

# Genesis 1:1 Sermon

Genesis 1:1-5

1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God[b] swept over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

## Classic openings to books.

When he was nearly thirteen my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow. TKAMB "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. Anna Karenina "In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing" A river runs through it "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." 1984 It was love at first sight. The first time Yossarian saw the chaplain he fell madly in love with him. Catch 22

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. - Pride and prejudice

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, A tale of two cities

Two households, both alike in dignity, In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,- William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet

## Introduction

The words of this book have shaped our culture, imagination and mythology - we are haunted by Genesis. Promised land, Forbidden fruit, garden of eden, Ashes to ashes, My brother's keeper, Be fruitful and multiply, Breath of life, Fire and brimstone...

Ironic - for a passage which says 'let there be light' More heat than light. So let's study it properly.

## But first what genesis is not.

**It is not a scientific text.** It predates the scientific method by at least 2.5k years. Nevertheless the very possibility of science is founded on the fact that the universe is ordered, and runs according to consistent and measurable laws. Einstein says *"The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible"* Science is not at odds with Religion. Many pre-eminent scientists are believers. Some religion is anti-science. And some scientists are anti-religion. But modern science is built on this fact that the universe is constant ordered, measurable and can be comprehended.

**Not a proof of the existence of God.** Instead God is the ultimate answer to the greatest question. How did all this come into being? God. Why is the world so ordered, beautiful? Issac Newton - *"He who thinks half-heartedly will not believe in God; but he who really thinks has to believe in God."*

Some say that belief in God means you don't need to ask any more questions. But on the contrary, because we know the ultimate answer, we can be confident that there are answers to our questions.

## So what is it?

I want to say it is mythology - but I fear I will be misunderstood.

Tolkein *"I believe that legends and myths are largely made of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode"* Myths are the stories which make sense of who we are. And Genesis is true - not in the way that a news report is true, but in the way that a great work of literature is true. Hamlet is profoundly true in its insight into the human condition. Is it literally true? Surely that is missing the point.

**And the stories we believe about our beginnings defines who we are and how we behave.** Ideas have consequences. Never forget that Darwin's natural selection and the survival of the fittest led to Eugenics and concepts of a master race. If you believe that you are a random event in a meaningless universe then it is hard to argue that human beings ultimately have worth.

## When was it written?

Who was this written to? Important question in understanding it. It is a remarkable text, the first part of the Pentateuch or Book of the Law which makes up the first 5 books of our Bible. The traditional understanding that it was written by Moses is unlikely - but there will be an oral tradition stretching back to that, and codified at some point in the History of Israel. The first glimpse of the book itself is in 2 Kings 22 - when Josiah rediscovers it. How did it get lost? It is written to form a people, to shape a community, to define an identity and of course to define what it means to be in relationship with God.

## So to the text.

### v1 Now actually this is not the absolute beginning.

*"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth"*. The beginning appears to be a period of time - perhaps a very long one when God was creating the heavens and the earth. God of course has no beginning. He creates beginnings because he creates time. Jesus speaks of this time in John 17:24 *Father, I want those you have given me to see the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.* And it does not explain the origins of supernatural beings, the fall of angels and so on. So there is this category of 'beginnings' which is out of sight.

### v2. Now the earth was formless and empty,

And so our creation begins with a vivid picture of prehistory. It is chaotic nothingness. It is not 'good'. But God breathes over it. The word for wind in v2 is breath.

### So creation is the process of God bringing order from Chaos.

Creation took time - it was a process. What that looked like in practice we don't know. But God speaks and order emerges. And he still does that. For people living in a society that was crumbling, or in exile this was vital - He still is, So don't be afraid when things seem to be crumbling. Left to themselves, things descend in chaos. And our calling echoes that. We bring order out of Chaos. But of course the sun still rises and the seasons still change. God has not given up.

### And God is bringing light out of Darkness.

v3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. Light is the first step of bringing Order. He can do this for you too. Maybe you remember a moment when he did. When the light came on, when God makes the universe comprehensible. The first day.

## Conclusion

In the beginning God... God is the ultimate answer. When we try and make sense of the world science is a marvellous tool, But without God it can never answer the greatest questions. Why am I here? What is the purpose of all this? *The chief end of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.*