

Sermon Notes

Genesis 1:1

“How to Read Genesis, part I – Ancient Introduction”

A Sermon Series on Genesis and Creation

September 13, 2015

Introduction

- 1) Genesis is by far one of the most important books in the Bible.
 - a) Easily one of the top ten (if not top five) books all Christians should know well.
 - i) Along with such critical texts as Romans, John, Hebrews, Exodus, Isaiah, Galatians, Psalms, 1Peter, Acts, etc.
 - ii) Besides creation and the fall, Genesis covers: Noah and the flood, the Tower of Babel, the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac & Jacob) and the foundational covenant given to Abraham, the story of Joseph and how Israel ends up in Egypt, which sets up the story of Moses and the Exodus.
 - b) You can divide the whole story of the Bible by the Book of Genesis.
 - i) By the Fall.

Before the Fall = Genesis 1:1 – Genesis 2:25

After the Fall = Genesis 3:1 – Revelation 22:21
 - ii) By theme.

Creation = Genesis 1:1 – Genesis 11:3

Redemption = Genesis 12:1 – Revelation 22:21
- 2) Besides Revelation, Genesis is the book that brings the most interest.
- 3) Genesis is one of the most beautiful books in the Bible to read, both in its wording and in the stories it tells.
 - a) Note, by “story” I do not mean something that isn't historically true or merely legendary. (Ex.: “Stop telling stories” or “faerie stories.”)
 - b) But something that is historical, but also includes a purposeful narrative of meaning. (Ex.: “Don't just tell me your history, tell me your story.” Chronology + Meaning)
 - c) Genesis is history, but it is more than simply stating historical facts. Luke 3:38; Rom 4:1ff; 5:14; 1Cor 15:22,45; 1Tim 2:13-14; Heb 11:4; 1Pet 3:20; Jude 14
- 4) Genesis is probably the most attacked & questioned book in the Bible.
 - a) The tension between science and Genesis is frequently cited by atheists, critics and secularists as one of the major reasons they have problems with Christianity.
 - b) All moderns, even children, quickly have many questions about Genesis, especially relating to creation. To give a few examples:
 - i) What about the dinosaurs? Why doesn't Genesis mention the dinosaurs?
 - ii) Is Genesis just myth? Is it just a science textbook?
 - iii) How old is the earth/universe? Young earth creationists argue for less than 10,000 years, while modern cosmologists believe the earth is around 4.5 billion years old, and the universe is around 13.8 billion years old.

- iv) How does the six days of creation work? How can you have the earth, light and plants before the creation of the sun?
 - v) How can there be death, disease and decay before humans, if the Bible teaches sin entered the world through Adam's fall?
 - vi) Did the laws of thermodynamics and entropy exist before the Fall?
 - vii) How can there be a historical Adam if humans evolved from lesser primates?
 - viii) Does evolution and the fossil record disprove Genesis?
 - ix) Where did Cain get his wife?
 - x) The Bible teaches early humans lived for centuries, how is that possible?
 - xi) Did Noah's flood really cover the whole earth?
 - xii) How can you get that many animals on an ark?
- 5) All these questions are good questions and should be asked.
- a) Christians are called to use their minds to be lovers of truth. Prov 1:7,22; Zech 8:19; Matt 22:37; Rom 12:2; Eph 4:15; 1John 3:18
 - b) We are called to wrestle, reverently, with the written Word of God. Gen 32:24-32; Ezra 7:10; Ps 119; Is 1:18; Acts 17:11; 2Tim 3:16-17
 - c) We will be touching on many of these questions over the next few weeks.
- 6) There is a problem, however, when we begin by asking questions of Genesis the text doesn't focus on or is concerned about, which quickly distracts us from Genesis' main message.
- a) All sides of the debate easily fall into this trap; including fundamentalist young earth creationists, liberal theistic evolutionists, atheist Darwinists, etc.
 - b) We end up majoring in the minors, as it were. There is a place for the minor (scientific questions), but not at the expense of the major (themes of Genesis)
- 7) To hear Genesis for its own sake we have to begin by hearing it through the lens of the Ancient Near Eastern world views in which it originally spoke to and against.

About Ancient Near Eastern Pagan Religion

- 1) Ancient pagan Near Eastern creation myths are numerous and contradictory.
 - a) The Old Testament interacts with ancient Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Canaanite and Egyptian creation myths.
 - b) Let us look briefly at the creation story from the Babylonian Enuma Elish.¹
- 2) Remember, everyone, especially the elites of ancient society, would all believe these myths.
 - a) There is no secularism, agnosticism or atheism.
 - b) To blaspheme the gods brings scorn and death.
 - c) Ancient Mesopotamia religion isn't about self-fulfillment, identity or self-expression, as it is for us moderns. (Nor are these the purpose for biblical Christianity!)
 - d) Ancient Mesopotamia religion is about terror, to appease the chaotic forces that arbitrarily govern the universe.

¹ The text might have been written down around the 18th to 16th centuries BC, though some of the stories could go back to ancient Sumerian or Akkadian cultures, including during the time of the first patriarch, Abraham (c.2200-2050 BC).

The Universe According to the Enuma Elish

- 1) At first only two primeval waters existed. (Primeval waters are chaotic & scary.)
 - a) The primeval sea (called Apsu).
 - b) And the monstrous chaos of the seas (Tiamat).
- 2) From these two primordial waters come the gods.
 - a) The gods make war on Apsu (the primeval sea) and kill him.
 - b) This enrages Tiamat (Apsu's consort) who makes war on the usurping gods.
 - i) She (Tiamat) takes the form of a great dragon.
 - ii) She creates all the monsters and evil spirits of the world.
 - iii) Some of the gods join her, including Kingu, her son and new consort.
 - c) The storm god Marduk slays Tiamat.
 - i) He is made king of the gods.
 - ii) Marduk makes the heavens and the earth from Tiamat's body.
 - iii) He also makes humans from the blood of Kingu and clay to do the labor of the gods so that he and his fellow deities can be at leisure.
- 3) Recap Akkadian cosmology in a nutshell:
 - a) From the primordial chaos waters come the gods.
 - b) At best the gods are capricious and at worst evil.
 - c) The world is filled with monsters and evil chaotic spirits.
 - d) Humanity is made to be slaves for the gods.
 - e) Thus religion is about appeasing the gods who care little about humanity.
 - f) Basically, it is something out of a gothic fantasy horror novel, such as the worlds of Robert E. Howard (1906-1936) or H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937).

The True Story. Genesis 1:1-2:3

- 1) Now imagine someone telling you all those myths are false, and instead read you **Genesis 1**.
- 2) What questions would you now ask?
 - a) Such questions as outer space being made of water, or that early humans living for centuries, wouldn't bother you in the least.
 - b) And such questions about dinosaurs or entropy wouldn't enter into your mind.
 - c) Ancient pagans, however, would be shocked by Genesis, and ask the central questions about the doctrines that Genesis is teaching.
- 3) For example, a pagan would be startled and ask such questions as:
 - a) Wait, there is only one God?!
 - b) This God isn't created by the Creator of all things?! He is eternal?
 - c) Even the primordial waters are part of His creation?
 - d) The creation is orderly, has purpose and is beautiful?

- e) This one God is so powerful that He doesn't have to struggle or war with other gods (which don't exist), but simply speaks everything into existence?
 - f) The creation isn't filled with monsters and evil spirits, but is just nature?
 - i) Even the darkness, the night and sea monsters are part of His orderly creation?
 - ii) Such things as the sun, moon, trees, waters, etc. are not gods or spirits but natural?
 - g) And the creation is good?
 - i) It's even blessed by God?
 - ii) Wait, God is good?!
 - h) Humanity is the pinnacle of creation (i.e. very good) and is in the very image of God?
 - i) Humanity is given dominion over creation to be good stewards? (We are lords and not slaves?)
 - j) The creation is so perfect that even God rested at its completion?
- 3) Genesis uses the language of the pagan creation stories, but is in stark rebellion against them.
- 4) We can, and should, still ask all those modern scientific questions about Genesis.
- a) Which is next Sunday's sermon.
 - b) However, let us not miss the main themes of Genesis, which are much more glorious, meaningful and important.
- 5) The beginning of Genesis tells us not just the true creation story.

- a) More importantly it proclaims to us who the Creator really is.

Ps 19:1-2 – *“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”*

- b) It causes worship and reverence.

Ps 111:1-4 – *“Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart, in the company of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the LORD; They are studied by all who delight in them. Splendid and majestic is His work, and His righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonders to be remembered; The LORD is gracious and compassionate.”*

- c) And for us on the other side of the cross, we know the true purpose of creation.

John 1:1-5, 14,16-18 – *“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 came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”*