

BEGINNINGS – A JOURNEY THROUGH GENESIS

dr matthew jacoby

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Thrive: Deeper

Thrive Deeper is a companion product to the Thrive Daily Reading Guide. In Thrive, Dr Matthew Jacoby works through books of the Bible taking readers on a journey of discovery through the Word. Every 2 weeks we release a new episode of Thrive Deeper which is a discussion around the past fortnights readings in Thrive.

find out more at
thrivetoday.tv

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Matthew Jacoby (B.Th. B.Litt. Hons, Ph.D.) is the senior pastor at OneHope Church in Geelong, Victoria. He is Lecturer in Christian Thought at the Melbourne School of Theology and he is the lead member of the acclaimed psalms-project band, Sons of Korah.

Matthew is also the author of *Deeper Places* (Baker, 2013), a book that explores the spirituality of the psalms.



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THIS ISSUE

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BEGINNINGS

– a journey through genesis

In this issue of Thrive we will be taking a reflective journey through the amazing stories of the book of Genesis. We will draw out of this book the message so foundational to the rest of the Bible. Reading this ancient book is not as easy as it might seem. We often read the stories in isolation, but my hope is that we will be able to feel the impact of each of the stories as they emerge out of the broader theme of Genesis. We will reflect on the message of the stories and consider them along with insights from the ancient historical context of Genesis. I am confident that you will see this book in a new light. The Bible is revelation from God. It is my desire as you read it, together with Thrive, that you will be equipped to engage and respond to this revelation. Please join me.

MJ

Order Out of Chaos – Genesis **1:1-2:3**

It is hard to overstate the importance of the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3. This highly condensed, intricately constructed chapter lays the foundations for everything that follows in all the books of the Bible. The big idea in the creation account is ORDER. We begin in 1:2 with the earth covered with waters, a common ancient symbol for chaos and death. God then establishes his perfect order, and this order is associated with *life*. This theme of order is expressed even in the literary features of the text. There are important literary patterns throughout the text. If you count all the repeated words and phrases, you will find rich numeric symbolism (numbers in Hebrew thought had theological significance). In the original Hebrew the first verse consists of seven words (7 is the number of perfection). The second verse then consists of 14 words. The account of the seventh day consists of 35 words, another multiple of 7. There is a rich theological artistry in this chapter in these and so many more respects. Here is the point: this isn't just what God did; it is what God does. He brings order to chaos. And his order creates the conditions for life. When our priorities get out of order, then our lives fall into chaos. This is the significance of the great flood in Genesis 7. Because humans rejected God's order, then the world returned to the watery chaos of Genesis 1:2. If you obey God's word ("And God said") then he will make a path through the chaos for you just as he did for Moses at the Red Sea. His order will then give you rest.

Read **Genesis 1:1-2:3**. Reflect on the patterns and the repeated terms and what they might mean. Ask God to order your life.

In Genesis 1 God is creating the blueprint pattern for human life which is why he works over six days and rests on the seventh. Over the first three days God creates a space for life and then, in the next three days he fills those spaces. The text is beautifully symmetrical and theologically rich. It unfolds in response to ten divine commands ("And God said..."), which is important because this is the beginning of the Torah (law) by which God orders the life of his people. The Psalmist likens God's word to a lamp that lights up the path of life (Psalm 119:105). Likewise, God first created a space of light in the darkness. On the next two days God divides the chaos-waters in two ways, first horizontally (to create the earth atmosphere) and then vertically to create dry land. This is very much like the division of the waters of the Red Sea in Exodus 14:21. The same symbolism binds these accounts together and they trumpet the same message: God makes a path of life by his Word. His Word shows the way, the truth and life. That 'Way' is a sanctuary that ensures we are not consumed by chaos and death. When Jesus walked upon the waters, he was declaring that he was more than a new Moses. He didn't just show the way. He is The Way. He is the incarnate Word of God. He is the light and 'life-space,' so that all who are 'in him' will live and will overcome chaos. God has made a life-space for you; a pathway through chaos and death. Will you live your life in Christ?

Read Genesis 1:3-13

Ask God to make a path forwards through all that threatens you and entrust yourself to Christ.

THE CENTREPOINT

TUESDAY

4 FEB

Genesis 1:14-19
Matthew 6:33; 22:37-38

Ancient Hebrew writers highlighted something by placing it in the centre of a text. So, for example, Leviticus is at the centre of the first five books of the Bible ('the Pentateuch'). And the day of atonement sits at the centre of the book of Leviticus. It is interesting to note then, what lies in the centre of the seven-day creation narrative, on day four. Here we have the creation of the 'two great lights' (the sun and moon are left unnamed here because they were typically deified in the ancient pagan world). These two great lights are to *govern* the day and the night. 'Government' is an important idea in the creation narrative. Human beings are to govern the earth but they themselves are to be governed by God and the sun and moon, as reflectors of God's light, are also signs of his government. So, to what end are they to govern? They are to "serve as signs to mark sacred times". This of course refers to the regular seasons of worship from the daily rituals and Sabbath days to the annual festivals. In other words, at the centre of this creation narrative, is an imperative for *worship*. A life oriented around worship then leads to sabbath rest. What you love most is the object of your worship. Our highest love is what our lives orbit around. If your life does not orbit around God then it will inevitably orbit chaotically around other people. This will undermine your human relationships because only God can be your light and your stable 'centre'. He alone creates the conditions for us and our relationships to flourish.

Read Genesis 1:14-19, Matthew 6:33 and 22:37-38

Put God and his purpose central in your life.

The 5th and 6th days of creation focus on the creation of animals and humankind. We are told repeatedly that all living things, plants and animals, are created “according to their kinds”. This phrase is repeated 10 times (corresponding with the 10 divine commands in Genesis 1). The point is to establish a contrast. While all other living things are created “according to their kinds,” human beings are *set apart* by being created *according to the divine image*. The idea of being *set apart* is a crucial theme throughout the Bible. The biblical term for this is ‘holiness’. Holiness does not just refer to moral purity. It denotes ‘transcendent otherness’. God, of course is holy in the most superlative sense, and this superlative is expressed by the threefold repetition, “holy holy holy,” in Isaiah 6:3 (Cf. Revelation 4:8). The Latin-origin equivalent of the word ‘holy’ is ‘sacred’ and this word helps to nuance the meaning implied here in Genesis. Three times it is said that human beings are created *in God’s image* and the repetition serves to highlight the uniqueness of humans. We are sacred because we are related to, and belong to, God in a special sense. To be sacred means to be set apart for a special purpose. Sacred articles in the tabernacle, for example, could not be used in any way. They were set apart for a special purpose. So it is with us. You cannot just do whatever you want with your life, because you are sacred. This is the foundation for Christian ethics. Treat yourself and others as sacred and you will honour the God to whom we all belong.

Read Genesis 1:20-27, Exodus 30:22-29,
Leviticus 20:7, 26 and 1 Peter 1:14-16

Reflect prayerfully on what it means for you
to regard yourself and others as sacred.

WHAT IS MAN?

Genesis 1:20-27

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1). John is not espousing some new Christian idea here. When mankind is first introduced in Genesis 1, they are introduced as God’s children. When the writer of Genesis talks about man being made in God’s image (1:26-27) he is denoting a direct progenitor, what in scientific terms we would see as the transmission of our DNA through reproduction. This is clear from Genesis 5:3 where it says of Adam’s relationship to his son, Seth, “He had a son in his own likeness, in his own image”. The writer expresses the familial relationship like this to make an important theological point, not only about human identity, but also our *role*. We are the representatives of God in the world, to each other and to the rest of creation. Ancient Near Eastern kings used to set up images of themselves in conquered territories to stake their claim in those areas. The images were symbols of the king’s authority. So, when people rebelled against that king, the first thing they would do was to deface the image. God’s image in mankind has been defaced. Do you feel defaced? Christ came to restore you and he is, by his Spirit, restoring the DNA of God’s character in you again. Don’t live like an animal. You are a human being with a high purpose. Step up into your relationship with God, enjoy life with him and, in this way, you will radiate his glory. Your joy in God will be a light to the world.

Read Genesis 1:20-27, Psalm 8 and 2 Peter 1:3-4

Give thanks to God for his love and the world he has created for us to enjoy. How can you live for your higher purpose as God’s child today?

FRIDAY
7 FEB

RULE & SUBDUE

Genesis **1:26-31**

In Genesis 1 we read about God bringing a perfectly ordered and fine-tuned creation out of a primeval watery chaos. He then gives it to us to do the same. We human beings were put in charge. God made us the stewards and caretakers of the world and each other. This is what is meant by the creation mandate to “rule” and “subdue”. We are to subdue chaos and establish God’s order. This is real authority, which entails a huge responsibility. A negative choice would take things back to chaos. This, of course, is what happened. Human beings rejected God and his purpose and, as a result, the world spiraled back into chaos (i.e. the flood in Genesis 7). Such is the authority that God gave us that he is committed to allowing the broad consequences of our actions to unfold. And when this happens, future generations bear these consequences. This is why the world is the way it is. It was not by God’s choice that this happened. No, it was our empowered choice that created the world we now live in. We are at odds with the natural world and each other only because we first rejected God. But there is good news. God gives us a new start in Jesus Christ. So, we can now make the choice again and bring blessing upon our descendants and ourselves. The decision to say, “Yes” to God in Christ is the most important decision you will ever make. And you can remake it every day. Have things turned to chaos? Call on Jesus to empower you again to rule and subdue.

Read Genesis 1:26-31

Ask Jesus to empower you again to rule and subdue the chaos in your world.