

1. The God of Creation (2007)

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[0 : 0 0] Well, do turn with me to Genesis chapter 1. I'm rolling my sleeves up not only because I'm hot, but because we mean business tonight.

We're beginning tonight a new series in this book of Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, and so, of course, we begin at the beginning, the first chapter. But before we look in more detail at this chapter, as we will do next week, it's important that we get ourselves clear on certain things.

We need to start by asking very basic questions. Why is this book here? What's it for? Why was it written by its human author under the inspiration of God?

And why has it been preserved by God for all time in the scriptures for us? It's important that we do think about these things, because if we don't, we might get completely onto the wrong track.

And if you do that, it is possible to get very bogged down and confused in this book. In fact, it's possible to become a real expert on the details of the book of Genesis, and yet to totally miss the message of the book as a whole.

[1 : 1 4] And there are people who have done that. There are many Christians, alas, who have done that. But that is not what God wants, not at all. The New Testament tells us that the purpose of all the scriptures is to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

And that means that right from the start here in the book of Genesis, the focus is not to expose every secret of the mechanisms of creation, but rather it's to reveal to us God's plan of redemption, his gospel.

That's why I'm calling this first study, not the creation of God, but the God of creation. Because Genesis as a whole, and Genesis chapter 1 in particular, is above all a word of revelation.

It's from God, and it's about God. And it's to lead us to God. And it's so that we might know God. So I want to think tonight about some of these things by way of introduction.

First of all, some issues about the place of Genesis, and then some thoughts about the purpose of the prehistory, the early chapters. And then some focus on the person of these early chapters, and God himself.

[2 : 3 2] It's really just asking some questions to help us get started in the book. So first of all, then, the place of Genesis. We're asking where, and how, and what. The place of Genesis.

Where is it? Well, obviously, it's at the beginning of the Bible. That's where it gets its name from. In the Hebrew, the first word is just in the beginning. That's what it's called.

We get our name, Genesis, from the Greek translation of the Bible, which then was, in turn, translated into Latin. Those first two words say Liber Genesis, the book of Genesis.

It's literally genealogy. It's actually the very same words that begin Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 1, verse 1 says, the book of the genealogy, the book of the Genesis of Jesus Christ.

And it is just the beginning. It's the beginning, and it's the unfolding of three things. First of all, the cosmos, the world, and then the story of humanity, and our alienation from God.

[3 : 33] And then thirdly, the beginning and the unfolding of the story of Israel, God's new initiative to save the fallen cosmos. In other words, Genesis is really the beginning of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Well, what about its structure and its composition? How and by whom and for whom was it written? Well, sometimes it's said to fall into two parts. Chapters 1 to 11, sometimes called the prehistory, and then chapters 12 through to 50, the patriarchal history, all about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

Actually, Genesis falls into 11 parts. There's the prologue that we read, down to chapter 2, verse 3, and then there are 10 separate books of Genesis, of origins.

If you look at chapter 2, verse 4, it begins with a little formula that comes 10 times through the book. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth.

That's the first book. Then chapter 5, verse 1, begins with a very similar formula. This is the book of the generations of Adam. Chapter 6, verse 9, it's the generations of Noah, and so on and so on, right the way down, all 10.

[4 : 51] And the book of the generations of each of these simply tells us what so-and-so generated, brought into being. First of all, the heavens and the earth, then this is what Adam brought into being.

This is what the sons of Noah brought into being. The first five generations of the ten take up just that first 11 chapters of the book, just about a fifth of the book of Genesis.

The second five generations take up all the rest, chapter 12 to chapter 50, about 80% of the whole. In other words, the real focus of this book and the book of beginnings is on the beginning of God's covenant story, his covenant promises, his gospel, and his gospel people, Israel.

Well, by whom was this book written? Well, traditionally, it's been said to be mainly Moses. No doubt there are some later updates updates and emendations when place names are inserted so that people understood where they were.

But the New Testament and certainly Jesus himself assume the full authority of Moses lies behind this book. And I think so can we. That's certainly good enough for me.

[6 : 04] It's true that there are similarities in the format, in the style, to other ancient texts that the Babylonian and the Sumerian and the Egyptian creation stories.

And that's true. And there are some Bible scholars who assume, therefore, that, well, it's just one of many. They're all much the same. But no, that is definitely not so.

There are decisive differences and rebuttals, indeed, in this, the book of Genesis. And that leads us to the next question. For whom is it written?

Well, Genesis is written clearly to expose the falsehood of the pagan views and to teach and to reinforce the truth to the ancient Israelites, the people of God.

And we'll come back to that later because it's very, very important. But if you think about it, Moses, of all people, was in a unique position, wasn't he? To use the concepts and the language of the day to do exactly that.

[7 : 06] He knew the contemporary scene. He knew the contemporary pagan mind. He was brought up and schooled in the sciences and the arts of Egypt. And that's why he was able to write such a literary masterpiece as we find in the book of Genesis.

But what is the central message of Genesis? The what question? What is it really about? Well, it's not primarily about man. Not even the patriarchs.

All comes down to beginning at chapter 1, verse 1 with what God generates. In the beginning, God. And that's why it's still a book that's relevant today.

It's not a book about people who've been dead for centuries or millennia or even longer. The New Testament, interestingly, quotes the book of Genesis in the present tense. Moses says it's still relevant because it's a word from God and about God.

It's God's promise to establish his kingdom, his place of gracious sovereign rule through his grace that will overcome the sin and the evil that man has brought into the world.

[8 : 17] In other words, Genesis is truly the beginning of the gospel of the kingdom of God. Its purpose is the salvation of men and women. And we'll discover as we go through Genesis that all the major strands that we find in the New Testament gospel, they're here in the book of Genesis.

Genesis. It's especially focused in what we might call the fulcrum of the book, the great promise of God to Abraham. You might just like to look at chapter 12 verses 1 to 3.

Such a key text for the whole book. God makes his promise, his fourfold promise to Abraham. He promises him, first of all, a place, verse 1, the land that I will show you, a place of fellowship with God.

He promises a people. I will make of you a great nation, a people for God. He promises his presence and his protection, verse 3. He blesses those who bless Abraham and he curses his enemies.

There's a covenant relationship of protection with this God. And finally, he promises a plan, a plan of redemption. You will be a blessing. says God.

[9 : 29] And in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed. A worldwide kingdom of God. Now that's a vital key to everything else that follows in the rest of the book of Genesis.

It's the story of that promise being worked out all the way through the book. In fact, the very last two verses of the book of Genesis repeat that. Joseph is about to die and he speaks of the promise that God will come and will lead his people out of Egypt and into the promised land and there to take his bones with them because God is a God who keeps his promises.

It's a story of a kingdom. It's a story that begins here in Genesis but yes, it finds its ultimate fulfillment only in the Lord Jesus Christ in whom God does come to be present as Emmanuel and through his death and his resurrection is gathering of people from all the world into his place his kingdom to be under his gracious covenant rule his salvation forever.

So you see above all God is the subject of this book of Genesis and God's kingdom and the proclaiming of that kingdom is the object of this book.

It's a gospel book to put with a message about the God of salvation and the way of salvation. Friends, if you missed that you missed everything important about the book of Genesis.

[10 : 56] Well, that's the place of Genesis. Now with that in mind let's turn our thoughts to the purpose especially of these early chapters the so-called prehistory and the creation accounts themselves.

It begins with our verse chapter 1 verse 1 In the beginning God. What is the purpose of these creation accounts?

Why are they here? Well, these accounts deal with the very vital questions of origins and of purpose and of identity for every single human being.

Who am I? Where have I come from? Where am I going? These are live questions in all the world today. People are asking these existential questions.

And we need to ask these questions don't we? to make sense of the world that we live in? What's it all about? We need to ask these questions to frame a view of the world a world view to understand our own existence.

[11 : 57] And here we have in Genesis inspired by the Spirit of God a reconstruction of the time of creation and the primeval world that does just exactly that. It answers these fundamental questions.

Interesting, I think it was T.F. Torrance who spoke of his father who was a missionary in China and he said that there were two books of the Bible that were most influential in persuading Chinese people of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not some of the ones that you might think. Genesis and the book of Romans. And I think the reason for that is that both of these books set out a comprehensive world view that answers these deep questions questions that people are asking wherever they are, whatever their culture is, about the very essence of life itself.

And surely these early chapters of Genesis must be some of the most remarkable and most influential pieces of literature ever written. They cross the boundaries, don't they, of language, of culture, of age, of intellect.

And that means that the message of these chapters is absolutely plain to everybody, whether you're young or old, rich or poor, clever or not so clever. And its message is absolutely plain and its message is this.

[13 : 18] The world that we live in is not a chance happening, a meaningless place careering into the unknown in the future. No! It's a definite purposeful creation of a loving God.

It's ordered, it's beautiful, it's good, it's wonderful. And yet it is, of course, spoiled. And vitiated by human sin. You see, immediately, that turns on its head, doesn't it?

So much of modern and liberal sociology and psychology. We're told today, people are the product of our environment. Make the environment better and people will be better. Well, no, says the Bible, that's completely wrong.

Actually, humans, even in the very best of environments, will at very best be rebels. ourselves. Our environment, our world, is as it is because of us. We're not as we are because of the world.

It was G.K. Chesterton, wasn't it, when he was asked, what's wrong with the world? He said, I am, sir. And that's the Bible's answer. And Genesis is a powerful word for our contemporary world that speaks with great relevance.

[14 : 31] It needs to be heard. It has a powerful apologetic function. That is, it makes sense of the world that we see around us. And therefore, it has a vital evangelistic function.

It needs to be heard. And that's why it's a tragedy that so often, alas, the message of Genesis has been all but silenced by so many of the controversies and the debates that we have among Christians about science and creation, about Genesis versus evolution and so on.

Often, these things have actually emasculated the confronting power and the real primary message of this book of Genesis. And we mustn't let that happen.

And so that means that we need to think clearly about a number of things. Primarily, about approaching this text in the Bible in the right way. It seems that that's an almost impossible question for some people to ask today.

Questions so often among Christians is, well, for creation or for evolution. That might be your question tonight. You might be itching to know what my view about evolution is or creationism or seven days or whatever it is.

[15 : 43] But friends, if that is your question, let me say this. That is to pose a false and a fruitless dichotomy and indeed a damaging one. To say that is not a capitulation to modern science.

Please don't think that. God. In fact, let me appeal to John Calvin. Don't think many of you would take him as a modern liberal. For one thing, he lived 500 years ago.

But John Calvin clearly held that all truth is God's truth. He said we live in a universe and literally therefore the world speaks with one voice, as does the scriptures, as we sang.

Speaking about the works of scientists and others, John Calvin in his institute says this, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts.

If we regard the spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the spirit of God.

[16 : 53] Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observations and artful description of nature? Shall we say that they are insane who develop modern medicine devoting their labour to our benefit?

What shall we say of the mathematical sciences? Shall we consider them the ravings of madmen? No. We cannot read the writing of the ancients on these subjects without great admiration.

We marvel at them because we are compelled to recognise how preeminent they are. In other words, he is saying to reject science, is actually to reject God.

Rather, he wants us to admire science and scientists. Good science, of course, and science, of course, may also have many suppositions behind it, some of which may be false, so we're to be discriminating.

But you see, when we come to Genesis, chapter 1, as to any part of the Bible, we've got to ask the right questions. What kind of language is this? What kind of literature is it? What's the purpose of it? That's the most important question.

[17 : 56] And that's how John Calvin approached it 500 years ago in the 16th century. He saw that it was not anti-scientific, but in fact that it was just non-scientific.

Now, the issue in John Calvin's day was the science of astronomy. People in the church were getting in a terrible pickle because the planet of Saturn had just been discovered.

And there was a great controversy going about which is the bigger light. The moon, as the Bible seems to say, the second light is, or the planet Saturn, which our astronomers tell us is bigger than the moon.

That was the controversy. And Calvin says that's just plain silly. And they quote again, Moses, he says, wrote in a popular style, things which without instruction all ordinary persons endued with common sense are able to understand.

that astronomers investigate with great labor whatever the wisdom of the human mind can comprehend. Nevertheless, this study is not to be reprobated, nor this science to be condemned, because some frantic persons want boldly to reject whatever is unknown to them.

[19 : 03] For astronomy, and that was the cutting-edge science of their days, not only pleasant, but also very useful to be known. It cannot be denied that this art unfolds the admirable wisdom of God, he says.

Nor did Moses truly wish to withdraw us from this pursuit in admitting such things as are peculiar to the art, but, listen, because he was ordained a teacher as well of the unlearned and rude as of the learned, he could not otherwise fulfill his office than by descending to this grosser method of instruction.

In other words, Moses here is not trying to teach science. He's teaching about God. And he's not just teaching about God to very clever rocket scientists, he's teaching about God to ordinary people like you and me who can understand his words.

You see, we have to recognize that because if we ask the wrong questions of the text, we'll obviously get the wrong answers, won't we? If you ask, well, is the Bible wrong because it says the moon is the second light and science tells us Saturn's bigger, is the Bible wrong?

Well, that's a silly question. And if we ask inappropriate questions of the Bible, we're very likely to get confusion. And you can ask inappropriate questions.

[20 : 24] You can say, well, what color is sound? Well, maybe some clever scientists will tell you that sound has a color, but to you and me, that's a silly question. What does music taste of, Bob?

What does music taste of? Well, you're a musician, but you can't answer that question, can you? It's the wrong question. You see, when we ask the wrong kind of questions, rather than exalting God's word, actually, we end up silencing the Bible.

Now, we've no time to deal with lots of detail, but I must make some brief comments then. First of all, about Genesis and science. Is Genesis a scientific account or not? In other words, is it primarily about nature?

Well, it says some things about science, no doubt, but certainly science is not its primary concern. Certainly it is opposed to scientific reductionism.

In other words, that everything is down to chance. There's no reason for anything. There's no creator. There's no purpose. There's no order. Therefore, no morality. Let's be very clear about that.

[21 : 32] You can't have creation and scientism. That is the worship of the denial of God. That's Richard Dawkins religion. Scientism. Now, that's obviously incompatible with a belief in God the creator.

But Genesis is very different from a scientific type account. As Calvin says, the language is non-scientific. It's a popular style. It's not that it's just pre-scientific and ignorant of science, because we know that Moses was educated in all kinds of science in Egypt.

Some of the science of Egypt still baffles modern day scientists. Nobody really understands how the pyramids and all these things were built. No, it's non-scientific language that's quite deliberate.

I mean, think about it. How else could you possibly speak across the centuries, across the cultures, to the advanced as well as to the most primitive? Well, Genesis has done precisely that.

And it still does precisely that. And that's why it's written the way it is. But its purpose, as far as understanding the world is concerned, is not to teach us about secondary causes, about what and how.

[22 : 46] It's to teach us about the primary causes, the ultimate cause. It's to answer the why question. Why is there anything at all? It's not descriptive in the way that science is descriptive.

Science observes and describes the world. Rather, it's prescriptive. It's revelatory. It says, this is the purpose of everything and this is why you should think and believe and behave in certain ways.

But above all, the subject is not the natural world. It's not the world of nature. The subject is the transcendent God. And he is above and beyond all science.

You can't discover God by empirical science and validation and things that you do in the laboratory. That's why people like Richard Dawkins are so stupid. No, if you want to know about God who is the creator, then he must reveal himself to us.

That's what we have in Genesis 1 and 2. Above all, it's revelation of God. Well, what about Genesis and history, then? Is Genesis, nevertheless, a historical account?

[24 : 00] Is it primarily about humanity and its history? Well, most definitely, Genesis purports to be recounting real history, not just myth.

And yet it is unlike any other human history, isn't it? It must be. It's unique by its very nature. There are no human beings present to ask any questions. Remember what God said to Job?

Where were you, Job, when I made the world? There were none of the usual sources or things that you'd expect history writers to have. The historicity of the events that it portrays are undoubted.

The New Testament assumes that. Jesus assumes that. But we mustn't confuse historical with literal. There are many ways to teach history.

Not all of them are prosaic. And that doesn't make them any less valid. And there are many ways in the Bible you can compare these things. I mean, just for example, later on when you go home, look at Exodus 14 and Exodus 15.

[25 : 02] In Exodus 14, verse 21, we're told that the Red Sea was parted by a strong east wind. But in Exodus 15, verse 8, we're told that the Red Sea was parted by the blast of God's nostrils.

Now, which of those two is true? Well, it's a silly question, isn't it? You could say the same thing about the birth stories in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 1 and 2, which speak just in plain prose of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Well, Revelation chapter 12 tells us of exactly the same thing in a very, very different kind of language, which is true. Well, of course, they both are.

You could say the same about Daniel chapter 7 or Revelation chapter 4 and 5 that speak of the exaltation of the risen Christ. Well, so does Matthew chapter 27 and 28 speak of Christ's resurrection and ascension, but very differently.

And nor are there any such thing, really, as bare historical facts, when you think about it. All telling of history bears the interpretation of the historian, somebody who writes with a message.

[26 : 11] And they'll write in a certain way so as to make that message plain. And just so with the biblical writers. They often place things out of chronological order so as to draw attention to the key message.

Remember, just a few weeks ago, we saw that, didn't we? In Joshua chapter 3 and chapter 4, how things are put out of order so as to emphasize the main point, those twelve stones from the center of the river.

Now, it may very well be just so in Genesis 1 and 2. I think that an honest and unbiased reading of Genesis 1 to 3 shows that the writer seems to freely dischronologize, put things out of order.

He varies the order of things in a way that's quite unembarrassed. And that seems to me to suggest that chronology isn't his primary concern. One of the most obvious is that in Genesis chapter 1, God makes man last of all.

Whereas in Genesis chapter 2, he tells us of man's creation first, before all the animals. On day 1, for example, you've got evening and morning, and yet, not until day 4 that the sun and the moon are created.

[27 : 23] And the sun and the moon are the very things that the text tells us defines day and night. Again, in Genesis chapter 1, we have the creation narrated over six days.

But Genesis 2, verse 4, tells us of the day when the Lord God made everything. Or was it one or was it six? You see, you can respond to these things in different ways.

One, of course, is to say with the liberal scholars, well, obviously it's just a hodgepodge of accounts put together, they all conflict, and it just shows it's all myth. That doesn't credit the author with a lot of savvy, does it?

I think if it was so obvious as that, they'd have done a better job to fool us. But nobody can really take that view seriously when you look at the artistry and the intricacy of the way these accounts are written.

Or you can assume, as many sincere Christians have, that we simply must harmonize things to prove that the author really was primarily concerned with the exact order and chronology of creation.

[28 : 26] And so people have generated all kinds of ingenious ways of postulating how you can have light without the sun, or how you can fit the accounts together so that we can make an exact chronology.

But as I read these things, I do think that there are many, many problems to that. Many things that just don't convince me to that approach. I'm not writing off these harmonizing views, but it just does seem to me much more natural to assume that the writer knew exactly what he was doing, and that he saw no problem for his readers who would also see what he was doing, and that they would understand that it was the considerations of his message about God, but dictated his order, not just chronology, just like in many other parts of the Bible.

So in Genesis chapter 1, the focus is on the creation of man as the climax in God's image, and that's the climax to the whole story. Whereas in chapter 2, it's a focus on man's exercise of God's image, what it means.

But again, his central place in creation is spoken of because he's spoken of first. So yes, Genesis is history. But it's not secular history, it's not ordinary history.

It is what Robert Godfrey, in his very helpful book, *God's Pattern for Creation*, what he calls covenant history. Let me quote. He says, we cannot understand Genesis 1 unless we see it covenantally.

[30 : 01] It's not an encyclopedia, but it's a covenantal record, always focused on God and his relationships to his people. Indeed, one way to see the whole book of Genesis is as a historical introduction to God's covenant made with his people at Sinai.

And I think that's a very helpful comment, because it reminds us of one of the very basic things that we've got to think about whenever we approach the Bible, and that is this, he's not speaking to you, silly. Genesis was not written directly to us in the 21st century in the West with our particular presuppositions and questions.

It's for us, of course, but that's not the same thing. And we have to ask these questions, to whom was it written, and why, and with what purpose. And only then can we really understand what the message is for us today.

We'll come back to some of the details next time, but before we go on tonight, I want to get to really the most important question of all. Because the purpose of the prehistory centres above all on the person of these chapters.

The who question. And the answer to that question is the Lord, the God of Israel, the one and only God, the sovereign God, the maker of heaven and earth.

[31 : 25] That's the most important factor in the whole thing, and yet that's the one thing that's so often overlooked in all the controversy. It's the polemic thrust, the apologetic thrust in these verses about the uniqueness of our God.

In other words, the deliberate and the provocative confrontation Genesis has with every other view of the world, and every other religion, and every other philosophy of man.

You see, the Bible is God preaching himself to us, and calling us to account, and challenging and rebuking us. And to say that it's not scientific, that it's not literal, is not to try and avoid a clash with other world views.

It's not to try and make it more palatable to modern man. It's exactly the opposite of that, in fact. It's recognising that when this was first written, it was deliberately written as a frontal assault on all pagan thinking.

Genesis gives a radically different explanation of the world from every other ancient creation story. There might be some similar forms and structures in those stories, but the content of Genesis is crucially different.

[32 : 43] It's just the case of the writer using the contemporary language and the forms of his day to use a language that everyone could understand to give a totally counter-cultural message.

And that's just preaching at its best, isn't it? Using the language people understood to give God's message as a very different one. And the purpose of this preaching in Genesis is that God might tell us who he is and who we are and what our world is for and how we can know how to relate to him and how to relate to one another for that matter in this world.

And without that revelation of God, we won't know. We can't know. Our world would be in a fog of confusion and of chaos. It was then in the pagan world that Moses inhabited, and it still is today in the pagan and the secular world that we inhabit.

So what are these erroneous views of the world then that Genesis takes head on and brushes aside? Well, above all, first, Genesis tells us that the world is not defined by mere chance.

The world of men and women and humanity is not just a chance occurrence, a fallout from the battles of gods raging in the skies and the heavens. That was what the Babylonian myth said.

[34 : 03] Earth was just a fallout from battles going on in the sky. Human beings were a chance byproduct. They were created from the blood of warriors that were slain and they were made just to be slaves to serve the god and do all their donkey work.

Well, it's hardly surprising if that's your view of the world that in that culture life was very cheap. It was there to be exploited always by the powerful. There's not a lot of difference, is there, between that view of a chance fallout from celestial battles in the gods and modern views that equally see the world just as a chance occurrence.

Banging together of atoms, primeval soup, mankind just eventually by chance emerged. Well, that view also ends up very often with a very cheapened view of life, doesn't it?

A view that sees abortion and increasingly infanticide and euthanasia as things just to be used and to be exploited. That was Charles Darwin's view. It's all about the survival of the fittest because it's all by chance.

Did you know that the real title of his book, which you know is just The Origin of the Species, did you know the real title was this? On the Origin of the Species by means of natural selection or the preservation of the favoured races in the struggle for life.

[35 : 22] You don't hear Richard Dawkins quoting that too much these days, do you? It was a view that justified racism. But no, in total contrast to that idea that the world is just due to chance, Genesis chapter 1 again and again hammers home.

It's the very opposite. It's by the command of a sovereign God. And God said, and God said, and God said, and it was so. And God spoke creation into being because he willed that it should be.

And you see, that means that the world has meaning. It's here for a reason. And it means that your life has reason and purpose. A God-given purpose.

That means that your life is valuable. Not just to others, but to God, your creator. And despair and disillusion and nihilism, these are such a feature, aren't they, of our modern secularized western world?

Well, no wonder. The world's just defined by mere chance. It's entirely logical, isn't it? But no, says Genesis, by the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host, for he spoke, and they came to be.

[36 : 42] And therefore it has meaning and purpose, and above all hope. Second, the world is not defined by sex. Creation is not intimately bound up with sexual unions and bestial practices among the gods, as almost all the pagan mythologies believe.

Which is why prostitution and perversion and fertility rights and so on were so much an integral part of their religions. But no, the world is not procreated through some grotesque sex act between gods and goddesses.

It's created from nothing by one God, the living God. And sex and sexual relationships are just a gift of God for human beings to be used rightfully and joyfully, but not idolatrously.

There's nothing divine about sex. Sex isn't to be worshipped or to be thought of as spiritual. That's the mark of pagan idolatry. That's why the Bible's religion was so against that kind of thing.

Well, the world is still defined by sex for so many people, isn't it, today? Sex is worshipped in our society and in most societies. It's even spiritualized and deified, isn't it? Especially in eastern religions.

[37 : 56] Tantric sex and the Kama Sutra and all that sort of thing, the way to a higher spiritual plane. Amazing, isn't it, how secular Westerners come over so religious when it comes to sex.

But what a lot of sadness there is in our world because of the worship of sex, isn't there? The porn industry, the most profitable thing there is virtually.

Think of all the prostitution, the child prostitution, the perversity, the paedophilia. Whether it's ancient Babylon or Egypt or Canaan or 21st century Europe, many, many people believe the world is defined by sex.

But no, says Genesis, it's not. Not the chance of secularism, not just the sensuality of sex. And nor is the world, says Genesis, defined just by luck.

Genesis tells us plainly, doesn't it, that human misery and estrangement are not just misfortune. It's not just bad luck and bad magic and curses and things. To be alleviated by charms and shamans and offerings to deities and spirits.

[39 : 03] No, the world is as it is because of sin. Because of a rebellion against God and against the moral order. Well, there are plenty today who think it's all about bad luck.

Therefore, who live in bondage to superstitions of one kind or another. Think of the animism of many of the eastern religions, the Asian and Chinese cultures. People living in fear of incurring bad luck and curses and whatever.

Some of the African cultures, cursings and spells and fear and terror of witch doctors. But even in our so-called secular culture, isn't it true? People in slavery to horoscopes and lucky charms and lucky footnotes and goodness knows what.

Your well-being and your future, your fortune, nothing to do with your behavior, it's all about luck. But Genesis says no. It's not bad luck that's a problem, it's sin.

But that also means that the way of true religion isn't a mystery. It's not mumbo-jumbo. It's clear. It's unequivocal. God has revealed the way. The way of response and obedience to him, the one true God, and to his command and the way of life.

[40 : 18] Now, the world is not defined by mere sensuality or superstition or secularism or even scientism. It is defined, says Genesis, by a sovereign God who alone has created all things, including us, for a glorious purpose.

There are all kinds of indicators just in the detail of the text that indicate this broadside against false religions and so on. One is the sun and the moon, which aren't mentioned.

Do you notice that? In all the ancient cultures, the sun and the moon were deities, gods. But Genesis just tells us there were lights, just lights that God made to light up the day and the night.

And in the pagan world, the animals, the natural forces were all dark powers. But no, in Genesis, it's just a word. And God banishes them all, the waters, the deep, the darkness.

In the ancient world, the sea monsters, the great creatures were forces of chaos likely to overcome even the gods. But in Genesis, God doesn't have to fight sea creatures. He just makes them.

[41 : 23] The word that's used there, the creating the sea creatures, used three times in this account. In chapter 1, verse 1, God created. It's used three times of the creation of man and woman.

It's a word only ever used of God. And there it is, used in verse 21 of the sea monsters. Created by God, not rivals. As the children's hymn says, the Lord God made them all.

Even the scary monsters. You see, this polemic, this broadside against the world's view is of vital importance. It mustn't be obscured. It's the main point of the creation story in Genesis.

Let me quote to you from a Jewish author, Herman Valk. Some of you will have read his novels, *The Winds of War* and so on. But in a very interesting book called *This is My God*, he says this in a paragraph called *The Real Point of Genesis*.

Listen. The first chapter of Genesis cut through the murk of ancient mythology with a shaft of light. Light that the whole world lives by now so that we can scarcely picture its effect when it first shone forth.

[42 : 34] The universe was proclaimed a natural order, created and unfolded by one force and set going to proceed under its own power. There were no man-like gods, nor were there animal gods, nor were the gods animals.

There was no sun god or moon god or love god or sea god or war god. The world and mankind were not the product of titanic incest and sodomy among monsters in the skies.

Sun, moon, wind, seas, mountains, stars, stones, trees, plants, beasts were all part of nature without any magic of their own. Mumbo-jumbo was a mistake.

The gods and the priesthoods which demanded burnt children or hearts cut from living men or ghastly obscenities or endlessly draining gifts were useless, silly, doomed libels on the universe.

The childhood nightmares of mankind were over. It was day. The Genesis account of creation cut the cancer of idolatry out of human discourse.

[43 : 35] It took a long time to prevail, but at last even the charming Greek and Roman gods withered under the stroke. Genesis is the dividing line between contemporary intelligence and primitive muddle in the realm of first and last things and as such I do not see how it will ever be superseded.

Friends, if you miss that, you miss everything important about the early chapters of Genesis. As then, so now, Genesis tackles head on all other views of the world.

Not just modern atheistic determinism, maybe that's less important now in our post-modern world, but every other false religion and superstition around us in our global village.

Into the darkness of paganism, whether religious or irreligious, with all their myths, whether scientific or superstitious, Genesis loudly proclaims, let there be light, proclaims the truth of the one true and only God, proclaims the God of creation, and it calls us to bow down before him and him alone.

And that's why it's a message of urgency and a message of power for our world today. It's a message for those who know this God and for those who don't yet know him. For the believer, it's the great word of comfort, isn't it?

[45 : 00] This is our God. That's why the Psalms are so full of it. It's a great cry of comfort. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

From where does my help come? My help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. What in this world can possibly be outside his control?

He made it all. It's a word of great comfort. But it's also a word of real challenge, isn't it? Because this is the God who will brook no rivals.

He's the only God. He's the creator of all and therefore he is the Lord of all. I am the Lord. Besides me there is no other. He'll stand for no rivalry in pagan gods or in false religion.

But the same goes for the human heart too. This God will stand no rivals in your heart or in my heart. Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, says Isaiah.

[46 : 09] See if Genesis chapter 1 is telling us anything at all, it's telling us this loudly and with utter clarity. I am the Lord your God, your creator and your redeemer and you will have no other gods before me.

He calls us to bow down and worship. He calls us to bow down and worship Jesus Christ and him alone is the absolute Lord of our life. Because as Colossians tells us, for by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

And he is before all things. And in him all things hold together. So that's the question. Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 asks to you and to me.

Have you done that? Have you bowed down low before the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth? Are you still doing that with no rivals in your heart today and tomorrow and every day, every waking breath?

Whatever your view of Genesis chapter 1 and the details of it and all the rest of it, don't miss that. Because that's the real message of the God of creation for you and for me today.

[47 : 36] This is the one true God. And he calls us to worship him and no other.

Now and always. Well, let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would help us to understand the magnitude of your message to us and the challenge that there is to bow low before you, the creator of all things and the Lord of this world and of our lives.

May we, in recognizing this, be drawn to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, and in him find meaning and understanding and purpose in our lives.

For we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen.