

## Prayers

### To God

*Pray in wonder at the the almighty power of God. Let His authority lift you and His love empower you; and be conscious of His presence with you always.*

### For myself

Weekly theme: Discipline

**Oh God, You show me the only way to go; You shine the brightest light on my path; You have the authority to guide me safely; You have the wisdom to advise me fully; You have the knowledge to inspire me, and You have the love I need to fulfil my soul. You are everything to me; so let me receive of You and not begin to imagine that the disciplines of love and faith can in any way be compromised. AMEN**

### For others

*Pray for God's blessings to rest on people of faith who struggle to live under oppressive regimes. We pray such prayers with regularity, but it is important that we do so. For example, Muslim lawyers are acting in their High Court against Christians who have used the Arabic name for God (Allah) in a public call for God (Allah) to bless their own country. To us, this would be a small matter of language, but this reveals a massive prejudice against Christians in that land who struggle to get the message of God's love out to other people in their lands.*

## Meditation

Aspire to the greatest of achievements,  
For the Lord Your God has given you power  
Beyond your understanding.

Reach out to the highest of goals,  
For the Lord your God has very important tasks  
That only you can do.

Believe that the impossible can be done,  
For the faith to grow in the Kingdom of God  
Is yours to use, not to lose.

Take hold of your covenant heritage now,  
For Your God has portioned out His blessings

And they are there for you: now!

## Bible Passage

### **Genesis 1:1-2**

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,

<sup>2</sup> the earth was empty and had no meaning, and darkness covered the surface of the abyss, while the spirit of God swept over the waters.

## Review

The Bible begins with an amazing description of the creative acts of God. Genesis contains two of these; the first in the description that starts here and ends at 2:3; the second begins at 2:4 and continues all the way through chapter 3 to its end (and some believe it continues further on still). Today, we will study the first two verses of the first great description of Creation, but the undoubted focus is on the first verse, which contains some of the most well known words of the Bible: *'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'* (1:1).

Both this verse and the one following it are remarkable. They seem to describe creation as God's work coming from nothing, but language experts and theologians have failed to agree on what they mean for centuries! Yet they stand as powerful and beautiful statements of faith in God as Creator, and they cannot be ignored; they begin the story of God's creative acts from which the whole earth and our place within it derive. There is a great deal to say about these verses, so we will use two days to study them in order to avoid simplifying important issues. It is important to take time over them; they form the starting point for the Christian understanding of God, and are therefore central to our faith.

To say the words of verse 1 are extraordinary is an understatement. Despite extensive debate and analysis over thousands of years, even sceptics find it hard to avoid the sense of mystery and wonder they evoke. However, you will be aware that many people today have discarded what the Bible says about the creation of the world, and believe that science has proved the Bible 'wrong'; the beginning of the world in the 'big bang' has been extensively analysed, and it is logical, mathematically reasonable and accurate. This may well be the right scientific conclusion, but it is tragic that science and religion have been played off against each other in this way. From a human perspective, both the Bible and science give us important but different information about the beginning of all things. Unfortunately, where science and the Bible disagree, we can all too easily be led astray by erroneous presumptions about either theology or science.

Our minds cannot fully grasp what it means for the world we know to come into existence. We are part of creation both physically and spiritually, so we find it extremely hard to understand the idea that what we experience as our reality could somehow just 'happen' whether at some moment of time or over some period of time. Indeed, many of the questions we naturally ask about the Bible's account of creation relate to time; 'what was made when?' 'What does the existence of 'chaos' (1:2) before creation mean?' However, even time itself is part of creation and was brought into being by God, so 'beginning' is in itself a fundamental part of God's creative deeds!

The more we think about what the Bible says about Creation, the more we realise that no science can ever describe what happened before the world came into existence at God's bidding, for no 'time' existed before creation. Science is itself part of creation, and it analyses

the world as it is; it can neither describe what happened before the known Universe began, nor describe God. People love to try and compare Genesis 1 with various scientific theories of the origins of the Universe, the 'big bang' theory, 'evolution', or analyses from archaeology or geology, for example. But the history of such debates is one of cantankerous disagreement and division, which do no favours to humanity's quest either for truth or for knowledge of God.

As we study Genesis further, I will focus on what this scripture is primarily about, which is the nature and character of the God. God Himself is made known within His Creation and it is a reflection of His nature. We will soon discover that it is also a reflection of His relationship with people (1:26f.). The word '*Genesis*' means '*beginnings*', and it sets out what is essential for us to 'begin' to understand God and have a relationship with Him. Along the way, it tells us many things in different ways, but we must not let ourselves become too side-tracked, lest we find ourselves wandering from the essential purpose of this passage within Scripture. It tells us that before anything existed, God was. We know nothing of His supreme existence or majesty, except the extraordinary picture presented to us in verse 2, of His Spirit 'brooding' over the face of the waters. This remarkable phrase tells us that God is about to act with stupendous power and majesty to bring the Universe into being!

In the coming days we will see how this creation unfolds and how God holds all things in existence even now. The whole created world reflects God's glory!

## Discipleship

### ***Application***

#### ***Faith in God as the Creator***

So whatever we think of science, and different people have different levels of trust and understanding of this queen of academic subjects, Genesis 1 appeals to us to trust that at some point God created the Universe as we know it. From that moment, everything we are familiar with has come together to make up the extraordinary, beautiful and stupendously awe-inspiring world in which we live.

Yes, I think it entirely reasonable for the Christian to have an open mind about 'science' and especially the 'theory of evolution', which has many different features to it that are not well understood and have proved controversial; but that is the very nature of science. The Christians does well to allow science to get on with its explorations of God's world unhindered, and come up with its theories; we can argue about them and discuss them as much as we like. The fundamental difference between the Christian and the atheist/agnostic is the belief that God was behind it all.

#### ***God is good***

We do not yet come to any analysis of whether Creation is 'good' or not, but one of the major differences between this story of the creation of the world and the many other versions of this found in ancient times is this. The Bible story is caking the violence and sexual connotations found in almost every other creation story of ancient times. This can surely be no accident. People who look at the world and try to analyse it often come to the conclusion that there is a great deal of evil within it, and they decide that this must be intrinsically embedded within creation. If you have the chance to 'google' the subject 'ancient creation stories', you will find links to some of these ancient creation myths and they are dramatic, sexual and full of violence!

By contrast, the God of the Bible is far different. Something mysterious is going on and we will soon begin to understand it better, but it is certainly not tinged with the frailties of human nature or the paranoia of its fears. When God is at work, He is in control to do what he wants.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- Look up 'creation' on the internet, perhaps 'google' the word or look it up on wikipedia. Then, read what some people are saying in the debate between religion and science. What do you think of what you have read? Share this with others and discuss it if you can.
- Pray for those who find it hard to accept that the Bible has anything positive and helpful to say about creation. Pray that God will move to help people discover the truth within His Word.

### ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. Have you known people tell you they don't believe in God because of science? How did you respond?
2. In groups, discuss what it means for you to believe that God made the world and everything in it.
3. What parts of Genesis 1:1,2 do you not understand and why? (discussing this will lead into tomorrow's study)

## **Final Prayer**

We praise You, O God, for the wonder of Your Creation. Although we can never understand everything about Your great creative work, we know about Your love for us through Your Son Jesus. May we never turn away from Your love or exchange mere ideas for Your truth; O God, our Creator. AMEN