

John 1:1-5 Genesis 1:1-5; 1:24-2:3 Sermon: “Why Are We Here?” by Michael R. Burkley, July 10, 2022
(see end of document for picture that illustrates the story of Creation in Genesis 1:-2:3)

The witness of the Bible is that God created all things in six days and rested on the seventh. I’m going to read all of Genesis 1:1-2:3 in my sermon today, so I’m just going to read verse one right now, and verse one summarizes the whole passage. The ancient Hebrews who first knew this story weren’t so much interested in the *How* of Creation as much as the *Why* of Creation. As you listen to this passage from God’s Word in my sermon today, ask yourself how it answers the “Why question” of all Creation.

Genesis 1:1 *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*

“Where did I come from?” is a question that most parents can expect to hear out of their children’s mouths at one time or another. And somewhere between birth and the end of adolescence kids generally figure that out, with or without their parents help – hopefully with their help. But there’s another question that kid’s don’t generally ask their parents, though they need the help of their parents in answering that question even more than the first one. The question is not “Where did I come from?” but rather “Why am I here?”

I’m a scientist at heart – I’ve earned my Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry and worked as a research chemist in polyurethane coating and have been a member of the American Chemical Society for 42 years now. Science is very useful in answering the question, “Where did I come from?” but science can’t even begin to answer the heart behind the question of “Why are we here?”

The questions science answers are incredibly important to us. I dare say a good chunk of us wouldn’t be alive today without the results of medical research, and none of us would be here if we didn’t have agricultural science. But for that critically important question, “Why are we here?” science doesn’t have much if anything to say. And that’s terrible, because being able to answer that question in a reasoned and human way forms the basis for answering a host of other questions: questions like: Is there any meaning in life?” or “What should I do?” for just about any situation.

The Bible doesn’t often give answers to our “Why?” questions. When people ask me “Why?” in the face of some tragedy I usually can’t pull an answer from the Scriptures, or at least one that’s useful to hear when we’re hurting. When we can’t get an answer to the “Why?” we often turn to other questions: what are we going to do now? Do *now* in the face our hurt. Are we going to turn away from God in hurt and anger or turn towards God, the God who created us, loves us, redeemed us.

But though the Bible doesn’t often answer our “Why” questions, it does, right from the start, give us that answer in a way that helps inform all of life.

I’ve said that I’m a scientist at heart, and I’m a pastor, too. I believe that the Bible is literally God’s word to us, to draw us to God and to equip us to be God’s representatives in the world. The word “literally” means, “according to the words.” I am convinced that we need to read the Bible, as best we can, according to the words of the Bible, as the authors and original readers would. That means that we should read poetry as poetry, not prose; parables as parables and not history; the Book of Revelation of God’s example of apocalyptic literature and not a sober history of the future, though it does tell of what will come. That’s reading those things “literally” as the words were intended to be read.

I think we need to read the record of creation in Genesis 1 literally, and I’ll show you why and what that means for our “Why” questions right now. I have an outline of Genesis one as a handout as your leave, and I hope you’ll pick one up to look over and help to understand this passage.

[Ge 1:1] *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [2] Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

[3] And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. [4] God saw that the light was good, and he 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.”

Here on the first day God creates light and sees that it’s good and separates the light from the darkness and names the light day and the darkness night. A lot of Christians think that this first day of creation was a twenty-four hour

day, because that's how long days are, and it does say the first day. Hold on to that question for a few minutes and we'll examine it again. But for now, I'd like you to help me by a group of you to represent the First Day of Creation – you're the day and the night.

The Scripture continues: [6] *And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." [7] So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. [8] God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.*"

This vault, what some older translations call the "firmament" is created by God to separate the waters above and the waters below. From the rest of Scripture we can see that the "waters above" are the clouds and the waters under the sky are the seas, but more about them later. Most of us have seen the ocean, and we see the sky and the clouds almost every day. God created them, and it was the second day. Would this group be the second day – remember, you're the sky and sea.

And creation continues: [9] *And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. [10] God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.*"

[11] *Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. [12] The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. [13] And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.*

On the Third Day of Creation God rearranges things, gathering all the water below into one place and caused dry land to appear. But now God does something more. He creates life—green plants and trees, and God declares it all good.

Would you be this Third Day of Creation? Remember, the focus of Day Three is the Dry Land and the vegetation.

I've run out of space on this side for the days of Creation, so we'll have to go to the back row, opposite of Day 1 to place Day 4. Would you be the group that remembers Day 4? Keep in mind your neighbors over on Day One as well. Remember that Day one was where God separated the Light from the darkness and named them Day and Night. But here's a question? In order to have day and night you have to have a sun and a rotating earth, and there's no Sun yet. How do day and night happen? I've heard all sorts of explanations, all of which are unreasonable, all of which depend on not reading the text literally – according to its words. But what does the text say? It's only on Day 4 that the Sun and the Moon are created, and they're created for a reason. Listen:

[14] *And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, [15] and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. [16] God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. [17] God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, [18] to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. [19] And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.*

Did you hear that? The Sun and the Moon were created to "Govern" the day and the night – to guide it into usefulness – to serve as markers for the days and years and to give light on the earth. And God said, "That's a good thing." That's why, the Bible says, the Sun and the Moon and stars are here, to remind us of God and to give light to the earth. Give light—for who? Let's keep reading about the Fifth Day of Creation. Would you hold the place of the Fifth Day of Creation? You'll see what you'll be doing in a moment. And remember your neighbors across the way—the Second Day of Creation where the sky and the seas were created.

[20] *And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." [21] So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. [22] God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." [23] And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.*

On the Fifth Day of Creation God creates the fish and the birds and blesses them and tells them spread out and fill their respective living spaces. Like the Sun and the Moon govern the Day and the Night, the birds and the fish have the freedom and the command to multiply – a type of ruling over the regions given them by God. Day Fivers, is there any relationship between you and Day 2? But time is short, let's move on to Day Six. Would you remember Day 6, and also remember your neighbors across on Day Three? Listen to God's Word.

[24] And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. [25] God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

[26] Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

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

[28] God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

[29] Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. [30] And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

[31] God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

It's on Day Six that God creates all the animals that fill the earth, and God said that it was good. And along with animals, related to them but different, God creates humanity, male and female, all in God's image, and God said of their creation, that it was VERY good, the first time God said that, and it was about us.

But why did God made humanity in his image—as his representative in this world? Here's the why question answered. He gave humanity the calling to fill the earth and subdue it – and subdue doesn't mean to crush creation but to wrestle it into shape – for the work of creation wasn't finished. to rule over all the birds and the fish and animals of this world – to rule over them as God rules over them – in creativity and grace. Now I think we're done a very good job of filling the earth, but not ruling in it as God's representatives. We crush and destroy far too often – more often than sustaining and lifting up it seems. But that's the story of Genesis chapter 3 and that's the story of why Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God came into this world to redeem us from our sins, our disobedience to God, and to make things right.

And with the end of Day Six the work of creation comes to an end. *[2:1] Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. [2] By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. [3] Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

I'm not going to ask any group of us to represent God here, because in fact, all of us represent God as people made in the image of God. But why did God rest? Was he tired? No. Scripture says that all of Creation was the work of God's fingers. He didn't have to exert himself at all. So why rest? Back then only the rulers, the bosses, rested. So when God rests, everyone back then would understand that God was sitting on his throne, ruling over all creation, sustaining it. And they would see that we are made in God's image, in relationship to God, ruling on this earth as kings and queens under the authority of the High King of Heaven.

Do you see the answer to the Why question? We're here because God created us to be here to be the good rulers of Creation—to act like God. That's the meaning of those words, according to the words of the Bible,

literally. But I also want to ask you, does this passage literally teach that God created the world in six twenty-four hour days? Look at the pattern of the story. Day One matches up with Day 4, the day and the night governed by the Sun and the Moon. Day two matches up with Day 5, the sky and the sea – the realms of the birds and the fish and fill them and use them. And Day Three matches up with Day Six, the animals roaming over the dry land and eating the vegetation, and related to the animals but different, the creation of Humanity with the special relationship to God with the call to rule well over this world, just as God does. And over all, is Day Seven, where God rules over the Universe, and God has no peer, no matching Day because God is God. To read this passage is not to see the “How” of God created, but the “Why” of Creation. It’s a poem speaking not science but relationship. That’s the literal meaning of this story of Creation. That’s what God did and why God did it!

In the end, that is the answer to all of our “Why” questions, that God is God and that we have the honor of being his representatives in this world. We’ve all done a terrible job at that, but that’s why Christ has come, to be the perfect human being, to pay the way for us to be redeemed so we can be what God has called us to be. How are you going to rule in this world this week, as people made in God’s image or for yourself?

The Days of Creation
Or
Why Are We Here?

