

## **Genesis 1:27**

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

‘Genesis is just a collection of ancient myths and legends that no one takes seriously today’

- Already that’s got some of you listening!
- It got me listening when a circuit steward in one of my previous circuits
- Said as much to me at the beginning of a Bible study on Genesis
- But of course it was not a new idea
- 100 years earlier Hermann Gunkel, Old Testament professor at Berlin
- said that the whole of Genesis was not history but legend
- and that Genesis 1-11 was the story of the impossible set in a legendary age

The first eleven chapters of Genesis are vitally important chapters in the Bible

- But no one can seriously say that they are easy
- All of the first five books of the Bible (Genesis-Deuteronomy, the Pentateuch)
- Have been the subject of intense source criticism
- Which more or less suggests that they are just a pastiche of several ancient writings
- Parts of it have been placed on a par with the Gilgamesh Epic
- A story about a Babylonian flood
- And for the last 150 years, creation has been challenged by Darwin’s evolution
- So that any notion of creation and a creator has been considered unscientific
- when compared with the evolutionary hypothesis

When considering Genesis 1 and 2, there are a lot of issues to be addressed

- that I am not going to take on
- How old is the earth? Can a Christian believe in evolution?
- One might even be tempted to ask, ‘does it all matter?’
- Its undoubtedly quite common for people who study science subjects
- To conveniently forget theology and Genesis when they are doing science
- And conveniently forget scientific theory when they are studying Genesis
- There is a very real sense in which that will not do
- But we cannot address everything in the scope of one sermon, even one of mine

Genesis is a book about origins – children ask origin questions that adults are afraid to ask

- Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?
- And to every answer that we give, children like to ask a supplementary ‘why?’
- The first eleven chapters of Genesis deal with origin questions
- In what some biblical scholars call aetiological myths
- I tend to avoid the word ‘myth’ because to most people it means something untrue

Before we dive into the first eleven chapters of Genesis we must ask what sort of book it is.

- And strangely for help we are going to the book of Revelation
- In Revelation we have a curious blend of real people, real churches
- And fantastic apocalyptic imagery – seven-headed dragons coming out of the sea
- In Genesis we have people who seem to be much the same as us
- But we also have talking snakes and fruit that gives knowledge
- Revelation gives us an insight into the future, Genesis gives us an insight into the past

## I IT TELLS US ABOUT THE MAKER

Even the most convinced evolutionists

- find it difficult to account for the origin of the worlds from nothing
- and life from the primordial slime
- everyone can look up at the sky, or across the seashore to ocean
- and wonder at the complexity and beauty of design in nature
- the question is ‘what was there at the beginning?’ and Genesis provides the answer
- ‘In the beginning God’
- evolutionary theory can suggest a method of procedure – but it cannot answer
- who did it? Or why did it happen?

Genesis is a theological book and consequently its great theme concerns God

- the God who created the world, what he created it to be like
- and the reestablishment of God’s original purpose in creation
- the revealed Old Testament name for God is Yahweh
- (sometimes but mistakenly spelt Jehovah) – this God is the creator

The maker of all things is introduced in the Bible’s very first phrase, ‘In the beginning God’

- God is the maker of all things visible and invisible
- The order of creation, its majesty, its splendour, all reflect his glory
- But he is beyond all that we can perceive with our senses

You might wander into the kitchen and there see a most lovely blackberry and apple pie

- The very existence of the lovely blackberry and apple pie suggests a cook exists
- My suggestion is that you could leave the blackberries, apples and pastry there forever
- And they would never make themselves into a pie – and even if they did
- Who would put the sugar on the top? But looking at the lovely pie
- And cutting it open – we would be surprised to see the cook looking up at us

The Old Testament was a world of many gods – but the distinction was made

- Between the God of the Fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph)
- And the gods of the nations (the pagan deities of the Gentiles)
- God alone created the heavens and the earth
- All the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens (Psalm 96:5)
- And these gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth
- Will perish from the earth and from under the heavens (Jeremiah 10:11)
- God alone is eternal and all else owes its origin and existence to him

The creation story is hugely complex in its Hebrew form

- Yet at the same time, simple, profound and perfectly clear
- Having created all the raw materials – formless, empty and dark (Genesis 1:1-2)
- By his powerful word, God brings form, order and light into his creation

Throughout these early chapters of Genesis we should remember that ‘in the beginning’

- Anticipates ‘at the end’ when ‘the last things will be like the first things’
- With a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17, Revelation 21:1)

## II IT TELLS US ABOUT MANKIND

Genesis tells us about our maker but it also tells us about mankind

- For the relationship between maker and mankind is the great theme of the Bible
- And Genesis gives us an insight as to how the work of God in the past
- Will tie in with the work of God in the future
- Particularly Genesis is interested in a land and blessing for God's people

I am not saying that the first chapter of Genesis is unscientific, as if science is always right

- But I think that it is right to say that science is non-scientific
- There are many questions that Genesis sets out to answer
- And many questions that Genesis does not set out to answer
- Our challenge is to make sure we hear the answers to the questions it is answering

When God began his creative work, the land was formless, empty and dark

- But into this darkness, God commanded the light to shine
- So that as the light of the sun broke in upon the primeval darkness
- It heralded the dawn of God's blessing
- No wonder that John 1, the New Testament, begins in the same way
- Introducing Jesus as the one who was both with God and was God in the beginning
- And whose creative power caused the light to shine in the darkness

In every act of creation, God is the one who knows what is good – for mankind

- He is intent only on providing the good for the man and woman he creates
- The creation of the first man and woman is one of subtle contrasts with all before
- No longer does God say 'let there be' but 'let us make'
- Although there is only one God, God exists in an economy of what we
- (for want of a better word) call 'persons' – three in one and one in three
- a creative community of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- and when humankind is created, male and female are created in God's image (1:27)
- 'image' is not easy to understand – perhaps the good distinguishing us from animals
- perhaps this points to the 'creative' power in music, painting, sculpture
- perhaps this points to the power of rational speech – not like a parrot
- perhaps this points to the relationship that humans have with each other and God

If all human beings ultimately have a common ancestor, as Genesis teaches that we do

- the important truth that we can learn from this is that the human race is one
- Christians should therefore be in the forefront of affirming the oneness of humanity
- Carefully using language: the human race is one, society cannot be multi-racial
- People maybe of different ethnic or tribal groups
- But when we see other human beings as being fundamentally different from us
- Then we are being neither biblical nor Christian
- The general teaching, Genesis 1, is supplemented by specific teaching, Genesis 2
- The first man is made from the dust of the earth but the breath of God gives life
- For convenience, we speak of body and spirit but man is one
- A body without the breath of life is a corpse, a spirit without a body is a ghost
- But a body with a living spirit is a person

### III IT TELLS US ABOUT MARRIAGE

Again, evolutionary theory finds it difficult to explain why there should be male and female

- But in Genesis the creation of humanity is specifically noted as ‘male and female’
- It is as if God created man and woman in relationship
- Reflecting his own personal relationship with himself in the Godhead

Adam (which means ‘of the earth’) was put into the garden where he could have ‘rest’

- This rest was ‘gardening’ – not drudgery but not idleness
- Everything was set for man to enjoy life
- The Garden of Eden perhaps more accurate Garden in Eden
- Was filled with beautiful lush trees, a river that divided into four headwaters
- The lands were rich in gold and precious jewels
- Man’s life in the garden was to be characterised by worship and obedience
- But one thing was lacking – there was no helper or partner who corresponded to man
- From among the animals – a special act of creation of the woman was necessary
- The essence of partnership is expressed by the woman being taken from man’s side
- The other question is what she is to help him in doing
- But the answer is obvious enough – the woman is to help the man in child-bearing

There are a number of important things to learn from this passage

- The man is not incomplete without the woman
- But he cannot reproduce without her – she is the one who helps bear children
- The woman is not incomplete without the man
- They complement one another – so that they can be partners together
- The man is delighted with the woman because she is of the same flesh and bone
- And of the same essential nature
- She is neither an inferior nor superior being – she is not a race apart
- And as they were of one flesh at the very beginning so they have the bond of marriage

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Genesis 2:24-25

This simple description of married life, often rendered from the older translations

- Leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh – is the fundamental human relationship
- The comment that they were naked and felt no shame
- Prepares the reader for what is to come after the fall into sin
- And relates the reader to his or her own experience
- But here the relationship between the man and the woman is holy and pure

It may not be a politically correct thing to say but only two chapters into Genesis

- We read of the uniqueness of the relationship between the man and the woman
- And the holiness and purity of the marriage bond
- The account may be a little coy as to what becoming one flesh means
- But it seems to me it means both sexual intimacy and common parenthood

- I IT TELLS US ABOUT THE MAKER
- II IT TELLS US ABOUT MANKIND
- III IT TELLS US ABOUT MARRIAGE

In the beginning God – the opening words of Genesis introduce us to our maker

- As the book and later the Bible unfolds we will learn more about God
- But we must never forget that he is our creator, he made us
- The opening chapters also prepare us for our fall into doubt and disobedience
- And how God plans to rescue a people for himself
- Even when God had brought the raw materials into being
- The earth was formless and empty and there was darkness over the deep
- His creative work begins when he calls light to shine in the darkness
- This is a situation that will later be repeated in a spiritual context
- When men and women are in the wilderness of doubt and disobedience
- But God in Jesus Christ will shine as the Light of the World

It tells us about mankind and how God created us in his own image

- Unique among everything that he had made – made in his image
- To be in a relationship with him, to worship him
- To share in creativity and the rational, spoken word

God wants to bless mankind – his creation – that we might share in his ‘rest’

- Not in the sense of idleness but in the sense of delighting in every day
- From Genesis we learn the oneness of all humanity
- There is no room for slavery, for exploitation, for robbing others of human dignity
- This must shape all our thinking and all our relationships
- From Genesis we learn the complementary nature of man and woman

We live in an age where sociological changes allow same-sex partnerships

- And modern science can even arrange for children to be born to a partner
- Without ever meeting the man who is the natural father
- For some people this is about the rights of the parents
- Whereas it seems to me that we ought to talk of the responsibilities of the parents
- And the rights of the children

Perhaps in our sex saturated society the phrase ‘naked and they felt no shame’

- Should teach us something about the holiness and purity of marriage
- And degradation that has come from so much misuse of God’s gifts

The garden was a place in which the man and the woman could enjoy God’s presence

- Peace and fellowship with him and with one another
- The theme of ‘rest’ is a reminder of what lies ahead
- For it will be a long time before God’s people return
- To peace and fellowship with God and with one another
- God our maker will have to take mortal flesh in Jesus Christ
- To become the second Adam, head of a new order
- Of men and women who, in Christ, are a new creation