

Creation and Covenant

We begin our class today by reading a few verses. The first is from Psalm 33: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, the starry host by the breath of His mouth.” Isaiah 40:25-26 speaks of creation: “‘To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.” Then in Romans 1:20 we read, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” These and many other passages speak of creation, our subject for today. Let us pray.

Lord, our God, today we consider a great, momentous deed that You have performed. The wonder of Your creating activities is much misunderstood; it is discussed at all times, but Your creation still is a wonder to behold. God, open our minds to understand more fully how important it is that we acknowledge You as the Creator and the one who maintains all that there is. Bless us now, we pray, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

I want to begin by referring to pages 19 to 44 of *Biblical Theology*, where Vos writes about the mapping out of revelation. He speaks of pre-redemptive revelation. Before redemption had to be announced, God was revealing Himself. Every time He spoke and called something to come forth, He was revealing Himself by word because He spoke and by deed because a deed followed the spoken word. The spoken words and the resultant deeds were, in time, recorded by Moses himself.

The point I want to stress is that Vos is very correct in drawing a distinction between pre-redemptive and redemptive revelation. Pre-redemptive revelation occurred before the fall. It was an indirect revelation at that time because it was not all by word, but much of it was by deed. Vos says that this revelation was indirect in that it also caused mankind to come forth as a part of creation so that God is revealed to us by nature. As Paul says in Romans 1, just being part of creation testifies to one’s heart that there is a Creator God, who is infinite and powerful. That is an indirect revelation because of the way we have been made and are made part of the universe. However, there was also a direct pre-redemptive revelation because God spoke directly to Adam and Eve when He gave them the cultural mandate and when He spoke to them about the possibility of death entering the world.

After pre-redemptive revelation, there is the redemptive revelation, which really begins in Genesis 3:9 when God seeks out Adam, asking him, “Where are you?” That is where the redemptive revelation in word begins. It begins with a seeking word. New revelation is given at that time. It never can be separated from the pre-redemptive revelation because the pre-redemptive revelation gives us the setting in which the redemptive revelation comes forth. Without the pre-redemptive revelation, there would be no framework in which redemptive revelation could come and be meaningful. Redemptive revelation is a restoring revelation. It tells us what we are restored to and in this sense, the pre-redemptive revelation gives us God’s original order, intent, and plan for humanity and the cosmos. It is given in germinal form, but it is there.

This redemptive revelation also comes through in deed. God comes and He speaks to mankind, but He also reveals Himself in what He did in dealing with Satan and Satan’s seed and in how He dealt with Cain. From that time on, we see God speaking and acting, and in time, this was recorded also. This redemptive revelation speaks from the very beginning of a seed that is to become the mediator. It speaks of God’s grace. The word “grace,” *chen* in Hebrew, is not used, but God comes to mankind when they are most undeserving. This is a revelation of grace even though the term is not used. This is a revelation of mercy. Mercy is God’s love toward the miserable and God here shows His love toward the miserable. This is a word of redemption, although justice is also revealed here and a sentence is spoken. That sums up what I want to say about pre-redemptive and redemptive revelation.

Now we move on to the second point: understanding creation. The first thing I want to point out is that I

don't like the word "prologue" as some people use it for Genesis 1 and 2 and even for Genesis 1 through 11, as if the real revelation begins in Genesis 12 with Abraham or even in Exodus, as Eichrodt and others would say, and everything else is simply prologue, a word before. In the same way, I don't like to call John 1:1-18 a prologue either, because the Redeemer is identified so specifically and clearly as the Creator, the light-giver, the revelation of grace and truth. That is not just a prologue. That is an identification of the Person of whom much will be said. Similarly, Genesis 1 and 2 are foundational for understanding of Scripture because they give us the entire kingdom setting, the framework within which everything that is revealed in Scripture takes place.

Let me give you some examples from the Scripture. In the passage from Isaiah 40 that I just read, Isaiah is speaking about the definite fact that God is going to bring Israel back from exile. The great Babylonian Empire and the Assyrian Empire seem to be invincible. But they are simply nations under the power of a Creator, God. And to understand the doctrine of creation gives one a good sense of the mighty power, the sovereignty, the all-controlling ability of God. If He could create and weigh the earth and know every speck of dust, how much more is it possible to look to Him as the great restorer from the exile?

Yes, Isaiah appeals to the doctrine of creation in chapter 40 when he introduces the great plan of redemption that God is initiating again and working out through the return from the exile. We find another example in the life of Jesus Himself. In Matthew 13:15 and Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus speaks of creation in the context of a discussion about marriage and the sinfulness of divorce. He says very plainly, "From the beginning it was not that way." When He speaks to some of the basic issues in life, Jesus refers to creation.

Paul does the same in his preaching. In Acts 17:24-26, Paul is preaching on the Areopagus. He tells the Greeks that from the very beginning, God had created mankind from one source. I could refer also to John 1:1-3 where Christ is introduced as the Word who was with the Father and who made all things. I read to you already from Romans 1:20 and verse 25. I could mention also Ephesians 1:4 and Hebrews 4:3, and these are just a few of the many passages all through the Scriptures that refer back to the great event of creation: that God, the Creator, brought forth this great setting, His cosmic kingdom within which mankind can live.

One thing that I regret is that we so often spend so much time arguing with scientists that we don't spend enough time looking at creation from the biblical-theological perspective. Creation is a fact. It refers to a great, integrated, and comprehensive act of God. We will explicate that act by looking at a number of Hebrew verbs. Creation is not just a verb, however; it's also a noun. The word "creation" refers to the result of the creative act. When I talk about the fact of creation, I am referring both to the fact of the act and the fact of the object. This world in which we live is a creation that came forth through the creative activity of God.

In talking about the fact of creation, I want to spend time on four major topics: the acts of creation themselves, the agents of creation, the character of the acts, and the character of the Creator. First, we will discuss the acts of creation.

If you are able, it would be helpful to refer to the handout entitled, "Creation Acts and Time References." On that handout, I've listed 11 distinct acts that are recorded in Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 2:4. The first great act is recorded in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." He brought everything forth before the beginning of days. This is when all things had their beginning. Everything was unformed and undeveloped. After this, the second act took place on what is referred to as the first day. God spoke and there was, in verses 2 and 3. God saw, *yara*—that verb is repeated again and again through that passage. God kept watching to see that His word actually brought forth what He wanted. And then we have the verb "separate," which is repeated a number of times in the passage. After that we have the verb, *kara*, "called"—God named things. He knew exactly what name to give to each of the various things He brought forth as He separated and refined His creation.

Thus we have seen that God's second act was the separation of light from darkness on the first day. His third act is recorded in verses 6-8. This passage uses a number of verbs, but the verb that was used before is *asah*, "to make." And then the verb "separate" occurs again as well. God separated the sky, the expanse, the *rakia*, from the earth, *eretz*. That was the second day.

God's fourth act occurs in verses 9 and 10. Let the waters be gathered, *kavah*, and let them be bound together. That verb, *kavah*, is a unique verb, meaning to twist something or bend something. The idea is that the waters should be inseparably bound together. After that we have once again the verb "to see," but in this case it occurs in the passive. "Let the land appear." Act four on the third day is that the waters are brought together and the land appears.

Notice, however, that another act took place on the third day, according to the revelation here. God commanded that the land should bring forth vegetation, *dese*. The verb, *dasa*, is "to go forth" or "come forth." Let vegetation come forth out of the earth that has appeared. This means that when God had created the earth, the potential for vegetation was embedded within it. God calls it to come forth on that second act of the third day, which is essentially His fifth creation act.

On the fourth day, verses 14 through 19, we have a number of verbs. The one that especially stands out to me is *nathan*, "to set" and "to give." God set the great lights in the sky. He appointed them. The text refers to God having made the great lights, but the emphasis is on their duty, on their place, what they should be doing. This is God's sixth act, on the fourth day.

God's seventh act is recorded in verses 20 and 21, where we see another verb, *sharatz*, "let the waters teem, let them swarm." Notice that the text does not say that God brought in a new fact of life. It seems as though it was present already in the water. A second act on the fifth day is the bringing forth of the creatures of the air. There is parallelism—"let them fly in the heavens, let them swarm in the waters." After this God says the same thing about the teeming life in the water and the flying life in the atmosphere: "God blessed them," *barak*. This is the same verb He used when He created man and woman and said "be fruitful and multiply." God blessed these creatures by giving them the potential, the power, the freedom, and the enjoyment of reproducing. In this way the fish can have enjoyment and the birds can have enjoyment as they, under God's guidance and direction, increase and fill the waters and fill the sky, just as man and woman living together, being one flesh, can have the enjoyment of reproducing and filling the earth with offspring.

Those are the seventh and eighth acts on the fifth day. On the sixth day, we see some more verbs. We have the verb *yatza*, "to bring forth," and we have the word *asah*, "to make." Then there is reference to the creatures on the land, the big creatures, and for the second time, the verb, *bara*, "to create," is used in that passage. We see it in verse 1 and in verse 25 where it talks about the animals. The verb *bara* is also used when speaking of the creation of humanity. This verb *bara*, to create out of nothing, occurs only three times: for the creation of everything at the very beginning, for the creation of the beasts of the field, and for the creation of humanity.

Notice also that God's ninth act, which includes all the creatures of the land, occurred on the sixth day along with His tenth act, when He made human beings male and female and told them to rule and to increase and to have dominion. All of that is part of the tenth act on the sixth day.

In chapter 2, we see the verbs, *kalah*, "to complete," *shavat*, "to rest," and *kadesh*, "to sanctify." This is the eleventh act on the seventh day. Thus we see that there are, indeed, 11 creative acts. These acts are presented to us with the first occurring before there are days, and then ten more creative acts occurring within a period which the text refers to as seven days. This has led some people to speak of a framework or a literary framework of a creed, but I don't use that type of language. I prefer to look at what the text says, and the text says that God did such a magnificent work, you can't describe it with one verb. The creation of the world cannot be described as a single act. Rather, it was a process of separating, dividing, forming,

assigning, blessing, mandating, etc. God brought forth the universe and then it was finished, *kalah*, finished, completed. That is the great theological fact of Genesis 1 and 2: that God brought forth the universe in a stupendous way, in a way that is almost impossible for us to describe literarily in a specific period of time referred to as seven creation days. God brought everything forth.

I am not going to argue with the scientists. I ask them to listen to me when they want me to listen to them, and I hope you will do that too. You have to listen to the scientists, but you don't always have to believe them. You always have to state the biblical facts in such a way that the scientists listen to you and believe you, because you're trying to set forth God's Word directly. This word concerning creation does not come to us indirectly, but directly from the written page, in Genesis 1 and 2.

I want to emphasize that these creation acts are foundational for your understanding of what God did and what God does and what God will continue to do.

Who are the agents of creation? Genesis 1 indicates that there is a threefold agent. The Bible speaks of God. In the Old Testament we do not yet see the word "Father," but later on we read about God the Father, creator of heaven and earth. We read also in Psalm 33:6, "by the word of the LORD," and John 1 tell us that that Word is, in fact, the second Person of the Trinity. The second Person was definitely involved in the act of creation. He was the great forming, producing agent. As the Father spoke, the Son produced. The Spirit, the *ruach*, was present at the creation as well. There are those who would say that this *ruah* we read about in the Genesis account was only a wind, but that is incorrect. It was more than wind. It was the Spirit, like a mother hen brooding over her chicks. In Psalm 104:30 we read, "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth."

The Spirit was at work from the very beginning and He has continued to be operative throughout the entire period of creation up to the present moment. He will always be busy as the refiner, the beautifier, and the life-giving agent within creation. Genesis 2 tells us that God breathed into man the breath of life. That was an act of the Holy Spirit giving unique life. The Spirit gave real character to the act of *bara*, bringing forth something new out of nothing by the act of the infinite God. Thus we see that there are three agents of creation. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all active in the creating work.

Let us move now from the agents of creation to the character of the acts of creation. I would like to spend an entire lecture on this topic, and the point I would like to make is this: If you want to be a creative person, here is a good pattern to follow. The creative acts of God are a good pattern for any type of creativity—whether you want to be a creative scholar writing a test, or a creative student writing a paper, or a creative husband or father. First of all, notice that these acts have a quality of authority or command. God's speech was authoritative. This is not a brute authority, but God spoke and everything He called for came to be because He is the great authoritative one. With Him is all authority, and He is the one who orders and commands all things.

Secondly, everything that He did was ordered, in the sense that it all came in the proper order. God did not ask fish to come forth on the first day. Rather, there is a pattern, a development, a succession. First things come first, second things come next, and then third things and fourth things. There was good organization and good development. Not only was it directed in the way I referred to already, but it was directed specifically toward the end that God desired. For example, on the fourth day, God directed the sun and the moon and the stars to be the controlling agents of day and night, time, seasons, and years. On the sixth day God directed the animals and people to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth. God gave specific direction. He said what He wanted. Finally, God was very productive. Each one of these acts was productive. Notice that the account tells us that every time God said something, something happened: just what He wanted was produced.

And then we have that Hebrew word *tov*, "good." At each step, God looked and saw that what He had

made was good. Does that mean “perfect,” that there was nothing more to be done? No. “Good” can carry this meaning in some contexts, but the word *tov* in Hebrew means that something meets the standard that has been set for it. Each day God was able to bring forth, to direct, set in place, bring into existence, exactly what He wanted. He looked and He said, “That is what I wanted” and He declared it to be that way.

I have learned from God in that respect. As a father of eight children, when I asked my children to do something, I learned that I could get them to do it so much more easily the next time if I looked at what they had done and said, “good,” if it was good. Sometimes, I had to say “pretty good,” and sometimes, I’d say, “let’s try again.” Of course, God never had to try again. He’s a perfect Father. I wasn’t always the perfect father, but I learned a great deal from God, the creating Father, about how to call things good. God always made exactly what He wanted, in the way He wanted it, dutifully arranged and good. Additionally, in Genesis 2 we find the word *kalah*, “completed.” God made everything He wanted and He completed it. Everything God intended for the cosmos was present at least in potentiality or in germinal form. All the materials—all these different elements that we have on our chemistry tables—were there. All the different varieties of life that we can bring about through breeding and hybridization was already present. It was not necessarily all unfolded and developed to the full extent, but it was there. That is what it means to say *kalah*—it was completed. There is no longer a creation in the sense of a verbal noun, nor is there any growing creation in a sense of an objective noun. God is no longer creating; the creation is completed.

Let us move from the character of the acts to the character of the creating one. We do not find the word “wise” in Genesis 1 and 2, but from the rest of Scripture, we know that the Creator is wise. What do we mean by the word “wise”? We will come across that again and again. I’ll give another example from parenting. As a father, I learned what wisdom was and what folly was. When the kids were in trouble, if I could figure out who was responsible for it all, and what he had done, and when he had done it, and why he did it, and where he did it, then I usually knew how to deal with it. I had to answer those five questions first—the who, the what, the where, the why, the when—and that is wisdom, putting it all together. God is wise; the wisdom of God is revealed through creation. He knew exactly how to do everything. He knew the “how” because He knew the “who” and the “what” and the “when” and the “where” and the “why.” That is the wisdom of God.

In creation we see God’s wisdom, but we also see His holiness. The New Testament also tells us about the holiness of God. What do we mean by holiness? God’s holiness means that God is totally separated from creation. That does not mean that He doesn’t reach out and become involved in His creation, but what He created is totally other than what He is Himself. He did not make the universe a part of Himself; we are not just little sparks of the divine. We are products of the divine, but not little sparks in the sense that we have the divinity of God within us. God remained holy as He created. Even though He established a close relationship between what He made and Himself, He kept Himself separate and distinguished from what He had made. He kept Himself holy and pure. This is not to say that what He created was impure, but that He did not in any way make Himself finite or limit His power. In His creation, He remained the great sovereign Lord.

In addition to God’s wisdom and God’s holiness, creation shows us God’s love. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the *cosmos*,” the whole world. Now some people might limit that to sinful people, but I think that John is telling us that God loved the whole cosmos and He has loved it since the day He made it. He made it as an act of love. In creation, we can see God’s love, in the sense of God’s giving of Himself. God imparts Himself to His creation as one whose hands and arms are stretched out, keeping the universe within His care. God is a fellowshiping God. He fellowships with the Son and the Spirit, but as soon as He created man and woman, He is there talking with them and telling them what to do. Everyday He comes to them in the cool of the day and fellowships with them. God is involved with His creation, and He is well pleased. He saw that it was good. Anything that fulfills His purposes makes God smile. I hope God is smiling on us right now. I hope we are fulfilling His purposes for us.

I think of that often as I sit at my desk, as I go out and do my gardening, or as I try to be a grandfather to my children. Am I making God smile? He really is well pleased when purposes are fulfilled. As a loving, sovereign, holy God, He's a smiling God. As He spoke and as it came to pass, He smiled, saying, "This is just what I wanted. How good it is." He is also a maintaining God. What He created on one day, He kept so that He could proceed to the next day.

As you think about all these things, I am sure that you can enrich your mind and your understanding of what God is like by considering what God did and how God the Creator is also a Father. The Scriptures, reveal this to us in germinal form in Genesis 1 and 2, but then beyond that, throughout all the Scripture God reveals to us how He—the great, triune creating God—is a Father. He is the Father of creation and the Father of you and me. He is the Lord, but He is a loving, wise and holy one, who will never leave or forsake us. From a certain point of view, I get at least as much comfort from knowing that God is my Creator-Father as I do from the fact that Jesus is my Savior-Lord. These two cannot be separated: it is wonderful to know that Jesus is my Savior Lord, but as a saved one, I have to function in this creation. And my Father is there guiding and directing and controlling everything according to the plan He had when He made it.

We need to spend some time discussing the creation of male and female. In Genesis 1:26 we see the divine counsel—"let us make." This means it was not the Father only, but the Son and the Spirit were involved as well. There are some who would say that this "let us" refers to God talking with the angels. That, to me, is nonsense, because the angels are not creating agents. This is why I pointed out the creating agents before: the Father, the Son and the Spirit. The Father, the Word and the *Ruah*. This is the "us" in "let us, let us now make man, *adam*, humanity. Let us make them in our image and likeness."

In other courses you may deal at length with the concept of "image" and "likeness." Here I simply wish to point out that the idea of image or likeness, first of all, indicates a similarity. I can get an idea of what God is like by looking at you, because you are made in his likeness. God has eyes, a mouth, ears, hands. God is present everywhere. There is something very personal about God. We have the great privilege of being like God. If we are born again and Christ is indeed the Lord of our heart, then indeed we can even more than ever before reflect the fact that we are like God. We are not the same as God, but He made us in His likeness.

To be made in the likeness of God also indicates that we are part of His family, which means that we share in a unique and mysterious way in the love and the life and the activity of God. My children share in my family, just as I shared in my father's and mother's family. I find biblical support for this idea in Genesis 5:3, where it says that Seth was in the image of his father Adam. When there's a believing son who follows and carries out the father's work, there is that idea of image there, of likeness, of similarity.

In addition to the idea of family, there is also the concept of representation. We're asked to represent God. That's why He created us in His image: to be like Him, to mirror Him, to participate in His royal family so that we could represent Him here on earth. God wanted a mediator between Himself and this whole cosmos that He has made, so He put Adam and Eve right in the middle of that. We human beings are created to be the mediators of creation, made in the image of God. We were given a mandate to rule and to have dominion. When the first Adam fell, a second Adam had to come to fulfill this role of mediator and to do the work that God intended Adam and Eve and their children to do. Human beings were created in a unique relationship with God, mirroring Him, in His likeness. God created us to represent Him on earth, to do His work, to be His vice-regents, to work with God in ruling and controlling the world. We are workers with God in the great cosmos.

That is what it means to be made in the image of God. In Genesis 1:26 and following, we learn that we're created male and female. It is important to note that both male and female share equally in the mandate to be image bearers and servants of God, although male and female are given unique roles. The word "male," *zakar*, very literally refers to "that which points." *Neqevah*, the Hebrew word for "female," indicates "that

which is pierced.” The language refers somewhat graphically to different roles even in the intimate facts of life. The man and the woman have different roles, but they are equally royal members of God’s family and equally called upon to represent God.

There has been much discussion of the concept of headship, the idea that the man was created to be the head of the woman, and what that means. There are those today who talk about male and female side by side because that is the way it will be in the great *eschaton*, but my judgment is that our forefathers were correct when they taught that the man has a role of authority and leadership. I believe that the Scriptures speak very specifically of unique roles between the husband and wife, with the husband and father taking a leading role in which he exercises a loving authority.

To illustrate that kind of loving authority, I want to tell you a story that I told a young man once before I conducted his wedding. (This is the same couple I told you about before, with the young woman who had only read the Bible once before I met her.) When I married them, I told them the story of a father who saw his wife jump off a cliff at the south shores of Australia to rescue a little boy who had stumbled over the edge as they were fishing. The mother had dived down into that turmoil and her husband saw that she could rescue the child, but she’d never be able to save herself. The father said to the children, “You need your mother more than you need me,” and he dove in. He was able to push his wife up on the ridge, but he died in the banging surf. I asked that young husband, “Do you love your bride enough to do that?” After the service, he said, “Preacher, I wish you hadn’t asked me that.” Man has a tremendous responsibility. The man has a role of leadership, but he is to exercise leadership in a loving, sacrificial way, not at all like a slave driver.

There has been a great deal of discussion of the two accounts of creation. I suggest you go to commentaries if you want to look into that further. At this time, I want to raise the question of whether there is a covenant of creation. In answering this question, I first ask whether God established relationships when he created the world. Since “covenant” essentially refers to the idea of an inseparable bond, a relationship of love, we ask, “Did God establish such a relationship?” He did, when He created humanity in His image, male and female. As we have seen, this is the most intimate relationship between human beings. God established social relationships in the social mandate—“leave your father and mother and become one flesh with your wife.” However, He also established a relationship between humanity and the cosmos. This is the cultural mandate—“be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” The relationship between humanity and the world is that we are meant to rule over it.

Some biblical passages—like Hosea 6:7 and Jeremiah 33:20-25—speak of a covenant that seems to have been established before God ever dealt with Noah and Abraham. You can find them in *Covenant and Creation* by Dumbrell and in Robertson’s *The Christ of the Covenants*. Was there a covenant of creation? Reformed theology has always wanted to speak of a covenant of works (which seems to suggest an element of merit) but you will find that both Dumbrell and Robertson have problems with that terminology. Even though the Westminster Confession clearly states that God established a covenant of works, and both Dumbrell and Robertson are Presbyterian Reformed men, they speak of a covenant of creation but disagree with the idea of a covenant of works. Interestingly, Vos doesn’t talk about a covenant of works or a covenant of creation. We will continue next time with the question of whether relationships were established at creation.