

1. Why is there something and not nothing?

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Date: 17 October 2018

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[0 : 00] Well, good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Tron Lunchtime Bible Talks. Great to see you, especially if you're a newcomer. We begin a new three-week series looking at the first three chapters of Genesis.

So please turn in your Bibles to the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1. It's nice to be down at this level.

Rather than up there. Here we go. Genesis chapter 1, and we begin reading at verse 1.

Hear the word of the Lord. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light.

And there was light. And God saw that the light was good.

[1 : 04] And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day. And the darkness he called night. And there was evening, and there was morning the first day.

And God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters. And let it separate the waters from the waters. And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse.

And it was so. And God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening, and there was morning the second day. And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place.

And let the dry land appear. And it was so. And God called the dry land earth. And the waters that were gathered together he called seas. And God saw that it was good.

And God said, Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.

[2 : 11] And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning the third day. And God said, Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night.

And let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years. And let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth. And it was so.

And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning the fourth day. And God said, Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.

[3 : 23] So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.

And there was evening, and there was morning the fifth day. And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds, livestock and creeping things, and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.

And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds, and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[4 : 33] So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them, and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed, that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit.

You shall have them for your food, and to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the heavens, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life.

I have given every green plant for food. And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

And there was evening, and there was morning the sixth day. Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done.

[5 : 44] And he rested on the seventh day, from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, because on it, God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

What is the most beautiful thing that you've ever seen? It might not look like it, but I once climbed an active volcano, in Tanzania, in Africa.

And the group that I was with, we made our ascent up this bubbling beast, through the night. And we arrived at the summit, just as the sun was coming up. And the view that I had, from the top of this volcano, it was so stunning, it rendered me speechless.

And if you know me, that's a very rare occasion, that I'm speechless. On my right hand side, I could see Lake Natron, which was a great body of water, that was glowing pink. And I didn't realize why that was the case, but it was only my guide who told me, that that's because it was, full of flamingos, sunbathing.

And the sunshine was beaming back off them. In front of me here, I could still picture it, and to my left, I could see in the distance, over the plains of the Serengeti. And I could see little dots moving about, and I only realized later, that that was herds, of wildebeest, and zebras.

[7 : 01] It was stunning. And as I looked at that stunning, and awesome sight, all sorts of questions, started to pop up in my mind. What kind of a power, could have created something, as beautiful as this?

I wonder if you've ever had a similar experience. And when you had that experience, did you ask similar sorts of questions? Did all of this beauty, really just happen by chance?

How did life begin without life, to create it in the first place? And even if I do decide, that everything has come about, completely by chance, why is there anything at all? Why is there something, and not nothing?

Well friends, the Bible doesn't let us, play desperate guessing games, about trying to answer, these colossal questions. Genesis 1, has the answers, that we're looking for. Before we get into the text itself, let's just ask some, introductory questions, about Genesis.

Who wrote Genesis? Answer, Moses. To whom was Moses writing? Ancient Israel. God's people, whom he had recently redeemed, out of slavery in Egypt, and who were in the wilderness, on their way to the promised land.

[8 : 16] Now why did Moses write to them? Well having spent considerable amount of time, in these chapters, I think here are some of the main reasons, why Moses was writing Genesis to them.

Firstly, he was writing to blast bad beliefs. In many ways, Genesis 1 to 3, was written as a polemic, against the bad beliefs, that were kicking about back then.

The false religious beliefs, that may have, weeded their way, into the hearts and minds, of the people of God. Secondly, having blasted away bad beliefs, Moses was writing, to teach the truth. So that God's people would know, foundational key truths. Let me just list some of the key truths, that are in Genesis 1 to 3. The truth about the origins of everything. The truth about humanity's great dignity, and purpose and place in the world.

The truth about marriage and sex. The truth about how the world should be. And the truth about how the world, is currently not what it should be. All of these truths and more, are proclaimed in these early chapters.

[9 : 20] But here is the main reason, why I think I'm persuaded, why Moses wrote these chapters. And it's this. Moses' big pastoral purpose, in writing, was so that the people of God, would know God, would know the Lord their God better, love him, and live for him, as they journeyed on their way, into the promised land.

Moses didn't want to see any of them, drift away from the Lord. He wrote, so that they would tether themselves, to him. And so that they would persevere, into the promised land.

And you know, I pray, that in three weddings this time, you will look back, on having listened to Genesis 1-3, and you will find, that these chapters, have had the same effect, on your life today. That any bad beliefs, that you might have, and if you're like me, you will have, undoubtedly some bad beliefs, in your head. I pray that you'll be corrected, and you will know the truth. But above all, I pray you will be encouraged, to know the Lord, love him, and live for him.

So that you might make it, into the promised land. Which for us, isn't the earthly Jerusalem, but the heavenly Jerusalem. The new heavens, and the new earth. So with all that in mind, let's look at Genesis 1.

[10 : 36] I've got three big truths, this afternoon. And each heading, flows into the other. So it's all one big sentence. Hopefully it was clear. Firstly, Moses wrote to teach, that there is only one God.

There is only one God. Please look at verse 1. In the beginning, God. And we could spend weeks, looking at just these four words alone.

In the beginning, God. That is, before anything existed, before there was such a thing as time, God existed. There is the one, true, living God. I've said this to you before, and I'm going to say it again. I think it's a fair assessment, to say that when most people, think about God today, what they do is, they picture a man in their head, and they make him bigger, and bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger, they got a really big man, and they go, aha, that's what God is like.

He's a really big man. But that is wrong. That is so wrong. God is not a big man. It is true, that we human beings have been made, to reflect something of God's likeness.

[11 : 38] We'll come to look at that in a moment. And it is true, that the Bible uses human terms, to describe something of God's likeness, so that we can grasp, what he's like. But Genesis 1 verse 1, these four words are clear.

On the whole, God is nothing like us at all. God is not a creature. He was not made. He has no beginning. He has no end. He's always existed. There was never a time when he was not. He is the one who is before, behind, and beyond the creation. He's eternal, all-powerful, self-sufficient. He was there before the beginning of everything, the primary cause of the cosmos. These four words, would have been radical back then. Moses, he's already taken aim, at the bad beliefs of his day. Probably the most dominant bad belief of his day, was a thing called polytheism. Polytheism. According to many ancient, Near Eastern creation accounts, there were actually, in the beginning, many gods, not just one, but many, and these gods, either fought with each other, or they bred with each other, and the fallout from their activity, was the whole cosmos.

[12 : 51] And actually, if you follow the implications of polytheism, each of the gods of creation, ended up having their own little personal domains, of rule, and lordship, and life. So there was the god of the sun, god of the moon, a god of harvest, the god of love, a god of this land, a god of that land.

And what a nightmare it was, to live under that system of beliefs, because, you were never sure which god you were to please, and if you spent too much god pleasing one god, you were going to make all the other gods jealous.

And so your whole life was just one big long, torturous exercise, of trying to keep all of the gods happy. But you never had any certainty. It was terrible. Moses says, no, no, no.

In the beginning, God, there's only one god, not many gods. Polytheism is nonsense. And if you were to fast forward through the centuries, you would see how radically different these four words remained in connection with all the other worldviews that were concocted by the mind of man. Let's just name some of them. Pantheism. The idea that God is actually part of the universe, or the universe is a manifestation of God. The type of people who say that, you know, we're all one.

[14:03] You're God, and I'm God. And the trees are God. And so, if you want to get close to God, what we've got to do is hug each other, or do all sorts of immoral, sexual practices together. Go hug a tree as well. You could do that.

Moses says, that's nonsense. God is not part of the creation. He's separate. A similar view to that is animism. I think a lot of Hinduism is based upon the idea of animism.

And Moses says, nonsense. God is totally separate from his creation. Can I just say, I don't know you, really. I know some of you.

But it may be possible that some of these bad beliefs might be in your minds and in your hearts today. Well, if that's the case, then Moses says to you, you're wrong. You need to be corrected. Know the truth. In the beginning, God. He is the one who's before, behind, and beyond creation. There is no other God but him. And at some point in eternity past, this one living God willed creation into existence.

[15:07] This brings me to my second point this afternoon. There is one God who created and ordered everything from nothing. He created and ordered everything from nothing.

Just look back over that text again. Look over the chapter. In fact, let me just give you 10 seconds with the person next to you. This is controversial. 10 seconds with the person next to you. What's the dominant thing that's repeated again and again and again and again?

It's really easy. Okay, 10 seconds. Go. What's repeated again and again and again? Maybe five, four, three, two, one.

Okay. What's the dominant thing? There's lots of things repeated, aren't there? But what's the dominant thing? Did someone say God? I couldn't hear that. I was just as fudge.

It's a Sunday school answer. God. God is everywhere. God, God, God, God, God, God. God saw. God created. God made. God said. God spoke. And I've lost my place in my notes.

[16:11] Here we are. God separated. God is the main focus of this passage. Moses wants us to be clear. He is the main subject of it all. Now, we don't have time to look at every detail this afternoon, but I just want you to zoom out and notice how carefully structured Moses has structured his piece.

1 verse 2 to 2 verse 3 form a section. And there, 1 verse 2 and 2 verse 1 to 3 are like bookends. In 1 verse 2, we're introduced to the creation and it's inhabitable.

It's a place of darkness and chaos. Moses says it was without form and it was void. It was empty. But then if you look at the end, the other bookend, 2 verses 1 to 3, we see a total contrast.

The creation is now habitable. It has been formed and filled with life. It's a place of light, order, a place of Sabbath rest and blessing. What happens in between to bring this change?

And the answer is God works. God's activity. And Moses has actually summarized God's work into six different mini sections that he calls days.

[17:21] Each little day begins with the phrase and God said and each day ends with and there was evening and morning the such and such a day. Just notice how carefully Moses has structured these six days.

You could split these six days into two groups of three and they parallel each other very carefully. Remember 1 verse 2? What were the two problems with the earth? The earth was formless and void.

Well on days 1 to 3 God deals with the first problem, the formless problem. Day 1 to 3 he forms the structures of the universe. On days 4 to 6 he then deals with the second problem, the void problem by filling all of those structures with life.

And you can see from the screen up here the way in which they parallel each other. You see day 1 to 3 God forms. Days 4 to 6 God fills. They parallel each other.

You see that? Let me just go off on a little aside here but it's an important one. Thanks Steve. To get fixated upon whether these are six literal days I do not think is a helpful thing to do.

[18:35] From my experience some Christians tend to get a bit frosty about this. In fact I once encountered a man in the church here who would demonize anyone who didn't believe these were six literal days.

He got quite a shock when I asked him to read Genesis 2 verse 4. Genesis 2 verse 4 says this These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

In chapter 1 Moses says six days. In chapter 2 Moses says one day. Why did he do this? Short answer I don't know. But I do know that he wasn't stupid.

He wasn't an idiot Moses. He was a very well educated man and he wrote under the authority and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So this can't be a blunder on his part. But imagine just would you for a second if Moses was here next to me it would be a lot easier because I could just sit down and let him do the Bible teaching.

But imagine the fact he was here right now and I said Moses' brother was it six days or one day? I reckon he would say Phil you've asked the wrong question of the text.

[19 : 43] In these chapters I'm not primarily concerned with answering the how and the when type of questions to do with the creation. If you want those types of answers to those types of questions then you can use God's gift of scientific investigation that he's given to mankind.

But as for me I'm much more concerned with answering the questions that science cannot answer. The who and the why question. Who is responsible for creation?

Why does it exist? I have not written a precise blow-by-blow account of every detail of how the creation came into existence. How could I? If I did that the universe alone wouldn't be able to contain all the books that I would write.

No. What I have done in Genesis 1 in my prologue is given you a completely truthful and historical account of creation set in a carefully structured poetic prose.

I'm not trying to tell you everything Phil. I'm just trying to tell you what you need to know. And at which point we would all say thank you Moses. We promise not to get fixated on things that do not matter at all.

[20 : 52] Okay. That's the aside over. Let's get back to the six days quickly. What do these six days teach us about God? Well don't they teach us that he is immeasurably powerful?

So powerful we can't even comprehend. God speaks and things burst into existence out of nothing. Let me just read to you a quote from the University of California Science Department. It says this There are about 10 billion galaxies in the observable universe.

The number of stars in a galaxy varies but assuming an average of 100 billion stars per galaxy it means that there are about 1 billion trillion stars in the observable universe.

That's 1 billion trillion stars just in the bits of the universe that we can see. Goodness knows how many more there are in the bits that we cannot see. Genesis 1 says to us that there was a time when these 1 billion trillion stars didn't exist.

And the living God said do you know what? I think we'll have some light. And like that they burst into existence. That's how powerful God is.

[22 : 00] We cannot get our heads around this sort of power. Notice the repetition all the way through as well of God naming the stuff he has made. Back then if you named something it was a sign that you had authority over it.

God names everything. Thus he rules over everything. He is the one who holds dominion over the whole universe. And also the fact it's not stated here implicitly but it is implied that God is the one who's going to sustain everything that he has made.

That the view of deism that God just made the world and got it all up and running and went there you go and just let it go and sat back like this and had no more involvement. That is nonsense.

God made everything and he sustains everything. Just think about this for a moment. the only reason that you are breathing right now is because God is letting you.

The only reason that there's blood pumping through your body right now is because God is letting it pump through your body. These six days they also teach us that God is immeasurably kind.

[23 : 08] He's so kind. Just think about this he didn't need to make things like laughter friendship excitement art music colour pleasure passion joy creativity he didn't need to make the cosmos as beautiful as it is but he did.

Why? Because he's so kind and generous. I have a couple of friends who are atheists and they came up to me I remember having a conversation with them one day over lunch and they said we refuse to believe in a God who's a stingy tight-fisted spoil sport and I looked at them and said well I agree with that because I don't believe in a God like that either.

The God of the Bible isn't that. The God of the Bible is so incredibly kind and generous. That breathtaking view I had from the top of that volcano I only got to see that because God is so kind.

It only exists because he made it and let it happen. You know I'm often struck by well just how ungrateful I am myself and how ungrateful other people are especially people in the church. Psalm 103 says this praise the Lord and forget not all his benefits. How are you getting on with that? How are you getting on with not forgetting all of the benefits that the Lord has given you and keeps on giving you?

[24 : 30] Friends there's so much more we could learn from these verses but briefly let me just focus on one last big truth that Moses was writing to teach Israel. remember what we've looked at so far there is only one God who created and ordered everything from nothing and last point mankind is the pinnacle of his creation.

Mankind is the pinnacle of his creation. If you were to zoom out and look at the amount of time that Moses spends on each day which day gets the most action? The answer is day 6.

Day 6 gets the most attention by Moses. This is what the whole creation process is building up to because on day 6 God created mankind male and female and this is really why there's something and not nothing.

God created this earth to house little images of himself to reflect his glory and his beauty. Please look at verse 26 and 27.

Then God said let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[25 : 52] So God created man in his own image in the image of God he created him male and female he created them. In verse 24 to 25 we can read that God makes the animals and if you read those verses you'll notice the repetition of the little phrase according to their kinds.

So God made living creatures according to their kinds. God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds. The livestock according to their kinds. Everything that creeps according to their kinds. But when it comes to mankind that phrase is ditched because there's something special and unique about mankind. They aren't made according to their kinds. They alone are made in the image of God.

It says it four times in verse 26 to 27. And so humanity is elevated above all the other creatures that God has made. Now what does it mean as we close to be made in God's image?

Well just listen to J.I. Packer he says this in Genesis 1 verse 1 to 25 it sets forth God as personal rational creative competent to control the world he has made and morally admirable in that all he creates is good.

[27 : 10] Plainly God's image will include all of these qualities. The human capacity for communication and relationship with both God and others and the God given dominion over the lower creation is also part of being made in that image.

Or someone else put it like this mankind is to be holy as God is holy loving as God is loving truthful as God is truthful faithful as God is faithful and so on and so on.

The image of God is not only about the qualities of our inner lives it is also about obeying God acting as he would have us act. Now I won't say any more about this because next week when you come back at Wednesday lunchtime we're going to think much more about this but for the time being I hope you can clearly see that we have not come from monkeys.

We are not animals. We are the pinnacle of God's creation for we alone have been made in God's image. Well our time is gone. Let me just summarise and say this.

The big application of this passage I was at a youth conference when I was younger and the guy was up the front speaking on this and his big application from Genesis 1 was pick up litter. Now there's nothing wrong with picking up litter.

[28 : 23] That's a good thing to do. We should look after God's creation. But surely Moses' application to you is this. Know the truth. Know the truth. There is only one God who created and ordered everything from nothing and mankind is the pinnacle of his creation.

Moses says do you believe this? You should because this is the truth. If your God doesn't match up to this God then your God is no God at all.

You don't know the true God. But if you believe this God the all powerful immeasurably kind and generous creator and Lord of everything then the only way you should respond to him is as Revelation 4 says by saying you are worthy our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power for you've created all things and by your will they were created and have their being.

Will you respond to the author of creation this way and the way that he deserves giving him your love honour praise and thanks. If he is the one who made you and if he is the one who sustains you then can you really afford not to treat him in the way he deserves to be treated.

Why don't we bow our heads quickly and I'll pray for us and I'll use Revelation 4 11 again as a prayer. Let's pray. You are worthy our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being.

[30 : 02] We pray that by the power of your spirit you would help us to take your word very seriously. Please correct us where we need to be corrected so that we will think properly of you and so that it will lead us to love you and live for you more and more.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.