**Lesson 2**

**14, 15 June 2021**

**Genesis 1:1 – 2:3**

**Comments from Chapter 1: *Turning Things Around***

* Jen Wilkin says that “the word *disciple* means *learner.* As a disciple of Christ, you and I are called to learn, and learning requires effort. It also requires good study methods.” She says elsewhere that any Bible study lesson should not only teach us something about the particular passage of Scripture under discussion, but also give some insight into how to study any part of the Bible. So as we go through the book of Genesis, we will be practicing various skills that will hopefully better equip you to study on your own.
* Jen talks about some errors in her thinking that hindered her Bible study in the past. One error she mentioned is that she believed that “the purpose of the Bible was to help me.”
* In her discussion of Turnaround 2, Jen lists a number of spiritual disciplines that involve the mind. (pages 29-30) Jen pulls these together by observing that “**the path to transformation runs** **from the mind** **to the heart**, and not the other way around.” She also notes that even secular science finds this principle to be true: we deepen our love for anything by studying it carefully, whether it is football or arranging flowers or God Himself. Why is that? Because “the heart cannot love what the mind does not know.”
* On the last page of Chapter 1 there is a six word phrase that summarizes the chapter and is an *important guiding principle* for all Bible study we do: **God before me, mind before heart**.

**Comments about the Text: Genesis 1:1 – 2:3**

**God Created** – After doing all the marking this week, you already have quite a bit of the rainbow in the first chapter of Genesis. We are going to add one more color right now: take an **ORANGE** pencil and draw a box around the word created in verses 1, 21, and 27. You’ll notice that almost all the things you have marked are either things God *did* or things He *said* during His work of creation. We will be discussing each of them at some point this summer; right now we want to examine the very first verb we encounter, “created”. The Hebrew word for “create” is *bara*. This word can imply “creating something from nothing”, as God did when He created the stars, the earth, the plants, etc. It can also imply “reforming existing materials”, as when God formed man from the dust of the earth or when Jesus turned the water into wine at the marriage in Cana. In either case, “it always signifies God’s divine creation of something strikingly new. Genesis 1:1 speaks of God’s creation of the original substance of the universe, something strikingly new. Genesis 1:21 speak of God’s creation of sentient or *conscious life* (animal life as opposed to plant life), something strikingly new…Genesis 1:27 speaks of God’s creation of man and woman *in His image*, something strikingly new.” (Bible Study Fellowship, *A Study of Genesis,* Lesson 1,page 1)

So man is not just another land animal, but something “strikingly new” and unique.

**Planet Earth** – The focus in verse 2 immediately narrows from the entire universe to planet earth. The earth as described in this verse is a rather scary place . . . if we can even call it a *place*. It is “without form,” with no defined shape or order. It is “void,” empty of things and empty of life. It is utterly dark, and there seems to be nothing but water, vast amounts of it, with nothing solid to put your feet on. If we had been there, this is what we would have seen . . . nothing! We might have *sensed* water all around us, but we couldn’t have seen it.

But the Spirit of God was hovering over it all. The Hebrew word for hovering comes from a root word meaning “to brood”, which makes me think of a chicken brooding over her eggs and her chicks. So in the midst of the chaos, disorder, emptiness and darkness, God was keeping very near, watching over His new creation. He had very special plans for this eerie thing called earth. Isaiah 45:18 tells us, “For this is what the Lord says—God is the Creator of the heavens. He formed the earth and made it. He established it; **He did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited**…” In its present state it is uninhabitable, so God immediately begins working on it. As the BSF (Bible Study Fellowship) points out, “Verse three onward unfolds an orderly account that reveals the mind and purposes of God. **God worked to form what was formless and to fill what was empty**.” And before He did either of those two things, **He removed the darkness** by speaking light into existence.

**Light? What Light?** – We do not know what this light looked like or where it came from. We know what it was NOT: it was not the light from the sun, moon or stars, because they had not been created yet. It was something totally other than those things. It is interesting that James describes God as “the Father of lights” and that Christ referred to Himself as “the light of the world”. God is not limited to sunlight and starlight to drive away darkness. In our present day world we see fireflies, glow worms and phosphorescent glowing substances. We enjoy firelight and electric light and multi-colored Christmas lights. So God creates all kinds of light, each kind unique and each kind different, for His glory and to our delight and amazement. And at the end of that first day, God was pleased with His work: He “saw that the light was *good*.”

**Forming the Formless** – On days two and three of the creation account, God continues to give form to what He had spoken into existence on day one. On the second day, he creates an “expanse” with the specific purpose of separating some of the water from the rest of the water. This is not a dam-like structure with water on either side of it. Rather the expanse separates the water in a “some-water*-over-* it-and-some-*under-*it” way. God calls the expanse “heaven”, which comes from a root word meaning “to be lofty”. So think of this expanse as “the sky” or “the atmosphere”, not the place we go when we die. At this point in creation, much of the water is under the sky in a vast ocean with no boundary, and another vast amount of water is above the sky, perhaps in vapor form. On day three God does some more separating of the water. This time His focus is on the water under the sky, and He commands that it all gather together “in one place”, so that dry land appears. And when He saw this new arrangement, He was pleased with it and pronounced it *good*.

**Filling the Emptiness** – Now that there is light and order, the state of the heavens and the earth is good, but God’s work is not finished yet. On days four, five and six He begins to fill each part of His creation with good things, and He does so in the same order in which He brought form to them. Actually He began this filling on day three when He commanded the earth to sprout vegetation. Had we been there to observe at the end of this day, we would have seen a beautiful blue and green world, filled with lush grasses and fruit trees and all manner of flowering plants. But if we had looked up, we would have seen an empty sky. So on the fourth day, God turned His attention to the heavens once again and spoke into existence the sun, the moon, the stars and all the galaxies in their countless myriads.

Years ago I read an article in *Newsweek* magazine illustrated by beautiful pictures taken by the Hubble telescope. The article said that scientists assumed that the stars had formed over varying amounts of time, and they expected data from the Hubble spacecraft to confirm this hypothesis. To their surprise the data actually indicated that all the stars formed at the very same time. They said, “It was as if every light in a large mansion was turned on in the same instant.” And I remember thinking, “Yes, they did. God said, ‘Let there be stars!’ and the stars burst forth in all their glory in a single instant.”

Then God turned to the water on earth that He had separated from the water in the heavens and said, “Let the waters *swarm* with living creatures, and let birds fly across the sky.” I like what the BSF says about this on page 4 of Lesson 1, “When we ponder the creatures that soar above us and swim beneath us, God’s work amazes us. To examine the variety of species God created from fossil records and in our own time is to stand in awe of Him.” And then on day six God looks at the dry—but now very fertile—land, and says, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures…livestock, creeping things, and wild animals.” And it was *good*.

And having filled the heavens, the waters, and the dry ground with countless marvels, God creates His crowning glory, something utterly unique in all of creation, something that reflects His image as nothing else ever could and ever will: mankind. And when He had done that, He stopped. His work of creation was *finished.*

 **Are You Puzzled?** – At this point in the narrative, does anything strike you as being rather strange? Why did earth start out in such a negative way, “without form, void and dark”? If adding the light was “good”—and it was—why not just start out that way? And if having the dry land separated from the water was good, why begin with water covering everything? And if being empty was not good, why wait several days to fill the heavens with stars and the earth with plants and animals? Why would God create something that seems bad—or at least badly in need of improvement!—and then work to fix it? I think there is an answer to that, but first let’s return to a question we discussed last week, namely, why did God create the earth at all?

**Formed To Be Inhabited** – As we saw last week, we don’t know why God created the universe and us, apart from the fact that it brings Him glory and pleases Him. But we are told the purpose He had in mind for the earth when He created it. Isaiah 45:18 says, “For this is what the Lord says—God is the Creator of the heavens. He formed the earth and made it. He established it; He did not create it to be empty, but **formed it to be inhabited**…” When we re-read Genesis 1 through this lens, we see a beautiful order and progression in His creation. His goal was to create a home for us, and notice how He did it. First He gathered the raw materials by speaking them into existence on day one. Then He spent the next two days making the eerie, swirling thing that was earth into a place of beauty and order, a place where we would feel at home. And once He had the *place* itself ready, He made abundant provision for *food* for all the animals and for us on day three. Only after all that was in place did He create the animals and us to enjoy what He had created for us. And when I say “us”, I really do mean *us*. Ephesians 1:4, 5 says, “For He chose us in Him (Christ), before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself…” So all the while He was forming the earth and filling it with good things, He had each of our faces before Him, not just mankind in general. I find that very significant. What did Jesus tell His disciples the night before His crucifixion? “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places…I am going away **to prepare a place for you**. If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so that where I am you may be also.” And what does John tell us in Revelation 19:9? “Those invited to the **marriage feast** of the Lamb are fortunate!” He also tells us that we will have access to the **tree of life**, which bears prolific fruit. So once again God is preparing a special place and abundant food for us to enjoy through all eternity.

**So Why the Process?** – I think that the fact that God had each of us in mind even before He began creating the earth sheds light on why He went through the process He did. Jen Wilkin points out in her YouTube video\*, “Genesis Is Our Story” (\*part of *The God of Creation* series) that the process God used in Creation is a beautiful picture of the work He wants to do in and through each one of us. Remember last week that we said that Genesis is archetypal in nature? As we will see, the creation account is an archetype or picture of God’s redemptive work in our lives.

**TAKE AWAYS:**

* Has God gotten any bigger yet in your eyes? May we discipline ourselves to continue our study of His Word. May we see more and more of His glory and majesty and awesomeness, and in that process, learn to love Him even more than ever before.
* I like how the BSF study of Genesis ended their first lesson (*A Study of Genesis,* Lesson 1, page 6), “In Genesis 1, God spoke, and amazing things happened. The same powerful God who separated the waters with His words still speaks. God speaks through His Word, His Son, His Spirit and His people. This week, as you read of the powerful God and His work in creation, how did God speak to you? Did His power and beauty raise your eyes from a hard situation in life to think about His might and majesty? Did your eyes catch on something beautiful God created and wanted you to notice? Did someone in your group share an insight that elevated your thoughts about God? *The God of eternity still speaks. How well are you listening?”*