

Although the focus of this series of sermons is on creating beings in God's image, so far we have not really said much about events occurring here on earth.

- ◆ Instead we've talked about the two different dimensions of time, one where God dwells and one in which we dwell.
- ◆ We've talked about how the Trinity is a community of beings within the Godhead grounded in love and relationship.
- ◆ It is God's dream to share this unique relationship of love with His created beings, summed up in the statement, "Let us make man in our image".
- ◆ We've talked about the rebellious angels who exercised their freewill, left their first estate and were banished to this earth.

Now we return to the creation event.

- ◆ As mentioned earlier, about 13.8 billion years ago, God brought the universe into existence.
- ◆ Astronomers and astrophysicists theorize there was a huge explosion, the Big Bang, and all matter that was compressed into the size of an atom by enormous gravitational forces was blown out into what we today call the universe.
- ◆ Scientists also tell us the temperature of the universe just a few seconds after the big bang was trillions of degrees hotter than our sun. However if that exact extreme temperature had been just a tiny bit hotter or colder, carbon molecules would never have appeared yet all life is based on carbon.
- ◆ For those of us living in our four-dimensional world, we struggle to understand how all the matter in the universe came from a pinhead along with the accompanying forces that first created the Big Bang and then pulled matter back together into the various bodies that make up the universe today.
- ◆ In classic understatement, the Bible leaves out all the scientific details and simply says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," and leaves all the questions unanswered.
- ◆ However in the midst of the estimated two trillion galaxies in the universe, one particular planet came in for special attention.
- ◆ It probably took a little divine prodding, as this planet was positioned with extreme precision in relation to the other heavenly bodies so as to sustain the fragile life forms we see on the earth today.
- ◆ ***Isaiah 45:18 For this is what the Lord says—he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited—he says: "I am the Lord, and there is no other."***
- ◆ One of the most fundamental requirements for a planet to sustain life is to orbit in the "habitable zone" of a star, the so-called "Goldilocks" region where the temperature is just right and liquid water can exist.
- ◆ Earth's precise distance from the sun, the diameter of the planet, its axis tilted at 23.5 degrees, the 24-hour day, and a conducive atmosphere are crucial in producing this "Goldilocks" factor.
- ◆ A recent statistical analysis by astrophysicist Erik Zackrisson from Uppsala University in Sweden arrived at this staggering figure that despite there being around 700 quintillion planets in the universe, that is a 7 followed by 20 zeros, there is only one planet like earth.
- ◆ It was one thing for planet earth to miraculously appear in this "Goldilocks" region, but now we are faced with another mystery, the arrival of life on this planet.
- ◆ If the probability of earth being positioned just right is practically impossible to measure, then the probability of life appearing by chance from non-life is even more remote.
- ◆ Paul Davies, an astrobiologist at Arizona State University in a candid admittance has said, "We don't know the mechanism whereby nonlife turns into life, so we have no way of estimating the odds ... It may be one in a trillion trillion (it's easy to imagine that), in which case, earth life may be unique in the observable universe."
- ◆ This potentially explains why humans haven't yet managed to create life in the lab even though it appears in nature in as simple a form as a seed.
- ◆ If all this isn't difficult enough to comprehend, then we have the development of intelligent human life on this unique planet.

Over the millennia, the task of interpreting the Genesis creation account has been a challenge for both Jews and Christians alike and has even led to conflict in defence of certain positions.

- ◆ So it is with a certain amount of apprehension that we look at the circumstances surrounding the creation event.

- ◆ In our introduction, our focus has concentrated on a scientific view; big bangs, goldilocks regions, and mechanisms whereby nonlife turns into life.
- ◆ It is a natural for those of us living in our advanced scientific and technological world of the 21st century to view our world through a materialistic lens where we have to understand how things work and how they came into existence.
- ◆ However, if we rewind our lens a few thousand years we may find the peoples of the ancient world viewed things from a totally different perspective.
- ◆ It is from their perspective that we need to understand the Genesis account of creation.
- ◆ We need to imagine Moses (relaying the creation account) sitting down with the Israelites (his audience) somewhere near Mt. Sinai and explaining to them the enormous privilege it was for them to be chosen by God to be His special people.
- ◆ Recent archeological finds and more accurate translations of ancient documents now give us a better understanding of the mindset of ancient near eastern peoples.
- ◆ Based on extensive research conducted by Dr. John H. Walton, these new finds has given us a unique insight into the mindset of these ancient people
- ◆ Rather than viewing the world through a scientific, technological or “materialistic” lens, as we tend to do in the 21st century, Dr. Walton proposes these ancient people viewed the world through a “functional” lens.
- ◆ Let me explain the difference.
- ◆ Take for example the seats we are sitting on.
- ◆ We can view the seat as an object made of a certain kind of material such as wood or metal, whose pieces have been crafted and assembled together, which are then covered with foam rubber and fabric.
- ◆ This description would be viewing the seat through a purely “materialistic” lens.
- ◆ However, if we shifted our focus to the use of the now assembled chair, we would be shifting our focus to the “function” of the chair – to be used as a comfortable reclining space for humans.
- ◆ Although understanding how the chair is constructed is interesting, it’s primary function is its use to humans after it has been assembled.
- ◆ It is through this “functional” lens that Dr. Walton has based his interpretation of the creation account in Genesis.
- ◆ Up to this point in time, interpretation of the Genesis creation account in the Christian community has primarily focused on reconciling the creation account in Genesis with current scientific knowledge.
- ◆ This has led to a number of competing creation theories. These include, young earth creationists, old earth creationists, gap or restoration creationists, evolutionary creationists and the intelligent design movement.
- ◆ Each try to reconcile the Genesis account with the present astronomical, anthropological, geological, and biological sciences.
- ◆ All of these theories rely primarily on a materialistic interpretation rather than a functional interpretation
- ◆ In other words they are looking at the creation account through 21st century eyes rather than through the eyes of the children of Israel living in the second millennia BC.
- ◆ The setting for the Genesis account is also important.
- ◆ Moses is introducing the recently freed children of Israel to the God who had delivered them from Egyptian slavery.
- ◆ As such, the emphasis is on the God who provides for and delivers humanity from slavery, both from Egyptian slavery and the slavery of sin.
- ◆ The message God wants to portray through His spokesman Moses is of a God who has both created humanity and provided all that they need for their existence.
- ◆ To frame the account in the usual materialist paradigm would also be irrelevant to the scientifically ignorant children of Israel who would be more concerned with how they were going to survive in the inhospitable Sinai wilderness.

With that background we can now look at a brief overview of the text from a functional perspective.

- ◆ Genesis 1:1 serves as a literary introduction of the subject matter it is going to discuss, what we would today call a “subject heading.”
- ◆ ***Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.***
- ◆ The account of what God did therefore begins in verse two where we find a description of the pre-creation condition.

- ◆ **V.2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.**
- ◆ What we find is, and this is significant, material is already present; we have a planet covered in water and obscured in darkness.
- ◆ The words “Tohu” and “Bohu” are used to describe the planet as a wilderness or wasteland that is uninhabitable and in a present state of chaos that lacks function or order.
- ◆ Notice too, this creation account given to the Israelites does not give any indication of how the planet or the cosmos came into existence.
- ◆ Rather it only describes events pertinent to them.
- ◆ The account then goes on to describe how God brings order out of this state of chaos and creates the functions that make it possible for humanity to inhabit the earth.
- ◆ This is confirmed by the verse we read earlier in Isaiah 45.
- ◆ **Isaiah 45:18 For this is what the Lord says—he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited—he says: “I am the Lord, and there is no other.”**
- ◆ God did it but the text does not offer a scientific explanation of how He did it.
- ◆ Instead, we are told what functions He brought into existence in order to make the earth habitable for His special project of creating “beings in His image.”
- ◆ **Day One – Time (Genesis 1:3-5).**
- ◆ **Genesis 1:3-5 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.**
- ◆ The normal emphasis of the materialistic theories focus on the source of light, but in reality, the emphasis should be on the function of “time.”
- ◆ After all it was God who called the light, “day” and the darkness “night” showing the emphasis should be on a period of time rather than on the source of light.
- ◆ **Day Two – Weather System (Genesis 1:6-8).**
- ◆ **V.6-8 And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” ⁷ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.**
- ◆ The focus of day two was to create the space in which humanity would live, and how the weather so necessary for survival was to be regulated.
- ◆ As water came from above as well as from the earth, ancient people considered the sky to be solid and this is why this verse is written according to their understanding and why it is called a “vault.”
- ◆ Ancient civilization’s relied much more than we do on the reliability of the weather for their existence and this was an important aspect for the next day’s function, the production of food.
- ◆ **Day 3 – Production of Food (Genesis 1:9-13).**
- ◆ **V.10-11 God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so.**
- ◆ The land and seas were separated and the cycle of living plants to produce food was set up, a critical function for sustaining life.
- ◆ Non-fruit bearing trees and flowers would also be a constant source of enjoyment and a reminder of the gracious God who provided both sustenance and pleasure for His people.
- ◆ In these first three days we see God setting in motion the three great functions necessary for sustaining life; time, weather and food.
- ◆ Again, the focus is not on how He brought these functions into being, but rather an orderly process of restoring order to a chaotic wasteland
- ◆ We also need to make a comment on God’s statement recorded at the end of each day, **“And God saw it was good.”**

- ◆ Some have interpreted this as a moral statement as it is used later in relation to the creation of man, but really it should be regarded as a comment on the success of the functioning process He had just set in motion e.g. time, weather, food.

Now that God has provided the functions for life to exist, days four through six are populated with the various life forms we find in the now habitable environment.

- ◆ The days four through six are parallel to days one through three.
- ◆ ***Day 4 – Lights to regulate the seasons (Genesis 1:14-19).***
- ◆ ***Gen 1:14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years.”***
- ◆ Notice the emphasis is not on the lights themselves, but rather on their functions, to again regulate time and seasons, an especially important function in an agricultural based society.
- ◆ ***Day 5 – God fills the habitat of sky and sea with bird and sea life according to their respective realms (Genesis 1:20-23).***
- ◆ ***Genesis 1:20 And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.”***
- ◆ The emphasis again is on their function to “teem” and “fly”, to be “fruitful” and “multiply.”
- ◆ Like the vegetation before them, they are created to provide sustenance and pleasure for the impending arrival of man (Genesis 1:29-30).
- ◆ ***Day 6 – God now fills the landmass He has provided with animal life and humankind (Genesis 1:24-31).***
- ◆ ***Genesis 1:24 And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so.***
- ◆ Like the sea and bird life before them the animals were to reproduce after their kind, that amazing feature built into creation, the miracle of reproduction and birth.
- ◆ When it comes to the creation of humanity, their function is spelled out in verse 26.
- ◆ ***Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”***
- ◆ The function of the newly created humanity is to populate the world in the same way as the instruction given to the animal kingdom.
- ◆ But they have an additional function in that they have a responsibility to the rest of God’s creatures, to subdue and rule over them (Genesis 1:28).
- ◆ God grants humanity another important function in that they are created in His image so they can relate to Him and one another.
- ◆ The arrival of humanity is the climax of the creation account as God assigns these functions to rule over the rest of His creation.
- ◆ ***Day 7 – God rests from His all His work and makes that day holy.***
- ◆ ***Gen 2:2-3 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.***
- ◆ God sat back, surveyed His creative work and saw that it was functioning well just as He had divinely planned (Genesis 1:31)
- ◆ But more needs to be said about the words, “work”, “rest”, and “holy”, used in these two verses.
- ◆ We will come back to look at these important words as the story progresses as they are crucial to understanding the story of salvation.

Let’s summarise the creation account.

- ◆ Days one through three pertain to the three main functions necessary for life; time, weather and food.
- ◆ Days four to six pertain to the functionaries that will inhabit the various areas made for them and their role in those domains; plants, bird and sea life, land animals and humans.
- ◆ Day seven changes focus from the creation to the Creator who surveys His handiwork, declares it “very good” and “rests.”

Viewing the creation account from the perspective of functions rather than from a materialistic or scientific perspective removes the need for Christians to defend their belief that God is the ultimate Creator.

- ◆ When various scientific theories are presented they need to be evaluated on their own merits, not on how it reconciles with a materialistic version of the Genesis account.
- ◆ The creation event in Genesis is not a scientific treatise. It's a message delivered to a scientifically ignorant group of slaves about the God who has both created humanity and provided all they need for their existence.
- ◆ There is no question God is the Creator. He designed and created all that exists and is testimony to His creative handiwork.
- ◆ Precisely how He did it though is not revealed in the Genesis account or in the rest of scripture.
- ◆ He may have brought some things into existence instantaneously, while with others He may have brought into existence through a long and complicated process.
- ◆ Regardless of how human life developed on the earth, the reality is, we are here and that is testimony to the creative ability of our God.
- ◆ A good principle to remember in the ongoing debate is to remember the author of Genesis was not so much concerned with *how* we got here but more with the question of *why* we are here.
- ◆ Unfortunately a preoccupation with the materialistic view, the *how*, has diverted attention away from the *who*. The functional view rightly focuses the attention on the *who*.
- ◆ Having said that, there is also a caution here for those proposing a scientific theory of man's arrival on the planet.
- ◆ They need to recognize science is in a constant state of flux as new discoveries replace old theories.
- ◆ Today's theory may not pass muster in 100 years time just as the theory of a geocentric universe, or later, a static universe have been debunked by new discoveries.

However, what is revealed over and over again as the salvation account unfolds is the purpose for which humanity was created.

- ◆ If God wanted us to know all the scientific in's and outs that would have been His focus.
- ◆ In fact, if He wanted to do this, He had the perfect opportunity to do so in His confrontation with Job (Job 38).
- ◆ Instead, when God finally speaks, He skips the "how" and impresses on Job the "Who" behind the marvels of the physical creation and the need to trust Him as He carries out His higher purpose of moulding and shaping humanity into His very image. (We will look at the case of Job later).
- ◆ The Christian community would do well to heed this same message today.
- ◆ Instead of being diverted by arguments over how God created the physical universe, we need to learn to trust our heavenly Father and Creator and concentrate on the more important function of allowing Him to create His spiritual purpose in us.
- ◆ God's purpose for humanity and how He goes about achieving it should always be the major focus when studying the biblical account.
- ◆ In fact His most creative achievement is still a work in progress, the creation of beings in His image.
- ◆ In this debate, God's ultimate purpose for this whole process of creation is too often overlooked, but it is recorded right here for us in Genesis 1:26, "***let us make man in our image.***"
- ◆ God's title of Creator is not a one-off title. He remains and continues to create and sustain the whole universe (Acts 17:25), and as we will see, remains committed to achieving His supreme creative achievement.