Sunday School Lesson (April 24, 2022)
Genesis – The Creation

This is how it all started.
"In the Beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." - Genesis 1:1

The Hebrew for "God" in verse 1 was *Elohim*, which can be plural! "Eloh" is singular; "im" makes it plural. One interpretation of this is that the writer DID intend it to be Gods, and meant it for Father & Son.

Before Creation, God existed, and nothing else did. God is self-existing and self-sufficient. And His creation of the universe was out of nothing (Latin *ex nihilo*). This is a story of power and progression: the earth was "without form and void" (Hebrew *tōhû wā bōhû*).[1] Out of nothing God made the earth, and then formed it and filled it.

We are all familiar with the premise that God created everything in "6 days." So, let's look at the sequence in this first chapter of Genesis.

Day 1	Light	Genesis 1:3-5
Day 2	Firmament	Genesis 1:6-8
Day 3	Dry land & vegetation	Genesis 1:9-13
Day 4	Luminaries	Genesis 1:14-19
Day 5	Birds & fishes	Genesis 1:20-23
Day 6	Animals & mankind	Genesis 1:24-31
Day 7	Rest	Genesis 2:1-3

This is a very poetic presentation of the Creation; it is sweeping and majestic. Rhyme was not that important to Hebrews, but this was probably meant to be sung, or chanted.

In all of this God is referred to as *Elohim*, only.

Creating male and female humans "in His own image" does that mean that, together, male and female are equivalent to God, any more than your reflection in a mirror is equal to you. In a mirror you see a two-dimensioned version of a three-dimensional self. Humans are a three-dimensioned reflection of an omni-dimensioned God.

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[1] Briscoe, Mastering the Old Testament, p.36.

How long was a "day?" How could you measure a day without a sun and no earth with a 24-hour rotation yet? Hebrew *yôm* fof "day" can also be translated to "period," which could easily mean an era, or a millennia.

At the end of each creation event, God declared it "Good." When He was finished, He declared it "Very Good."

Alternate Sequence

There is another version and it is a prose version. It does not attempt to divide events by "days;" it only presents them in a sequence. In this version, God is referred to as *Yahweh*, or *Yahweh Elohim*, but never as just *Elohim*.

Sequence		
1	Earth, heavens, mist	Genesis 2:4-6
2	Man	Genesis 2:7
3	Garden of Eden	Genesis 2:8
4	Vegetation & Tree of Life	Genesis 2:9
5	Beasts & Birds	Genesis 2:19-20
6	Woman	Genesis 2:21-22

*Note: Genesis 2:10-14 names four rivers flowing from the Garden of Eden
- Pīshȯn = Ganges? (India), which flows around the land of Hǎv'ĭlah (Arabia)
- Gīhȯn = Nile?, which flows around the land of Cǔsh (Ethiopia)
- Tīgrĭs
- Eūphrā'tēs

Is this second version truly a different version?

Humans are tied to the earth: v. 7 "the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground" Mankind was made from dust, and returns to dust. So, too, are all the beasts and birds: v. 19 "So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air". A frequently used analogy is God working as a potter, forming all of us from clay.

We have an intimate relationship with God: God breathed life into the nostrils of the man, completing him and giving him animation.

In this sequence God reviewed has work at the completion of each step and declared it GOOD. Except for Man. Here is a hiccup. Unlike the birds and beasts,

Man has no companion that is comparable to him (v. 18), so God created a helper. "The word '*helper*' occurs twenty-one times in the Old Testament and on fifteen of those occasions it refers to God helping man in one way or another – a fact that cast doubt on the common suggestion that woman, as man's helper, was in some way subordinate and inferior."[2]

God put Man in the Garden of Eden "to tend and keep it." God worked six days and then rested, so it is a natural expectation that God intended Man to likewise work and then rest.

Evolution in the Name of God

The Old Testament teaches monotheism, which is at the heart of our faith (actually for Jews, Christians, and Muslims). Some religions have devolved monotheism into a concept of polytheistic animism. The Apostle Paul addressed this as the advent of sin and the spiritual decline which followed in Romans 1:19-23.

> *[19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; [21] for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.*

In the Old Testament, there is a progression in the way God is identified:
- Shaddai = The (one, chief) God
- El Shaddai = Supreme God, or God Almighty
- Yahweh = I AM
- Elohim = the Lord(s)
- Adoni = My Lord

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[2] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

Did Moses author Genesis? Certainly not all of the Pentateuch because Deuteronomy includes a description of his death. This progression in naming God is part of the rationalization of some theologians that parts of Genesis may have come from multiple authors. Last week Grant Sitler mentioned one of the most popular, the JEDP theory of multiple authorship. Based on the phrasing and idiomatic language usage, linguistic experts believe the second Creation sequence description is the older version. The first version is sometimes refered to as the Priestly description and the second as Jahwistic.

Reconciling Genesis with Science: Creation vs. Evolution

Taking Genesis literally, there have been several famous calculations for the date and time of the Creation. This list is from one website:[3]

- James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, in 1650 counted all the "begats" in the Old Testament and came up with the evening of October 23rd, 4004 BC. He decided on October 23 because that is the autumn equinox, a traditional start of the new year; and, it must have been a Sunday, as that would certainly be the first day of the week for God to begin work.
- Venerable Bede believed Creation happened in 3952 BC.
- Isaac Newton calculated 3998 BC.
- John Lightfoot, Cambridge Hebrew scholar, believed Ussher's calculation was correct: 4004 BC, but, it would have been at 9 am on the day of the equinox, not the previous evening, as Ussher claimed.

The National Geographic website estimates the Earth's age at 4.54 billion years old (rocks in Canada have been estimated at 4.3 billion years old).

Using observations from the Hubble Telescope and calculations based on the expansion rate of the universe and background microwaves, scientist have estimated the age of the universe at about 13.77 billion years.[4]

In 1925 the famous Scopes trial (The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes) was about a Tennessee high-school teacher arrested and tried for teaching Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. He was found guilty and fined $100, but later the verdict was overturned on a technicality. (The 1960 movie was *Inherit The Wind*.)

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[3] Irishtimes website
[4] NASA website

Summary

Personally, I don't believe Genesis is God's scientific manual of how to create a universe.

Moses used simple terms (whether his own vocabulary was limited, or because he was describing, in his "homey way," to an unsophisticated audience) to describe mind-boggling events. It is similar to the Apostle John's descriptions in The Revelation of John, of Armageddon and the Apocalypse, for which the words had not yet been invented, words like missiles, helicopters, and nuclear war.

Regarding Creation, the point is – God DID IT, and He did it all !!
HOW He did it is beyond the comprehension of our mortal and limited minds.

Close with These Days devotion from Jan. 13, 1999, "Stars In Jars," regarding Day 4 of the Creation.

> Day Four unfolds so soft and still: / Glimmer,
>   gleaming, / shimmer, beaming/
>   brightness everywhere.
> Signs to mark / the passing time, / the sun, the moon,
>   and stars all shine / and take their turn.
> Day Four is done / and closes with a setting sun.

I remember when I was four years old, playing outside. As day folded into night, I looked up at the cheerful stars. I longed to reach out and touch one.

I say a star hurtle toward earth, then vanish. Certain that it had landed in my neighbor's back yard, I climbed the fence, imagining a glowing, five-pointed star lodged in the lawn. I determined to pluck that star from the ground and place it in a glass jar, where it could light up my room like a celestial night light.

But the yard was dark. No star. I fought back the tears and climbed back down to earth.

Stars weren't meant to be caught and confined in jars. I'm glad for that now. It heartens me to know that the stars I see tonight, the stars I saw as a child, are the same stars that have lit the night since the beginning of time.

When our lives seem disrupted by new beginnings, may we take comfort in the constancy of God's creation.

God of light, we thank you for your unchanging love, which is our sure foundation. Amen.

References:

1. Briscoe, Stuart, <u>Mastering the Old Testament: Genesis</u>, Lloyd Ogilvie, General Editor, Word Publishing, Dallas, TX, 1987, pp. 1-53.

2. Harper Study Bible, Revised Standard Version, Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI, 1985.

3. Internet:
   - https://www.irishtimes.com/news/how-an-archbishop-calculated-the-creation-1.378556#:~:text=In%201650%20the%20archbishop%20of,a%20date%20for%20the%20Creation.
   - https://wmap.gsfc.nasa.gov/universe/uni_age.html
   - https://www.nationalgeographic.org/topics/resource-library-age-earth/?q=&page=1&per_page=25

4. RSV Bible on-line: http://www.biblegateway.com

5. These <u>Days,</u> daily devotions (Jan – Feb – Mar, 1999), Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, Louisville, KY

Bible Readings:

1. Genesis 1:3-5	2. Genesis 1:6-8
3. Genesis 1:9-13	4. Genesis 1:14-19
5. Genesis 1:20-23	6. Genesis 1:24-31
7. Genesis 2:1-3	8.