

**Title: The Great God of Creation****Text: Genesis 1:1-19, Psalm 8:1-4***Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on June 17, 2007*[www.goldcountrybaptist.org](http://www.goldcountrybaptist.org)

NOTE: To view the presentation played by Pastor Phil in the beginning of the sermon about how the heavens and earth declare the glory of God, see below “Powers of Ten” website demo <http://micro.magnet.fsu.edu/primer/java/scienceopticsu/powersof10/>

Last August or September, when I came to speak as a candidate, I spoke in a Sunday evening service on the greatness of God from Psalm 8, which I wasn’t able to finish as the evening service is usually only a half-hour. Someone came up to me after the service and said if you become pastor of this church, please finish that message and preach on God’s greatness again, and I told them I would. This morning I hope to make good on that promise.

This Father’s Day it is a real blessing having my dad and hero here and to have them hear me preach in person for the first time. Creation, Evolution, and Genesis were issues God used in the spiritual pilgrimage of my family (dad evolution teacher before I was born, now missionary in Philippines in a creation science ministry, declaring about the great God of creation to peoples that other missionaries haven’t been able to reach and training locals to do the same)

God’s Greatness is the greatest subject I could ever talk about, the greatest object of our attention and focus, and the greatest and best thing I could do for you on Father’s Day is to direct your attention to our Heavenly Father, a God of dazzling splendor, greatness and majesty, the God whose glory we are created for

In one of my first sermons here, I began with how John Piper began his book *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* [p. 9]:

“People are starving for the greatness of God. Most of them would not give this diagnosis of their troubled lives. The majesty of God is an unknown cure. There are far more popular prescriptions on the market, but the benefit of any other remedy is brief and shallow. Preaching that does not have the aroma of God’s greatness may entertain for a season, but it will not touch the hidden cry of the soul: “Show me thy glory!”

If you’ve been here long enough, I hope you sense and share our desire to be God-centered and have a high view of God and honor Him and His Word in our teaching, and that it is not mere words, but is what we’re pursuing however imperfectly we do so. God is God, we are not – His glory is most important, not us. And what you believe about God and your view of God is the most important thing about you, and a church or individual or father or family will be strong or weak in proportion to its conception of God.

The scripture in Genesis we read talks about how God created the trees on day 3 of creation, and I have been studying the details of the Hebrew text of Genesis 1 and some of the implications for modern debates about evolution and creation and science which are a fascinating interest to me.

But it's possible as they say to get so stuck on the trees that you miss the forest. This morning I want to give a more panoramic view of days 1-4 of creation, and how this bigger message was applied by other Bible writers and the psalms, and ultimately that we would praise our great God.

King David said it this way in Psalm 145 (NKJV):

*1 I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever.*

*2 Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever.*

*3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable.*

*4 One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts.*

*5 I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works.*

*6 Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, And I will declare Your greatness.*

I want to focus on the big idea of this section of Genesis which is revealing the great God of creation. The big idea can be summed up in 3 words "God is Great" – and the goal is that we would worship God more in light of this, like King David did.

God's Greatness in creation in manifested primarily 2 ways:

- I. Incredible design and beauty of our planet
- II. Infinitely massive majesty of the universe

### **First, the Incredible design and beauty of our planet**

We live in an incredibly beautiful world – God could have created a very boring world without much color or variety, but the millions of manifold ways He displays Himself and His creativity and attributes are painted all over this world. On these first few days of creation God formed on our incredible planet a beautiful pallet of radiant colors, creatures that are incredibly designed, mountains of grandeur, lush forests, all kinds of beautiful flowers, intricate details of leaves, incredible complexity and design that we can now observe through microscopes, beautiful dazzling starry skies that we can observe through telescopes, massive oceans which can produce enormous swells which are truly awesome and give a hint of God's majesty. His greatness and power is displayed in rolling thunder, typhoons, tsunamis, tornados, and all creation speaks unmistakably of a great God of awesome wonder and design.

The seventeenth century mathematician and philosopher Sir Isaac Newton had a mechanical replica of our solar system made in miniature. At its center was a large golden ball representing the sun, and revolving around it were smaller spheres attached at the ends of rods of varying lengths. They represented Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, and the other planets. These were all geared together by cogs and belts to make them move around the sun in perfect harmony. One day as Newton was studying the model, an unbelieving friend stopped by for a visit. Marveling at the device and watching as the scientist made the heavenly bodies move in their orbits, the man exclaimed, "My, Newton, what an exquisite thing! Who made it for you?" Without looking up, Sir Isaac replied, "Nobody."

"Nobody?" his friend asked.

"That's right! I said nobody! All of these balls and cogs and belts and gears just happened to come together, and wonder of wonders, by chance they began revolving in their set orbits and with perfect timing." His friend undoubtedly got the point. The existence of Newton's machine presupposed a maker, and even more so the earth and its perfectly ordered solar system ...<sup>1</sup>

Because Genesis 1 speaks of some of the physical things God created, I will talk about some of those, where they display God

*6 Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."*

*7 God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so.*

*8 God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.*

My Bible has the word "expanse," some of you have "firmament" (ESV has "canopy" in footnote) – perhaps "sky" is best translation.<sup>2</sup>

This includes the area above the planet, the air, the atmosphere. God designed it perfectly for life, as modern man has learned, 21 % oxygen is the exactly right amount. If it were 25 percent, fires would erupt, if 15 percent, human beings would suffocate.<sup>3</sup>

But that's not all God did precisely and perfectly in this expanse or sky above the waters. We are told if water vapor levels in the atmosphere were greater than they are now, a runaway greenhouse effect would cause temperatures to rise too high for human life; if they were less, an insufficient greenhouse effect would make the earth too cold to support human life.<sup>4</sup>

These things speak of the incredible design of our planet by our great God. The more we learn about how the heavens declare about God, the more difficult it is for unbelievers to explain all of these factors that perfectly fine-tune our planet for life, that these are just owing to a big bang, accidents, explosion, evolution, random chance, luck, naturalism, or mother nature. For example, just the right level of carbon dioxide is maintained naturally in the earth's atmosphere. If the CO2 level were higher than it is now, the heat would make our life impossible. If the level were lower than it is now, plants would not be able to maintain efficient photosynthesis, we wouldn't be able to breathe. The right ratio of nitrogen and ozone is also critical for life. We are also told that the degree of transparency of the atmosphere is essential for life. If the atmosphere were less transparent, not enough solar radiation would reach the earth's surface. If it were more transparent, we would be bombarded with far too much solar radiation down here. God of course knew all these things and knew what He was doing when He created the heavens and the earth.<sup>5</sup>

Water makeup itself is uniquely and perfectly fine-tuned for life.<sup>6</sup>

What incredible design from an incredible designer with infinite wisdom! Brilliant men have been around for thousands of years before they discovered these things – and if those with greatest intelligence have a hard time merely discovering or describing these things, how can they deny the possibility of intelligent design a creator – even the Great God of the Bible!

That's just scratching the surface of all the variables required for life – the anthropic principle – there's many more we'll cover later. If it was true in Paul's day as he says in Romans 1 that men know God from nature and creation but they suppress the truth, how much more is that true in

our day where far more truth is known!

*Read v. 9-10*

God created not only the perfect atmosphere for life, he created the perfect balance of land masses, which modern science has more recently understood. Consider the following:<sup>7</sup>

- Scientists tell us earth has the perfect ocean levels and just the right level and percentage of water, and if it wasn't exactly right, life would not be possible.
- If the thickness of the earth's crust was greater (even just ten more feet of solid matter added to the 8,000 mile diameter), too much oxygen would be transferred to the crust to support life. If it were thinner, volcanic and tectonic activity would make life untenable. The thickness of the earth's crust is just right.
- If the 23 degree axial tilt of the earth were altered slightly, life would not be possible.
- The earth also has a slight wobble angle of 3 degrees, and they say if it was much more or less, our planet would not be hospitable
- Rotational speed - the earth turns once a day in just the perfect manner so one doesn't burn up in the day nor freeze at night. It revolves at a speed of 1,000 miles per hour at the equator, if it rotated slower on its axis, all life would cease to exist, either by freezing at night or by burning heat during the day.
- The diameter of the earth is also just right for life (8,000 miles) – if it was significantly different and would result in enormous problems with gravity and other chain reactions.
- If there were more seismic activity, much life would be lost. If there was less, nutrients on the ocean floors and in river runoff would not be cycled back to the continents through tectonic uplift. Even earthquakes are necessary to sustain life as we know it.<sup>8</sup>

Isaiah 40:12-14 says:

*12Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,  
And marked off the heavens by the span,  
And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure,  
And weighed the mountains in a balance  
And the hills in a pair of scales?*

*13Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD,  
Or as His counselor has informed Him?*

*14With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding?*

Were these days 24 hours? When it speaks of “evening and morning” the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, could it have been a really long time between sunrise and sunset rather than normal 24 hour days?

According to some scientists, if the rotation of the earth took much longer than 24 hours, temperature differences would be too great between night and day. If the rotation period was shorter, atmospheric wind velocities would be too great for life.<sup>9</sup>

Plants are created on day 3, and verses 14 and following say that the sun and moon were created on day 4. This is a big problem for the view that says “day” in Genesis 1 refers to a long age, as plants cannot live long without sunlight.

Their only hope is to argue that the sun really was created on day one, and verse 14 only means

“let there appear” – in other words it was only on day 4 that the heavenly bodies became visible, allegedly some dense cloud canopy or atmosphere was done away with so that the sunlight created on Day One could now reach earth. They say this is written from the perspective of someone standing on earth - but there’s no man on earth till Day Six and on Day One there’s nothing to stand on as the planet is all water. Actually this passage is God’s perspective as He is the only One there.

The phrase “let there be” is identical in form to 1:3 which clearly refers to creation by calling forth. And the word for “made” in v. 16 is the same word used to describe God creating other things in this chapter, including man.<sup>10</sup>

If the text wanted to convey “let there appear” there is a Hebrew word the author used in v. 9 that is translated “let it appear” (same root referring to each time God saw) but instead for day 4, God uses the Hebrew word that actually means “made” / “create.”

If this were true that really all that happened on day 4 was a cloud layer was burnt through, it sure goes to a lot of trouble and words and 5 verses to say that. And you would have a day where no creation took place (contra Ex. 20:11). But even if that were true, if no sunlight was visible till the 4th day, in the day-age view where each day is a long time, the plants could have not survived for thousands of years (or however long a “day” is) without sunlight getting through, without photosynthesis. Verses 15 and 17 make clear that this is when light arrived on earth.

Furthermore, the insects and birds required for many plants to live by pollination could not have happened since those were not created till later in the week. This is no problem if you believe Genesis 1 literally (plants can live a day or two without these things) but the Old Earth Creation view has serious scientific problems here with plant life for thousands or millions of years before the creation of elements necessary for life. In our “old earth” brethren efforts to have a view that reconciles with scientific theory, I think their view here has bigger problems with scientific facts.

Evolution is a *theory* – but not just a theory, it’s a faith, a religion, a dogma that men continue to hold to despite the evidence we’ve already mentioned about how perfectly and fine-tuned for life our planet is, not only how the earth and atmosphere are, but in the universe. Here’s more:<sup>11</sup>

- Moon’s size and distance from the earth
- Earth’s distance from the sun
- Orbital speed of the earth
- Moon-earth gravitational interaction
- If the centrifugal force of planetary movements did not precisely balance the gravitational forces, nothing could be held in orbit around the sun.
- If Jupiter were not in its current orbit, the earth would be bombarded with space material. Jupiter’s gravitational field acts as a cosmic vacuum cleaner, attracting asteroids and comets that might otherwise strike earth.
- If the gravitational force were altered by 1 part in 1040 (that’s 10 followed by forty zeroes), the sun would not exist, and the moon would crash into the earth or sheer off into space. Even a slight increase in the force of gravity would result in all the stars being much more massive than our sun, with the effect that the sun would burn too rapidly and

- erratically to sustain life. [Strobel compares this to 1 inch on ruler millions of miles long]
- Within a Galactic Habitable Zone
  - Protected by Giant Gas Planets
  - Within a Circumstellar Habitable Zone
  - Nearly Circular Orbit
  - Magnetic Field
  - Plate Tectonics
  - The mass of the electron
  - The four fundamental forces of physics (the strong and weak nuclear forces, gravity, and electromagnetism), are perfectly balanced to yield the elements necessary for life.

It takes a lot of faith to be an evolutionist or atheist these days! Scripture says it is the fool who says in his heart there is no God – fool not meaning idiot or ignoramus or intellectually deficient, but someone with a moral problem who suppresses God’s truth. You have to possess quite a bit of faith to believe this all happened randomly after some big bang and swirling chaos of explosions and lucky naturalism finally worked out things just right and perfectly. The heavens indeed declare the glory and greatness of God.

*So the first way God’s greatness is revealed in creation is by the incredible design and beauty of our planet. The second way God’s greatness is revealed in creation is by*

## **II. The Infinitely Massive Majesty of the Universe**

When I use the word “infinite” I am not saying there is no end of the universe, but it is seemingly infinite and immeasurable and endless from our observable vantage point.

Last 2 words in Hebrew are literally “and the stars” (what an afterthought)! Talk about the biggest understatement ever – all the stars in this vast universe, just like that, oh yeah, God did those, too

Ted Tripp has argued persuasively that we are all wired for worship, we are created to be taken up with majesty. Our problem, as fallen creatures, is that we are taken up with majesty anywhere other than Christ and the God for whom we were made. He says that as dads and parents our most important task is to be dazzled by God and teach our children about the glory and grandeur and greatness of our God of wonders beyond our galaxy. And one of the greatest places God’s splendor and majesty is displayed is in the starry skies and vast enormity of our galaxy. They make an unmistakable statement about how BIG our God is.

Albert Einstein gave a devastating indictment of preaching fifty years ago that may be more true today. Charles Misner, a scientific specialist in general relativity theory, was quoted like this:

[The design of the universe] “is very magnificent and shouldn’t be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion, although he strikes me as a basically very religious man. He must have looked at what the preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming.

He had seen much more majesty than they had ever imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing.”<sup>12</sup>

When the Bible writers reflected on the great God of creation, they were caught up with the incomparable majesty and magnificence and supreme significance and man’s relative insignificance.

In Psalm 8, we see an example of this – notice how the first and last verse talks about how in all the earth, our Lord’s name and majestic nature are on display.

#### *Verse One*

LORD – Covenant name, emphasizes eternity, self-existent

Lord – Adonay, governor, master, sovereign King

Majestic – we don’t use the word majestic or majesty very much in our world’s vocabulary. The Biblical word majesty or majestic means superior to something else, and, therefore, that which is majestic, the idea of superior power, royal splendor, magnificence.

Perhaps I’ve told you of the Puritan father who tells of the most important advice to his son “First of all, my child, think magnificently of God ... teach your thoughts to reverence Him in every place ... first and last, think magnificently of God.”

Our problem is our view of God is too small. That’s why we are called to “magnify the Lord” – when you see something with a magnifying glass or binoculars or telescope, you’re not making what you’re seeing bigger, you’re getting a better view of what you’re seeing and how it’s bigger than you first thought.

Do we think magnificently of God? How big is our God? One way to measure this is the bigger your view of God, the smaller you are, and the smaller your problems are.

#### *Verse 3*

#### **When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers**

However big this seemingly immense and immeasurable and incalculably vast universe is, it’s just finger work for God. Isaiah 40 says it’s like the span of His hand in comparison to the massive bigness of God.

Recently scientists found a hole in one of the outermost parts of the universe, the size of a speck held at arm’s length. They trained a higher-powered telescope on it and left the lens open for a long time and when they developed the picture that was taken in that tiny hole they discovered a whole new “world” with over 1,500 more ... stars? ... No – Galaxies!<sup>13</sup>

The board chairman of AiG discusses how he has shown pictures from Hubble telescope from everyone scientists down to 7 or 8 year old and without fail, jaws literally drop physically without fail everytime they show the pictures. Internal picture of our milky way galaxy, looks like sand, just a tiny glimpse of a fraction of the small part of the universe we know about.

Why is it important to consider the heavens?

“The mere thought they are so far beyond and above everything [on this world] – the feeling that before them everything earthly so utterly vanishes to nothing – that the single man is so infinitely insignificant in the comparison with these worlds strewn over space – that his destinies, his enjoyments, and sacrifices, to which he attaches such a minute importance – how all these fade like nothing before such immense objects; ... in thoughts like these I can always *lose myself* with a silent delight in the view of the starry firmament.”<sup>14</sup>

Charles Spurgeon said it this way:

“The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the doings, and the existence of the great God which he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity.”

*What is man that you are mindful of him?*

There is something very healthy about having our pride drowned. God created us to only be satisfied when He is glorified.

Perhaps you've seen the advertisement in a magazine or newspaper, where there are these enormous mountains, so vast and immense, with two men standing on the very top, so miniscule you can barely see them. The caption next to it says, "You've never felt so alive. You've never felt so insignificant." We have it built into us, though we are fallen, to enjoy and be taken up by majesty. Though we boast in self-esteem, we all know that beholding something majestic and immense -something which dwarfs us- is where we experience being "alive."

John Piper says it much better than I can:

“Nobody in this room would go to the Grand Canyon to increase your sense of self-esteem. Nobody stands on the edge of the Alps or the Rockies or the Grand Canyon in order to go there to feel better about ourselves. Do you know why you go there? Because you were written to be satisfied with splendor, not self. You were created and a law written on your heart to be infinitely, eternally, fully, joyfully satisfied in a grand splendor not a great self. I plead with you lay it down. Lay down your quest for the applause of men, the approval of men, and begin to get on a quest for the one thing that will satisfy your soul -- the splendor of Jesus Christ and all that God is for you in him. I just plead with you for your own soul's infinite happiness that you will stop pursuing it in the wrong place ... We have an invincibly triumphant savior - Jesus Christ. Don't turn away from him to yourself. Don't want praise for you; give praise to him. Know him; he'll satisfy you.”<sup>15</sup>



Notice that the rest of the psalm does make clear that God *is* mindful of us, and gives man great honor and responsibility to be steward of what God gives us on earth. The list of creatures man is given dominion over is very similar to the language at the end of Genesis 1.

Why is God so gracious to us? This is where to many people including Christians have it all backwards when they are man-centered. You don't start with man, you start with God and His glory and His purpose, and that's where significance comes from. The fact that we sinners don't deserve anything should humble us and cause us to worship our Great God.

There are hundreds of billions of stars out there and the Bible says God not only keeps track of them all, he knows them all by name. God not only sustains everything in the universe, but he keeps track of the tiny planet called Earth – not a single sparrow can fall to the ground apart from His will, he knows the numbers of hairs on our head, and listens to our prayers and knows every word before it's even on our lips. King David, talking about this said, “such knowledge is too wonderful for me.” If you aren't constantly amazed by God, something's wrong.

Listen to the words of Puritan James Janeway from 1674.

“How do you find and feel your hearts affected upon the report of these things? Do you not see matter of admiration and cause of wonder? Are you not as it were launched forth into an ocean of goodness, where you can see no shore, nor feel no bottom? You may make a judgment of yourselves by the motions and affections you feel in yourselves at the mention of this ... If, then, you feel not your souls mightily affected with the condescension of God, say thus unto your souls, What aileth thee, O my soul, that thou art no more affected with the goodness of God? Are you dead, that you cannot feel? Or are you blind that you cannot see thyself compassed about with astonishing goodness? Behold the King of glory descending from the habitation of his majesty, and coming to visit thee! ... Oh, the wonder of his goodness! Oh, the condescension of his love, to visit me, to sue unto me, to wait upon me, to be acquainted with me! Thus work up your souls into an astonishment at the condescension of God.”<sup>16</sup>

If you want my recommendation on where to read to “work up your souls into an astonishment” at God, Job 38-42, Isaiah 40 and following, or many of the psalms are a great place to start. May our great God help us to worship Him more like we see in Revelation 4 and 5.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kent Hughes, *Genesis*, 32.

<sup>2</sup> In Genesis 1:8, God calls this expanse *shamayim* which means heaven or sky. The Jews would speak of 3 heavens – this is the first around earth, which includes what we modern man calls the atmosphere, the second is what’s beyond, which we now know as the vast universe with its heavenly bodies, and the third heaven is where God dwells (spiritual realm). Earlier creation scientists taught that verses 6-7 were speaking of a pre-flood water canopy or vapor canopy in the upper atmosphere, or a few even proposed ice layers or rings or moisture deep in space, but these ideas have been largely discarded due to scientific difficulties (see Douglas Kelly, *Creation and Change*, p. 183, for a good summary of the scientific difficulties). The “water above” could be simply the moisture in the atmosphere used in condensation, precipitation, etc. Since the Hebrew word translated “expanse” is used in many other places in the OT after the flood, I think it’s better to just let the text refer to the sky or heavens rather than a different pre-flood climate and world. In other words, “expanse” is the visible blue sky seen in the day and dark at night, the realm where birds fly and the place where we can see the sun, moon, and stars as v. 14 says.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p. 26 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Norman Geisler, and F. Turek. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, p. 105 (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist.*, 98.

<sup>6</sup> For a summary, see “living water” heading at <http://www-acs.ucsd.edu/~idea/archives/anthropic.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Lindsay, D. G. (1991). *The origins controversy : Creation or chance*. Dallas, TX: Christ for the Nations. Chap. 15.

<sup>8</sup> This last fact as cited in *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Verse 16 says God “made” (*asa*) – this Hebrew word does not mean “made appear” - it is the word that means “make” (*HALOT* lists 15 different nuances, none close to what the day-age view suggests – I did check all lexicons) – this is the same word used in Genesis 2:4, which very clearly seems equated with create (*bara*) of Gen 1:1, also 1:26-27 uses both terms interchangeably for creating mankind. Brown Driver Briggs Lexicon 793.2 cites this verse as example of “make” or “create”, as does Gesenius Lexicon p. 657.

<sup>11</sup> The below facts are summarized in sources already cited above as well as DVDs entitled “The Privileged Planet” and “The Case for a Creator.”

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *First Things*, Dec. 1991, No. 18, p. 63

<sup>13</sup> From “How Big is your God?” Audio presentation available from Answers in Genesis ministry

<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 1:86.

<sup>15</sup> From “Thankful for the Love of God – Why?” preached 11/18/2001. Text and audio version available on line at [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2001/73\\_Thankful\\_for\\_the\\_Love\\_of\\_God\\_Why/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2001/73_Thankful_for_the_Love_of_God_Why/)

<sup>16</sup> *Treasury of David*, 1:88-89.