

The World His Temple

Genesis 1.1-2.3

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The Old Testament, so also the book of Genesis, was inspired by God and it communicates truth to us.

The Apostle Paul writes that all Scriptures are God-breathed and are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

It was written for us, but it was not written to us. The book of Genesis was written to people in the Middle East 3000 years ago.

So for grasping the meaning of the text, and how it can train us in righteousness, we have to wonder what it meant for them, long ago.

This means, among other things, that we must not approach the text as if it will be able to answer all questions of today.



1. God above all

Today we are very scientifically interested in the origin of things, especially about the material origins. Scientist wonder, how did this world exactly begin?

3000 years ago, people were much more interested in the question of how our present universe is organised, how its order can be maintained, how we as humans should live in this great world.

And the Holy Scriptures were given by God to train us in righteousness - in how to live - it is not a book to teach us scientific knowlegde.

In modern times, we look at our world as if it is a perfect machine, that runs by itself. And if you believe that on top of our nature, there is something more, that there is a God, then you also believe in the supernatural.

In the ancient world, and in the bible, the concept of a world divided in nature and something supernature, would be seen as ridiculous.

For Israel and all Middle-Easterners of those days, God, or the gods, were seen as being intimately part of everything there is. No plant could grow without God's blessing. No star could move in its track without God holding it. Every harvest was thanks to God.

A few things that I get immediately from reading Genesis 1, is that from the outset, we are confronted with the mystery of the Trinity.

God created, sure. Or was it the Word of God that created? God spoke and its was.

Or was it his Spirit that hovered over the waters?

Our God - Father, Son and Spirit, is the one who made all there is. And God in his fullness was involved in the act of creating this world we live in.

In the Middle East in antiquity, there were many myths about how our world came into being. In many nations creation was seen as the result of different gods fighting each other, and the fact that chaos changed into order was seen as the outcome of the fight of the gods.

Our God does not fight; He is eternally three-in-one. He is love, peace, joy, and this goodness of God is visible in creation.

We see that God made all things by just speaking a word... be. He spoke, and it was.

All things that are mentioned that God created, sun, moon, stars, animals, the sea, the land, birds, all this you will see if you would go with me to the Egyptian museum in Cairo.

You would see mummified cats, representing the cat goddess Bast. And statues for worshipping the sun, Ra. All aspects of nature were worshipped as divine.

Genesis 1 shows us in a very poetic manner, that our God made all those things that are worshipped as gods by the other nations.

What the people around Israel saw as divine, all powers of nature, were really put into our world by our God. Our world and what is in it is not divine - only God is.

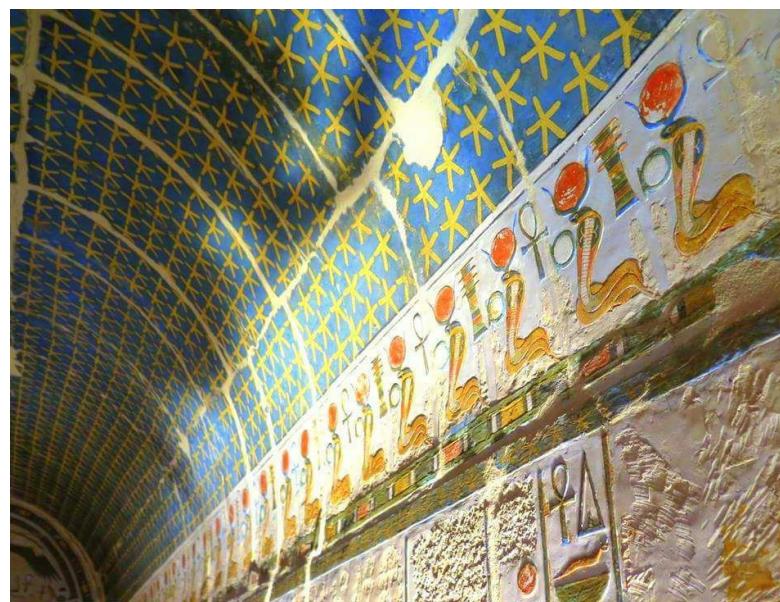
This does put all the gods of our world in their right place, does it not? Nothing is to be worshipped as divine, but God alone.

Whether it is another divinity, or money, or our job, or the state we live in, nothing is divine and nothing deserves our love and attention as God does. He made all things.

02. This whole kosmos is his temple

Now if God created all things by just speaking a word, there is a danger.

Since the time of the Enlightenment, a few hundred years ago, many people came to see God as a clockmaker who made the world like a a clock and then he withdrew from his workshop. The clock runs by itself.



This view of God, as a distant First Mover, and our world as a machine takes the magic out of this world.

But Genesis 1 offers us hope; our world is a spiritual world.

Any Middle-Easterner, 3000 years ago, who heard this poem of Genesis 1, would hear immediately that God created the world as his Temple.

Genesis 1 describes the building of a Temple. God built it in six days, and then on the seventh day, he did not withdraw from the workshop, but he made it his resting place. He filled it with himself.

John T. Walton, professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, defends this idea:

Any ancient reader, Israelite or otherwise, would have understood that if [Genesis] talks about God resting, it talks about the temple, because that is where God rests and where the gods rest and that is why temples were built.

That was how all people looked at their world in those days. The world was seen as a magical place, a universal temple where God, or the gods, rest.



So why then did the nations, and Isreal, build their temples of stone?

Israel's Temple was shaped as a microcosm of the actual kosmos. The Temple in Israel represented our whole world.

The Jewish historian Josephus wrote about this around the year 100AD. He said, “every object [in the temple] was intended to recall and represent the universe.”

The temple made of stone was meant to point Israel to this greater truth: God exists in our universe. He is not distant from us, but he participates in our world. He is near all of us.

After Israel's Temple of Solomon was destroyed, around 600BC, Israel desperately wanted to rebuilt it. But the prophet Isiaiah challenged this urgency to rebuilt the temple.

If our universe is really God's dwelling place, what is the great need for a humanly constructed “house” for God?

Thus says the Lord:
Heaven is my throne
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is my resting place?
(*Isa. 66.1-2*)

God rests in our world. This is the house where he lives.

So back to Genesis 1. God's work of creation was that he put all furniture in the right place in the universal temple. And then God saw that it was very good.

And normal life could now begin, so God took up residence in this world of us.

It is like an American President who, after all preparations for elections and the ceremonies to install him, then settles into the White House. He rests there; he resides there, to work.

God did not withdraw from work. His resting on the seventh day meant, the work of creation was done and he could now fill the world with his presence, and manage it.

If your life, and your world, has become flat, boring, one-dimensional, consider Genesis 1. This world is the place where God rests. He is around us, above us, in us. We live in a spiritual universe with God very nearby.

To see the world around us with this in mind, brings magic back into our lives.

3. Man in the center

Next week we will look deeper into the role of mankind in this created world, when we look at Genesis 2. But man also appears in Genesis 1, so let me say a few things.



It seems quite clear in the creation story, that God created our world for the sake of mankind. All things are created, organised, put together, for the sake of man.

Light and dark, days and nights, seasons, food to eat, beauty to enjoy. God made this world for us. For you.

In the rest of the ancient world, there were many creation-stories. And in those stories, the world was always set up to serve the gods, so that they could tease humans, or go and hunt.

But creation in Genesis 1 is for the benefit of humanity. The bible has a very anthropocentric view. God made the world for us. God does not need anything from us. But he gives us all things to enjoy. He saw that what he made was good and He gave it to us.

Without shame, we can say: God wants the best for us. God wants the best for you. And you can whisper it to yourself: 'God wants the best for me.'

God did command man in Genesis 1 to take good care of the world, to manage it, but that was not for God's sake. It is for our own benefit. God made this beautiful house for us, and he then tells mankind to take care of it. That is for us.

This is our God. He is unlike all other gods, who say: give me, give me. Our God is known for giving.

In your personal life this is essential. Too many Christians walk around with fear for God, and with a sense of under-accomplishment. "I do not do enough for him." But this misunderstands the nature of God. He wants the best for you.

And two more thoughts about your precious nature as a human being.

First question. If God made a temple, where are the priests?

Exactly. Adam and Eve. God made mankind to be the priests in his wonderful temple.

And what were those priests supposed to do? To take care of this world and make babies.

For God, taking care of this amazing world, is a priestly task. To work the soil, to take care of animals, to develop a company, to compose music, to take care of this world, to teach, to raise children, to water your garden.

These are godgiven tasks in his temple, but they are all self-serving. They are for our own sake.

So what you do, your daily work, is a priestly task for God. Never underestimate the value of small things. Never underestimate the value of what you do. It is work in God's Temple.

And a final question... next week a bit more about this. If in the Middle East, people made a temple, when all was finished, a statue of God would be brought into the temple, to take center stage.

Where is the statue of God, that is brought into the temple of the universe in Genesis 1?



God himself is invisible, but what represents God in the Temple of the Universe?
What is the Image, the Likeness of God?

Why did we never think of this? Mankind is the image of God. Mankind was created, man and woman together, to be God's representation. To say it rather bluntly: you are God's idol. You are his statue.

Not only the rulers, the mighty, the rich, the powerful. They were worshipped as gods in ancient days. But you, and all people, are God's image on earth.

A good reason, by the way, to treat all people, all people, with the utmost respect.

So if we begin to worship idols, wooden statues, animals, or stuff like money, we do not only dishonor God, but we push ourself down. Because you are supposed to receive that honor and love and respect.

Conclusion

Enough new ideas for today. God made the whole world as his temple. And He is very present in his temple. He is nearby.

And He made you as the most awesome capstone of creation. All that was made, is for serving us. All has been made for us to enjoy.

So we take care of our world. All we do to develop our world is a priestly task. And if you wake up tomorrow, and you see that sleepy face in the mirror, do not underestimate what you see . You see God precious image.

Amen.