

THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

Unit 2a God's Unique Method of Creation

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Today, I want us to take a look at God's unique method of creation. The main teaching point that we will unpack in this lesson is that God alone is the one who creates. Now, we'll do this primarily by interacting with three key texts within the Bible that help us understand the unique way in which God has created all things. First, I'd like to look at two of these passages with you. One from the Old Testament, Genesis 1:1, and one from the New Testament, John 1:1-3. And these I'd like to look at side by side. As we do this, we will not only discover some powerful parallels that exist between the Old Testament and the New Testament as it relates to creation, but we'll also be able to see just how God went about creating the universe and everything contained within it.

So let's take a look at these two passages. First, we have Genesis 1:1. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." And we have John 1:1-3. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." Two texts that are discussing how God has created. Now, I first want to draw our attention to that which existed before creation. So we're starting with the concept that's maybe a little bit outside of our natural understanding of the way that things are. However, it's an important starting point. You see, both of these passages talk about the preexistent nature of the Godhead prior to creation. That is, these passages teach us that God existed before creation. So in Genesis 1:1, we see the Hebrew word "beginning" (*re'shiyth*). This Hebrew word means the initiation of an action, the initiation of a process or a state of being. It implies primacy in time, a point of time which is the beginning of a duration and of which nothing precedes. Now, notice that we also have the word "beginning" in the Greek text of John 1:1-3. Here we have the Greek word *archē*. In a similar fashion, this word talks about the commencement of something that is both new and finite. I like to think of it this way. The moment a moment becomes a moment is its beginning, its *archē*.

Let me give you an example that may help you understand this concept that's behind both the Hebrew and the Greek word "beginning." If you're like me, you probably have a list of your favorite Christmas movies, those movies that are must-watch if Christmas is to be Christmas for you. I know I have several. But one of my favorite movies has to be that classic American movie "It's a Wonderful Life." Christmas Eve is not Christmas Eve in my household if we don't watch this movie. Now, in this story, a man by the name of George Bailey, after going through some hard times, considers what the world would be like if he never existed. Thinking that the world might be better off, he prepares to jump off a bridge into the icy water below. But before he does this, God sends an angel to grant George his wish. So for the bulk of the movie, this angel shows George how life in his little town would be different if he never existed, if he never had a beginning, if he never had an *archē*. One of the first things we have to see is that the Bible reveals to us that the Godhead existed prior to creation. You see, before there was a beginning, God already was. And both of these passages reveal a God who already existed at the moment all things were created.

Now let's take a look at this word "create" in Genesis 1:1. What we're going to discover is that it is Yahweh who has created all things. The Hebrew word here is *bara*. It's a Hebrew word that is only used in relationship with the God of Israel. Because of this, it is a theologically significant word. It pops up in the creation narrative no less than six times and elsewhere in the Old Testament, but never apart from the God of Israel. So the word is used not only in relationship to the creation of the universe, but it's also used in relationship to Yahweh and Israel. Take for instance Isaiah 42:5-6. We read there, "Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: 'I am the LORD; I have

called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations.” Here in this text, God created both the universe and the nation of Israel. Another example of this word and its relationship with God can be seen just a few chapters later in Isaiah 45:18. There we read, “For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other.’”

Theologian K. A. Matthews has this to say about *bara*: “Created is used in the Old Testament consistently in reference to new activity. The striking feature of this word is that its subject is always God. It therefore conveys the idea of a special activity accomplished only by a deity that results in newness or renewing. All which was new at creation, which must logically have been everything, was created by God. And not just any god, but Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel as revealed to us in the Bible.”

Now let’s turn our attention to God’s speech in creation. What we discover as we look again at John 1:1-3 is that the word of God is generative in nature, that God spoke all things in the beginning. In this passage, John 1:1-3, we are introduced to a new understanding of God’s word. Here, John uses the concept of *logos*, the word of God, to describe none other than Jesus Christ. This concept was certainly a new one in John’s day and age. However, be that as it may, what I would like us to focus on is this idea that we can learn a lot about the nature of God through His word. You see, the word of God is a rich theological concept in the Old Testament as well as the New. God’s word helps reveal God’s character, nature, and will within creation. In fact, the word of God was deeply involved in God’s activity at creation.

So come back to Genesis 1 for a moment and move just slightly beyond verse 1. In verse 3, we read, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” God spoke and the light came into being. For a moment, don’t focus on what God is creating. Rather, consider the *means* by which he created. God created the light using His word. This is later confirmed for us in Psalm 33:6-9. There we read this: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; He puts the deep in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him! For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm.” In this passage from Psalms, we see that God spoke and creation came to be. We also see that God commanded and creation came to be. God’s word is intimately involved in the act of creation. In fact, if we again come back to John 1:1-3, we’re told that not only was the word of God the *logos* involved in creation, but that the word of God formed and fashioned all of creation. We see this in the phrase “All things were made, and without him nothing was made that was made.” It’s clear that God’s word played a crucial role in His act of creation.

This then leads us to ask, “How did God truly create?” Well, Christian theology has come to define God’s act of creation as being *ex nihilo*. This is a Latin phrase that is translated “out of nothing.” God literally created all things out of nothing. God used no preexisting material in the process of creation. As we have already observed when we looked at the word *bara*, God’s creative activity was always novel, always new. Thus, as Christians, we confess that God created all that we see around us *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Yet we also read in Genesis 2:7 that there was one exception to God creating via His word. In Genesis 2:7, we read that “the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” In this verse, let us focus in on the

word “formed” for a moment. This Hebrew word is used to describe the forming or fashioning of things as of the forming of clay that is done in the hands of a potter. This word is most often used when the Bible talks about how God created humanity and the nation of Israel. We can see this word used in action in Isaiah 45:9. Here a stern warning is given to those who were formed by God to not resist their creator. There it says this: “Woe to him who strives with Him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to Him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles?’” What is clear is that God took special care to shape humanity, His special creation.

Now, this is a topic we’ll talk more about later on in this course. For now, it’s enough to say that the Bible reveals that God created all things out of nothing, most things with His word, and that he took special care to form and fashion humanity into His likeness. God alone creates. The foundational passages that we have looked at today, Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1-3, teach us that God and God alone existed before all things. They teach us that God alone created all things, that God’s word is generative, and that His divine word spoke all things into being *ex nihilo*. Finally, these two passages teach us that God has shaped His creation for His own divine purposes.