

# OpenTheo

## Introduction to Genesis - Part 2

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### **The Bible for Today with John Stott** - webteam

John Stott shows how Genesis is 'God Breathed' and must be regarded primarily as a book of salvation and not of science.

## Transcript

[Music] God created these things, all things, in the universe out of nothing. Not that the whole universe came into being instantaneously, but that when God began, He had no raw material to work upon. There was nothing in existence but Himself.

But in the beginning, that is in the beginning of time, God created the heavens of the earth. Therefore, before this beginning, there was no creation. There was only God.

[Music] Welcome to the Bible for today with John Stott. The 20th century gave us a number of great evangelical Bible teachers, and for many, John Stott stood above them all. Perhaps no one raised the standard of biblical teaching as did Stott.

When a TV reporter once asked him, "You've had a brilliant academic career, a first at Cambridge, rector at 29, Chaplain to the Queen," "What's your ambition now?" John replied, "To be more like Jesus." It was Jesus Christ that He made preeminent in all His teaching. Whenever He preached His home church of all souls, laying in place, it was packed, and people even sat on the stairs. During John Stott's centenary, we are bringing you some of His finest Bible teaching from almost 60 years of ministry.

[Music] Last week, we heard one of the earliest recordings of John Stott, which was recorded after he preached the sermon in church. As was his preference at the time. We looked at the very beginning of the Bible, Genesis, and saw that the Bible is God breathed and divine.

So we must therefore study it with reverence. We also saw that the Bible is profitable and has a practical purpose, and we must study it with obedience. Today, John Stott concludes his message by giving us a bird's eye view of Genesis chapter 1. You'll find it helpful to have your Bible open in front of you.

The Holy Scriptures are able to instruct us for salvation. That is the grand end and object of Scripture. And salvation must be understood in its all-embracing sense, including not only the justification of sinners by which they are accepted in the sight of God, but their centrifuge.

The only way to make a decision is to make a decision. The process by which they are made righteous in their character and conduct. Then you see, Scripture presents Christ to us so that we are justified by faith in Him.

It makes us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, verse 15. And this is to all Scripture. All Scripture is God breathed and all Scripture is profitable.

And therefore, the Bible is not the only way to make a decision. And the Bible is not the only way to make a decision. And the Bible is not the only way to make a decision.

For all Scripture, all Scripture is God breathed and all Scripture is profitable. And therefore, if it's true of all Scripture, it's true of Genesis. We must regard Genesis primarily not as a book of science, because science changes constantly, but as a book of salvation, which is man's abiding, universal, and unchanging need.

In and through the early chapters of Genesis, God's purpose is not to disclose by special revelation scientific truths, which could be discovered by empirical investigation. But rather to reveal religious and moral truths, which, if not revealed by God, could and would never be known. What we say about these chapters is not that they're unscientific and may be contradicted by science, but that they are known scientific, their purpose being different from the aims and objects of natural science.

We sum up, then, our main approach to the book of Genesis. It is twofold. One, since these chapters are God breathed and have a divine origin, we must study them with reverence, listening, humbly to God's word as he speaks it through these chapters.

Two, since these chapters are profitable and have a practical purpose, we must study them with obedience, resolved to be not any hearers, but doers of God's word. So much for our approach to the book of Genesis. Now, the second section of this first address concerns the manthrust of the first chapter of the book.

We're going to go into greater detail next time, but I want now to give you a brief bird's eye view of chapter 1. And as we look at it as a whole, there are three major truths which stand out. First, in the beginning, God. Thus one, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Now, read a confederate struck by the majestic simplicity of this opening sentence. God is introduced with art apology, without explanation, without proof or definition. The author is, of course, writing to believers in Israel.

And his aim is to affirm that the God of the covenant of Israel is the God of creation. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who redeemed his people from bondage in Egypt, is an empettic tribal deity, equivalent to kimosh, the God of the Malabites, or Milcom, the God of the Ammonites, but the true and living God who created the universe and man on earth. The opening words of Genesis, declaring that God is the creator of all things, the heavens and the earth, dispairs of all the various alternatives which have ever been suggested.

The universe, as its origin, not to some heavenly warfare between the gods, as the pagan creation stories affirmed with what Alexander McLaren calls their monstrosities and pure relatives. Note to an eternal conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, as some dualistic systems have affirmed. Note the operation of blind irrational forces, some unexplained evolutionary process, as unbelieving humanists would have us believe today, but to a free and sovereign act, or succession of acts, of the Creator's will.

Moreover, God created these things, all things, and the universe out of nothing. Oh, not that, in Charles Wesley's famous hymn, "At His voice creation sprang at once to sight." Not that the whole universe came into being instantaneously, but that when God began, He had no raw material to work upon. There was nothing in existence but Himself.

For in the beginning, that is in the beginning of time, God created the heavens of the earth. Therefore, before this beginning, there was no creation. There was only God.

This is, in fact, the consistent teaching of Scripture. God inhabits eternity, not time. Isaiah 57, 15.

He is the great "I AM." The eternal is self-existent, one. He alone has immortality. Again, some 90 verse 2, "Before the mountains were brought forth, ever thy had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." So then God is not dependent on the universe.

He existed eternally before He led the universe. Rather is the universe dependent upon Him. And it was with His first act of creation, that time and history began.

This truth is also implied by the Hebrew word that is used in verse 1 of the universe, in verse 21 of the origin of animal life, and in verse 27 three times of man. According to the commentators on the Hebrew text, it is a very special word. It's never used of making or manufacturing material things.

Outside the Bible, apparently it is used to the work of artists, but in the Old Testament it is reserved exclusively for the creative work of God. Deilich has written in his commentary, "The Colonel of the Nation expressed by Barra (BARA) is the origination of the absolutely new." von Rodd, a contemporary Lutheran commentator writes, "It contains the idea both of complete effortlessness and of Creartia ex Nihillar, that is

creation art of nothing." This is the first truth that stands out of chapter 1 of Genesis in the beginning, God. The second truth is this, in the end, man.

What is planned from Genesis 1 is that before the process of creation began, there was nothing in existence but God, and when the process had finished, there was man. The whole chapter leads the reader on and up to man. Man is presented as the crown, the climax of creation, the end product which God had already conceived before the work began, and to which he was gradually working.

And man's uniqueness is emphasized in the chapter. Although God created all things, both animate and inanimate, only man was created in his image and after his likeness. And then man was appointed the lord of the lower creation.

He was told to fill the earth and to subdue it, and he was given dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves over the face of the earth. Thus man, God like in his intelligence and his authority, is set forth as the masterpiece of God's creative plan. So, in Genesis 1, the first truth that is emphasized is in the beginning God.

Second is in the end man, and the third is in between ordered stages. Notice straight away the striking contrast between verses 1 and 2. Thus one speaks of the creation of the heavens and the earth, that is the universe. But verse 2 speaks of the earth only.

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. It is recognized that God is the creator of the universe, and that the earth is only a tiny part of it. But the Bible is the story of God's dealings with earth, and especially with the man he made to develop an earth.

So, Genesis 1, like the whole Bible, is a geocentric book, it centers upon earth and life on earth. It focuses attention upon earth, and it only describes the rest of the creation in its relation to earth, and to man. Next, verse 2 comes the description of earth's primeval chaos.

The earth was without form and void, etc. Some people have propounded the theory, made popular in the Escortheel Bible, that verse 2 describes not the state of earth when God made it, but the state to which he reduced it by a subsequent act of judgment. They point to Isaiah 45, verse 18, which uses the same Hebrew word for chaos, and says on earth that God did not create it a chaos.

Some people further embrace this theory, because they believe that the days, the six days of Genesis 1, are to be interpreted literally if periods of 24 hours, and they are then in trouble because they need a long period of time for the rocks and the fossils to form. And so they argue that between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1, there was a prehistoric fall, either of angels or of some pre-adamic race or of birth, which led to the ruin of the earth

by divine judgment. If that were the case, as they argue then, verses 3 onwards describe not the original creation, but the recreation or reconstruction of earth after some prehistoric disaster.

Now although this theory seems still to be held by quite a number of Christian people, it is really pure speculation. It depends on changing the words and the earth worlds without form and void, to that the earth became without form and void, which is not what the text says, and apparently is to force the Hebrew words. Moreover, all Isaiah 45, verse 18 in the Hebrew says is that God did not create the earth in order to remain a chaos, but created it in order to be inhabited.

So then we should believe that verse 2 describes the primeval chaos, when the earth was formless, empty, dark, in the language of damage, decimate and dead. It indicates the undeveloped state of earth before God gradually reduced the chaos to a cosmos. Bernard Ram in his book, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture Rights*, it corresponds to the assembling of the raw materials by the manufacturer, the connecting of the oils, easel and canvas by the painter, or the selection and setting up of the marble block by the sculptor.

Next, the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the deep. Some commentators like von Rod, whom I've already mentioned, thinks that this is a further description of the chaos, and should be translated that a terrible storm was agitating the deep. But the traditional interpretation, which now seems now adequate reason to abandon, is that already the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, was moving over the chaos.

The verb used for moving is the same word that occurs in Deuteronomy 32, verse 11 of the eagle fluttering over her young. It may be, therefore, that the Holy Spirit is here likened to a bird. As later he appeared in the form of a dove at the baptism of Jesus, and that he never thought to be hovering or brooding over the formless west.

Certainly this is how Milton took it in *Paradise Lost*. "Instruct me, for thou nest, thou from the first wast present, and with mighty wings I'd spread dove-like, satst brooding on the vast abyss and medsted pregnant." After verse 2, there are followers in verses 3 to 26, the six so-called days of creation. There are not many, I think, even amongst the most devout biblical Christians who argue that these are six periods of 24 hours, or if you like of 12 hours for day night.

Some people, certainly, argue still that they are meant to be six days of revelation rather than creation, six days in which God revealed the creation to Moses. But most people hold the view that the days represent immensely long, but uneven epochs of geological time. There seems to be some warrant in this view because the word "day" that is used for the six stages in chapter 1 is used in chapter 2 verse 4 for the total creative period.

And you'll remember that we're told in Psalm 91 that one day is as the Lord as a

thousand years and a thousand years as one day. How far we should press the details is still open to debate. It's possible that the order of creation in Genesis 1 is not meant to be stripped to scientifically chronological, and this is suggested by the pattern which the six days are given.

There seems to be a deliberate parallel drawn between the first three days and the second three days. Thus on the first day, light appears, and on the fourth, lights, the sun, the moon, and the stars. On the second day, a firmament or expanse separates the air from the water, while on the fifth day birds are created to inhabit the air and fish to inhabit the water.

On the third day, the earth appears, and vegetation grows on it. While on the sixth day, beasts and man appear to inhabit the earth and eat the vegetation. Looking back over the chapter, whatever the precise details may mean, the emphasis seems incontrovertible.

It is these three things that I've tried to expand. First, that in the beginning, God took the initiative to create the universe out of nothing according to His own sovereign will. Second, that they're followed a long period of development in stages of increasing complexity, transforming the earth from its original chaos to a home fit a man to dwell in.

And thirdly, that man was made in God's image and given to many and over the earth and all the creatures of earth, sky and sea, that man is the summit of God's creation. And there is nothing in all this that is inconsistent with modern science. What then can we learn from Genesis 1? I suggest that we learn this lesson that if God is the creator of all things visible and invisible, and if man is the crown of his creation, then man has a unique obligation to worship God for two reasons.

First, because only God deserves to be worshipped. He deserves it because he's our creator. We depend upon him for life and breath and all things.

And worship is the recognition of our dependence. Everything that breathes should praise the Lord, Psalm 150 verse 6. Worship is also a recognition of the greatness of God's wisdom, power and goodness displayed in the creation. Psalm 104, 24, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works, and wisdom hast thou made them all.

The earth is full of thy creatures." If worship is due to God as our creator, I'm Donatre, which is the worship of creatures, or of God under the form of creatures, is absolutely prohibited. We're forbidden to make any grave an image or the likeness of anything that is in heaven and above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth, and we're forbidden to bow down and worship them. Yet Israel frequently disobeyed the second commandment.

She made representations in wood and metal and stern of animals and of men in Egypt, for instance, and later copied the astral worship of Babylon. But Genesis 1 states that the living creatures and the sun, the moon and the stars are the creation of the living God. And so the prophets ridiculed the folly and condemned the wickedness of Israel's idolatry.

And Paul, the apostle, argued that idolatry is inexcusable. Since all their men knew God from the created universe, they did not honor him as God, but exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals, and reptiles. You can find Paul's argument in Romans 1, verses 20 to 23, and Acts 17, verses 24 to 29.

I say again that the reason we must worship God is that only God deserves to be worshipped, because he is the Creator and the Lord of Heaven and Earth. And the second reason why God is to be worshipped is that end a man can give him the worship he deserves. True, the rest of the creation is said to worship God.

In the Benedicite, which in the Church of England we sometimes sing at Morning Prayer, we exhort all the works of the Lord to praise him. The sun, moon stars, the wind, far, frost, snow, mountain seas, birds. We exhort them all to praise and magnify him forever.

And this is a perfectly biblical thing to do. It's based upon Psalm 148, where first the heavens and the contents of the heavens, and then the earth and the creatures of earth are commanded to praise the name of the Lord. But the worship of these creatures, the worship that these creatures are exhorted to give to God, is an irrational and an involuntary worship.

They can't help it. The invitation to worship is a poetic fancy. They cannot help obeying the commands of their Creator, or giving to him thereby the worship that is due to him.

Only man. Only man is able to give to God a free and intelligent worship and able to withhold it too. For man was made in the image of God.

Man can now and understand God. Man can study the works of God and take pleasure in them and can love the Lord his God with all his mind. And so, if only God the Creator deserves to be worshiped.

And if only man is able to give him the worship he deserves, then let us. Learn this lesson from Genesis 1, and let us give to God our Creator the glory that is due to him, and let us bring him our reasonable worship. That is the worship of our mind and of our whole being.

Oh, now. You've been listening to the conclusion of a message by John Stott on Genesis chapter 1. Recorded almost 60 years ago at all souls church in London. This is just one of 14 messages that John gave on Genesis chapter 1. And you can find the rest of the series by visiting [JohnStott.org](http://JohnStott.org). During his lifetime John wrote over 50 books, many of

which have become classic works with some being translated into 60 languages.

He wrote the manuscripts by hand at his retreat in Wales by the light of an oil lamp, as he did not have electricity connected there until 2001. Many of the sermons we are featuring in these centenary bookcasts form the basis of his books, and today's recommendation is entitled *God's Word for Today's World*. Details of this and all John's books can be found at [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott). The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world.

Today Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries, thanks to the vision of John Stott, who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership. To find out about this and other ministries John Stott founded, go to [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott). Join us at the same time next week for more from *The Bible for Today with John Stott*.

[Music]

(buzzing)