lived experience that's what we need to discover and find out and Genesis chapters 1 to 3 help navigate our way for us because these chapters in the Bible these early chapters point us back to the origins of everything so Genesis chapter 1 introduces us to the creator God because that's where we need to start and so while we'll come to

Genesis with questions about creation so was it through a big bang was it through an evolutionary process was it through seven literal days the focus as you heard when Catherine read to us the focus of the creation account isn't just on the creation but it's on the creator it tells us what we need to know I guess rather than what we might like to know Genesis 1 reveals to us the creator God who is powerful who is purposeful and who is personal and that has clear implications for how we understand our place in this world and the point of our existence and so today we're going to consider three points about God and his creation the first is God is powerful the second is God is purposeful and the third is God is personal God is powerful purposeful and personal first of all God is powerful Genesis chapter 1 loudly declares this to us so from Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 we get the headline for in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and then all the way through the chapter as it was read God's creative power is emphasized at every single stage of creation each day you notice follows a similar pattern and so what we have here is and you see on the screen we've got an announcement and God said we've got a commandment let there be on the first three days we've got a separation light and darkness sky and sea land and sea then we've got a report so God made and then and it was so on the first three days we've got a naming so God called God called God called we've also got an evaluation every time every day

God saw that it was good and then we've got this chronological framework the first day the second day the third day and so on so let's just have a look at this for day one if you've got your bible there read verse three to five with me so verse three and God said so that's the announcement let there be light that's the commandment and there was light that's the report God saw that the light was good that's the evaluation and he separated the light from the darkness that's the separation God called the light day and the darkness he called night that's the naming and then there was evening and there was morning the first day that's the chronological framework and so can you see how there is so much packed into every single day of creation we're supposed to see the power of God at work in his world in his creation and it happens as God speaks the whole creation into existence he just has to say the word and it is so let there be light and there was light notice that God doesn't knock the creation into shape somehow in the way that a builder would build a house or a baker would bake a cake both amazing creative skills by the way I wish I had those but this is different God is all powerful so he only needs to speak and creation happens now there are lots of ancient creation stories out there and these stories tell of the world emerging and forming as a result of

battles between different gods but the God of the Bible we discover is in a league of his own because God's words have a power unto themselves and just contrast that with our own words we might be able to command some things when we speak maybe as a boss at work or as a parent at home but we're aware that our words have a limited power they can never create something out of nothing and that's what the Genesis account wants us to see it wants us to see that every square inch of this universe was created through God's words that's how powerful God is and there couldn't be a better illustration of sovereign supreme power than this

I just love the way that God's power is beautifully illustrated in verse 16 with the words he also made the stars apparently there are approximately 200 billion trillion stars in the universe did you know that you can't see them all but they're there 200 billion trillion and Genesis simply tells us the creation of those stars in this throwaway line almost in a casual way oh yeah and he made the stars that's how powerful God is and so what we're talking about here when we read this account is creation on the macro level so with all the stars and all the galaxies but we're also talking about creation on the micro level with all the subatomic particles and DNA structure Genesis 1 is loudly and boldly declaring God God made all of this it is his creation and so it speaks to and points to him and so whether God did this over six literal days or over a longer period doesn't seem to be the issue here and we will get to this so just hold on but what matters here in Genesis 1 is the fact that God is the creator of everything that's the big idea that's the main point God made everything he's a powerful God who in the beginning created everything that exists that's why we're here none of this would be here without him you've all heard of Sir Isaac Newton one of history's greatest mathematicians and scientists well apparently he built a model of the solar system so that he could be helped in his studies of the world and of science and then one of his atheist friends came to see him one day and asked him who made this and Newton said no one so his friend said something along the lines of don't be so ridiculous a structure as intricate as this must have been made by someone and Newton who did believe in God said if it is so obvious to you that this model needed a maker why don't you come to the same conclusion when confronted with the real universe and isn't that what Genesis chapter 1 does it describes our real universe to confront us with a powerful creator

God and the danger is that if we remove this foundation that God is the creator and we try and understand our origins the origins of the universe the purpose of life our significance meaning why we're here what we're for if we remove the foundation that God made all this then we're going to struggle to make sense of anything you see if we're going to grasp anything about our world or ourselves or how to live we are going to be confused if we don't grasp our origins and so Genesis 1 tells us there is a powerful God and he is distinct from his creation he is above his creation not part of his creation because he is the creator and so everything that exists including you and me we're here because God says so and this is a challenge for people today but it has always been a challenge for ancient people as well the challenge to believe that God is our creator because when it comes to all the issues that matter to us today in our world if God is creator it means that we don't get to define reality we don't get to define meaning we don't get to define purpose we don't have the authority or the right to do so because if we are creatures and we are part of a creation made by a creator then only the creator has their right to define meaning and purpose and he has and he has revealed all of this to us and so this is both a comfort but it's also a challenge whoever we are whether you believe in God or not the fact that the Bible is telling us God is a creator means we need to sit up and take notice so that's our first point God is powerful second point is that God is purposeful

[11 : 05] Genesis 1 doesn't just tell us that he's powerful that's clear that's obvious but also that he is purposeful and so his creation was good indicating that it was both beautiful and functional so the account of creation here carefully expresses God's ordered and purposeful work he shapes the creation in an ordered rhythmical beautiful way and scholars actually pick up on this by highlighting various features in the text of Genesis chapter 1 and so there's the use of numbers especially the number 7 in the original Hebrew Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 consists of 7 words Genesis chapter 1 verse 2 consists of 14 words 7 times 2 and then the concluding section in Genesis chapter 2 verse 1 to 3 concluding section of the creation it has 35 words 7 times 5 if you need a hand with your mathematics so 7 or multiples of 7 is repeated all the way through this chapter and it's not just the number of words in a section it's also the number of times specific key words are repeated so God is mentioned 35 times earth is mentioned 21 times and then the phrase and it was so and it was so occurs 7 times and then we're also told 7 times unsurprisingly but 7 times

God saw that it was good why? why is it so important? well it's because by the 7th day God had finished his work of creation and he rested and so all of this is told to us with remarkable artistry in a rhythmical and in a purposeful way which means that creation account in Genesis chapter 1 and chapter 2 comes to us in a literary form that can sometimes be quite hard to interpret of course what we're told here really happened all of this is true it's not mythical it is historical but it's told with great literary skill and so the challenge for us as we read it is discerning what is what and that's why opinion differs as you know when we try and understand what these early chapters of Genesis are saying because the Bible text is far richer in meaning than sometimes we allow for that doesn't mean it's unclear it doesn't mean it's unexplainable it doesn't mean it's untrue it just means it's richer there's a depth to it and how it comes across and we see this in Genesis chapter 1 in this carefully structured account of creation that takes place over six days and so I guess at this point it's worth asking the question well what in Genesis chapter 1 is meant by a day because the Hebrew word for day the word yom can have different meanings John Lennox mathematician he suggests there are four meanings to the word day so it can refer to a literal 24 hour day but it can also refer to a longer period of time for example in Genesis chapter 2 verse 4 the word day appears in the Hebrew where it refers to the whole act of God's creation in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens it's referring to everything and this is why some people will take Genesis 1 literally insisting that it teaches God created everything in a period of six 24 hour days which would indicate the world is not more than about 6,000 years old others would be on the opposite end of the spectrum insisting that the days are long periods indicating that the age of the world fits with the popular scientific understanding of how long we've been here and still others will take a more literary interpretation of Genesis chapter 1 literary rather than literal insisting that well the chapter does tell us what happened it tells us in a highly artistic way indicating that it's not all to be taken in a literal sense and so there's always going to be discussion about how we interpret Genesis and so while we do believe that this is the inspired word of God it's infallible it never gets it wrong it tells us how God created and he did

I don't think we need to only interpret what's said here in a literal sense because we can do justice to the authority of the Bible while coming to tentative conclusions about what's being said so well the question is what is being said well we're meant to pay attention here to the form as well as the content of this account so let's just look at the form of what's said here the six days you'll see this on the screen the six days are divided into two groups of three or two triads and they're in direct contrast to what's said in Genesis chapter 1 verse 2 about the earth being formless and empty and so what we see in the first three days is that God creates the form of the world and then in the next three days the second three days God fills it and so there are parallels you'll see between days one and four two and five and three and six as God systematically forms and then he fills and so on the first day

God creates light and separates it from darkness and then on the fourth day he creates lights for the days and night the sun the moon and the stars then on the second day God creates the sea and the sky and then on the fifth day he creates fish for the water and birds for the air on the third day God creates fertile land and then on the sixth day he created animals for the land and human beings made in his image so formless to form empty to filled in the first three days God gives the creation form and in the next three days he gives it fullness and so it indicates to us doesn't it the clear progression and the definite purpose of creation it is logically ordered and it is perfectly executed by God but also see how God built into creation the ability for it to flourish and continue and so if you look at your Bible you see the land produces vegetation with the ability to multiply seeds and so on animals are also able to reproduce and human beings are commanded to be fruitful and increase in number and so through the whole process

[18 : 25] God continually declares that his work is good everything he makes is good it is very good it is the way it is supposed to be it's sorted in the very best sense of the word and that's why we can talk about the laws of nature the laws of nature didn't just appear out of nowhere or nothing all of this around us in this world even in this universe didn't just happen that's what we're being told you me this wonderful world this vast universe didn't just appear in some kind of fully functioning state there's an inbuilt purpose in everything that's inherent and it's all because that's how God designed it to be in fact the Genesis account opens up the world to us it opens up the universe to scientific discovery because God is a God of purpose and this world makes sense and it can be explored and enjoyed in other words what we discover here is not the denial of science what we see is actually the beginning of science the reality that our world is worthy of exploration and

explanation isn't due to the absence of God but it's due to the purpose of God because that's how he designed it to be in other words

Genesis fuels scientific discovery because behind all of the science there is a creator God and this even slips out in the language we see here to describe creation so even those who don't believe in the creator often can't help themselves expressing their sheer wonder at the complexity and the marvel we see in this universe for example many of us I'm guessing will have enjoyed watching the TV series like Planet Earth or Our Planet you know those ones narrated by Sir David Attenborough and the quality of the video production is stunning because it captures the planet and the animals who live in it in such a fantastic way but David Attenborough as someone who actually rejects the notion of God as creator he uses language to describe the marvel that he sees and the language he uses is often religious sounding we might even call it worship language because he'll speak in terms of the miracle of life or the enchanting creatures or the glorious display why does he speak in those terms for somebody who doesn't believe in God well it's because

God's creation is shot through with purpose and with beauty and with orderliness that we can't look at it without being amazed and stunned and this comes from Genesis chapter 1 which is charged with rhythm and logic to emphasize not just the power of God in creation but the purpose of God we're supposed to see how the pattern and the process of creation speaks of how the creator God gives purpose to everything so that's our second point God is purposeful first God is powerful second God is purposeful and third God is personal that's what Genesis 1 tells us he's personal we know we've seen already because he is a speaking God there needs to be a relational aspect a personal aspect to God's character because he speaks and he's spoken the creation into existence we've seen that but he also speaks to the people that he makes and that's why the focus in creation is not on God sorry the focus in creation is on God making a world that is fit for human beings to live in

I wonder if you noticed that you could almost say that the world was made with us in mind as if God has us in his sights and he's preparing this world as a home for us to live in did you notice the description of the world how it's bursting with details and how this world relates to humans long before the humans actually arrive on the scene it's in contrast to the brief summary he gives to the rest of the universe verse 16 he made the stars and so God gave light to see he gave land to live on and food to eat he set time in motion we have seasons and days and years because God gives day and night and so the message here is that we have a personal God who created this world for us to live in and we see this as we get to the crown of God's creation which is mankind made in his image it's telling us that humanity has this privileged place in God's purposes where God not only made us but he relates to us and he communicates with us and we see this in the people he has made he enters into this special relationship with his creatures he speaks to them in a way that they can understand he addresses them and he gives them responsibilities he tells them what to do how to live and how to relate to each other as human beings and so he's not distant he isn't remote he's not some kind of force who speaks creation and then disappears no he is transcendent because he isn't part of his creation but he is also imminent because he is involved with his creation and so here in Genesis 1 we are introduced to God the creator and to man and woman his creatures and so the scene is set here for this relationship the story of this relationship between God and man that will continue not just all the way through the rest of the Bible but will continue right the way through human history and it's all because our creator made us to know him

I guess our culture too quickly dismisses the God of the Bible either he isn't there or he doesn't care you can't see him you can't hear him so you can't know him and yet we're being told page one of the Bible that he is a personal God who relates to us and so the staggering implication is that he is there and he does care we can see him we can hear him speak and we can know him and the creation reveals this to us that's why we started our service with Psalm 19 and why we sang it together the heavens declare the glory of God the skies proclaim the work of his hands day after day they pour forth speech night after night they reveal knowledge so we can see who God is and what he is like in all that he has made so from the skies above to the very depths of the sea and everything in between it all declares the glory of God it speaks of him and so I guess the question for us is can we see it can you see God from all that he has made if you don't know this God you just need to open your eyes and look look to see his power look to see his purpose in this world but even if you do know him don't miss the magnificence and the goodness of all that he's given us because he wants us to know him and to enjoy him in this beautiful world that he has made for us

and so we should look and see how this world speaks of him every single day of our lives so the next time we climb a mountain or watch the sunset or swim in the open water or walk on the beach or eat good food or laugh with our children or hold the hand of a loved one or gaze at the stars or smell the scent of a flower it is all good because it's made by God and it points us to him because he is good now of course we know that the creation the world is no longer good we see and we will see from Genesis chapter 3 that we now live under the curse but in God's purposes the creation of humanity eventually leads to a nation and then eventually leads to one man

[27 : 40] Jesus Christ and it's in him and in him alone that we discover God's ultimate purpose for everything and so later on in the Bible in the book of Colossians chapter 1 we read this about Jesus for in him all things were created things in heaven and on earth visible and invisible whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities all things have been created through him and for him he is before all things and in him all things hold together and he is the head of the body the church he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through his blood shed on the cross so we were made by God and we exist to know God and yet we have all turned away from God despite the splendid revelation of himself in creation and in the person of his son

Jesus Christ we've turned away and yet the good news is that God is gracious and God is patient with us he even entered into his creation in Jesus Christ in order to die for us and so it is only through his death for our sin that we can be reconciled to God and the good creation that is now under a curse only that can be renewed and restored through Jesus Christ and so whatever our world says to us whatever world views there are out there the world view the perspective the one that gives the best reasons for hope and meaning and purpose and significance is this world view the one that tells us there is a creator God and that God has come to us in Jesus Christ so that we might know him and in knowing him we understand where we came from our origins we understand where we're going heading towards the new creation and so we understand how we should live in the world right now all of this helps make sense of our lived experience of human beings as human beings all of this makes sense of the deepest longings of our hearts and it's all because we have a God who made us who knows us who loves us and wants us to be in relationship with him and for Noah who pesticides they inherit but what things look like for the other and for people is unable to to be through this of our relationships and for people are unable to overcome and you are not aware of our lives of a tranquil and whole happening of avoiding those inside and they have what food and provide you and that can only