

Prayers

To God

Pray and sing your praises to God. If you have a 'tongue', then sing in praise, if you love a famous hymn, then sing it, and if you have a favourite song on UTube, then play it and let your soul give the purest praise to the Lord.

For myself

Pray about your feelings. Sometimes your feelings are quite contrary to your intent, or your feelings lead you into something other than what you know to be right. Offer these things to God and seek His way forward into discipline and faithful living.

For others

Weekly theme: Justice

Dear Jesus, come with mercy on our land and bless all who seek to do what is right and just and true and of good report. May we all be willing to promote the heritage of Christian faith on which all true morality and social stability stands, and unashamedly give honour to the God who is ready to help us if we will honour Him and follow His advice. May we also be ready to stand against what is evil and wrong in our land and seek justice and peace for all who are on the receiving end of social extravagance and political manoeuvring. Make us into Your active people, we pray, AMEN

Meditation

Lead us on a journey of discovery, dear Lord:

Take us beyond what we know to see things as You do,
To discover our true place in Your world.

Take us out of our comfort zones into Your great universe,
To see the beauty of all You have made.

Take us out of the simple ways of thinking about our faith,
To find Your light and revelation in the Word.

Take us out of our dependence on the things of this world,
To trust in You alone for our greatest happiness.

Take us out of the limits of time, of hours and days and years,

To see Your eternal plan evolve within our lives.

And as we find out more, dear Lord, lead us on.

Bible Passage

Genesis 1:14-23

¹⁴ And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them mark out the seasons, days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light to the earth.' And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights; the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night, and the stars. ¹⁷ Then God set them in the dome of the sky to give light to the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ Evening came and morning came; day four.

²⁰ And God said, 'Let the seas swarm with fish and living things, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' ²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and all manner of living things which move or swim in the seas, and every kind of winged bird. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and said, 'Be fertile and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds increase on the earth.' ²³ Evening came and morning came; day five.

²⁴ And God said, 'Let the earth produce living creatures of every kind, cattle and creeping things; and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. ²⁵ God made all kinds of wild animals of the earth and cattle, and everything that creeps upon the ground. And God saw that it was good.

Review

Today's passage from Genesis 1 describe day four, day five and and the beginning of day six of Creation, and contain the fifth, sixth and seventh pronouncements of God ('*and God said ...*' 1:14,20,24). This may seem to be an odd place to stop the reading, but I do this because the next verse contains the eighth pronouncement of God which is about the creation of men and women, and we will look at this tomorrow.

The passage for today moves us on from the basic structure of the world so far created, and describes the creation of days and years, and of living things such as fish, birds and animals. It seems odd that we read about the creation of days and years here, a little after the creation of the first day in verse 6 (day one), but the first day was a 'unit' of God's creative power, where we are now being told about the sequencing of time, and God's organisation of the created world. As day follows day in this creative sequence, God reveals more of the world we experience, and the whole sequence is leading us towards the creation of men and women, as we will read tomorrow. Between creation itself and the arrival of people, Genesis 1 reveals the creation of our environment.

Those who wrote down this story attempted to put into words the perfection of the world they saw. They described God's awesome majesty with words that do an amazing job of assessing and reflecting the glory of Creation. As we read, the passage is full of small cameo pictures of God's creative work; the setting of the heavenly lights to '*mark out the seasons*' (1:14), the sun and the moon '*ruling*' the day and night (1:16). In a profound and powerful way they present us with short memorable descriptions of a staggeringly wide

variety of things made by God; for example, '*let the seas swarm with fish and living things*' (1:20), and '*let the earth produce living creatures of every kind ...*' (1:25).

This passage also contains the powerful and positive feature of God's affirmation of contentedness in what He has done. Three times He looks at what He has done and says '*it was good*' (1:18,21,25) and he blesses His work (1:22). This is an extraordinary and beautiful feature of the Creation story, because many ancient creation narratives speak only of creation out of violence, sex, greed and manipulation. God, however, declares His creation good, and this is not just stated, it is also represented stylistically in the structure and order of Creation. The world is created in a perfect number of seven days (including the seventh 'Sabbath' day, 2:1-4); also, God issues a perfect ten commands to effect Creation, '*and God said ...*', with nine such sayings in in Genesis 1, and the tenth being attached to the command to rest on the Sabbath day (2:1-4).

God's pleasure is also indicated by His blessing. He blesses creation twice, and each time, this blessing is followed by a significant proclamation. Here, God orders the fish and the birds He has just created to '*be fruitful and multiply*' (1:22). Later on, God blesses the people He has made and then issues the same instruction to men and women (1:28). Obviously therefore, the blessing of God is Scripture's way of recognising the supreme importance of procreation.

As we read this passage about the creation of the world's contents and the life within it, another of Scripture's significant numbers comes to the fore, and this is the number 3. This, together with 7 and 10 was regarded even in ancient times as a 'perfect' number with spiritual significance. Here, genesis records the creation of time as taking place in a threefold manner, that is, in seasons, days and years (1:14). The lights in the sky were threefold; the **greater** (the **sun**), the **lesser** (the **moon**) and the **stars** (1:16). The life created on day five consisted of three creatures; **fish**, '**living things**' and **birds** (1:20). God's blessing is given in three Hebrew words, be '**fertile** and **multiply** and **fill**' (1:22). Lastly, on the land, God made three types of living things, '**cattle** and **creeping things** and **wild animals**' (1:24).

Nowadays, we categorise the world around us in a scientific manner, but those who wrote down this story categorised everything in threes to indicate the perfect work of God. If they wished to include any more specific plants trees or vegetation, they would have listed them in threes, to honour God's perfect will! It is perhaps difficult for us to understand, but ancient people were aware of their limited knowledge, and this was their way of honouring God for the whole of His creative power.!

Within each part of this story, there are other hints of God's power and authority. For example, the story obviously describes the creation of the objects of the universe, but more is implied beneath the surface of what we read. Most of the objects and living things mentioned in this passage were worshipped by other nations precisely as gods; the sun, the moon and the stars, and all kinds of living things in the sea or on land. We do not think of things like this, but ancient people knew all about it. In comparison to the peoples of other lands, the Israelite people held in this narrative a fundamental truth about creation; God is in complete authority over all things and over all other so-called 'gods', and he even has authority over all evil ('*darkness*'). God has made all things and they are therefore not to be worshipped above Him; that would be idolatry (see Exodus 20:2,3,4). Nothing much is said specifically about these things, but scripture builds on this later on in Genesis, and it is important that we spot this apparently simple fact about the magnificent Creation story.

Discipleship

Application

Awe and wonder

There are times when a disciple of Jesus can only come before Almighty God in awe and wonder at His Creation. The more we read of what God has done within the literature of the Old Testament, the more we can take hold of its truths about the nature of God; for this is what the Bible is all about. Despite many mysteries within the text of Genesis, and many unsolved mysteries within science concerning the origins of all things, there is surely a place for people of goodwill to rise above the historical chasm between Genesis and 'science'. We can surely all explore what Genesis has to say about God, and what it means for people today to say that our world is God's Creation.

Honouring God in faith and deed

The great story of Creation here in Genesis 1 is not a philosophical treatise. It is a working description of our spiritual connections with God. Scripture declares that He has made the world in which we live, it is perfect, He loves it, and we are not to despise it therefore or pretend that anything certitude is worthy of our affections or our worship. The whole world is before us to use and to live in, and this is clear even at this point in our studies.

Some people find it hard to accept this part of Scripture because they feel that this narrative is far removed from their experience. However, there is no reason why we cannot take the cultural leaps necessary to understand it for what it is, and rejoice in the wonderful glory of God it projects. It is probably worth the time for each Christian to read Genesis 1 and try to get their heads around it so that when people ask them about their beliefs concerning creation, they have something reasonable to say!

Ideas for what to do

- *Take the opportunity of a break some time to go for a walk, look at some books about the rest of the world, or gaze at the sky, and 'wonder' at God's creation. We can see this in almost anything if God opens our eyes!*
- *Pray for those who find it difficult to see God in the things around them because they are surrounded by 'man-made' objects, often not very beautiful ones, and they have little opportunity to appreciate the wider experiences of life available in this world.*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How important is time? Have you ever imagined trying to get round it or step outside it? Does science tell us exactly what time is and why it exists?
2. Is 'life' essentially one thing? Do you feel connected to the rest of the world of living things, to fish, birds and animals etc. because God has granted all 'life'?
3. Why is it that we live within this complex and fascinating world and forget the God who made it?

Final Prayer

Eternal God, who does all things well, read our minds and teach us truth; read our emotions and enrich our lives; read our hearts and strengthen our character. We need Your works of grace within us; so make us worthy to receive your blessings. AMEN