Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

In 2008, the ability to video call someone on your computer was a new thing. And Skype was one of the first companies to make this technology widely available. So, I typed in Holtslag and did a search, and the name of someone in the Netherlands, who had the same first name as my Grandfather, popped up. And wondering if we might be related, I sent him a message introducing myself and asking if he wanted to speak on Skype. And around three weeks later, I got a Skype call from him. We started talking and it turned out that we were very distantly related. And while we were talking, he asked me if I knew about the Holtslag book – the history of the Holtslag name and family? And I did not, so he promised to send me a copy. And sure enough, it arrived a couple of weeks later. But it was in Dutch, of course, so I had to give it to my Father to translate, which he did. So, now I knew that the original Holtslags had a castle and a street, and an only child who was a daughter. And when she married, her husband took her surname, so that the Holtslag name could continue. And it was fascinating to read the history of the Holtslags. And maybe you have read the history of your family. It gives you a very real sense of connection and belonging.

Well, I want you to try and put yourselves in the sandals of the people of Israel, as they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land. Around 400 years before, they were one man, Jacob, and his extended family – around 70 persons. But now, having been delivered from slavery in Egypt, they were 1.2 million adults, plus children. And God was bringing them to a land where they could live as His people. So, they were a new nation. But at the time, **they had no *written* history of their origins**. They surely had an *oral* or spoken history, but oral histories can lose things or be added to in inaccurate ways, over time. And so, the Lord commanded Moses to write down the history and laws of Israel. And the Lord Himself would give Moses the words, so that they were accurate and reliable and trustworthy. Thus, the people would now have the truth about their origins, on paper (or stone and papyrus, as it was back then).

And this is why we read, earlier, about Moses reading the “*Book of the covenant*” to the people. And we also read in **Nehemiah** that when the people of Israel, having returned to the Promised Land after the exile, needed to be reminded of their history, Ezra read to them the “*Book of the law of Moses*.” And many other places in the Bible make it clear that **Moses is the author** **of the first five books of the Bible** – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And does anyone know what the Hebrew name for those first five books of the Bible is? Torah. And let me add here that this why we also read **Mark 12:26**, because it refers to the “*Book of Moses*” and the account of the burning bush. So, the Book of Moses or the Torah is not just the law parts of Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy, but also the historical parts. And it is worth noting here that the is a very particular way of writing history in the Hebrew language, which is the original language of Genesis. Hebrew has a very particular way of writing history. Poetry is written in quite a different way. But right from Genesis 1:1, this is classic Hebrew history.

So, whether it was the occasion that we read about in Exodus 24 or another occasion, **try to imagine being among the first ones to hear the words**: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*.” And then you heard the account of the six days of creation, Adam and Eve, the Fall, Noah and the flood, the Tower of Babel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the deliverance from Egypt. What an incredible moment that must have been. Now, they had a *written* account of their history, with the sense of connection and belonging that such histories always bring. So, from that day on, when a little Joshua or Abigail asked Dad or Mum, ‘How did the stars get there?’ or, ‘Who are our ancestors?’ or, ‘Why do people die?’ they would receive an answer from the Torah – the Word of God.

But, and this is a key part of today’s sermon, Genesis is **not just the history of Israel**, is it. There have been many, over the centuries, who have argued that it *is* just the history of Israel; that it is just Israel’s version of creation to go alongside the versions of creation that other Ancient-Near-Eastern peoples had. And so, they argue that we don’t need to take the creation account or the Fall or the Global flood of Noah literally and seriously; we can just ignore those accounts as Israel myths or poems. But the Bible is crystal clear that **Genesis is the history of every human being**. It is a literal history of the origin of the universe. It is the God-given account of *how* all things, apart from God, came into existence, and *why* He created all things. And a vital part of the why is to help us understand why there is much that broken and twisted and dysfunctional and diseased and dying in creation. For ultimately, this brokenness is why Jesus needed to come, to die on the cross, and why He will come again to bring in the new heavens and new earth.

So, today we consider Genesis 1:1 under the theme of **God’s Divine Foundation for Faith and Life**. And this will be an introductory sermon. We are going to see how much foundational theology there is in just the first verse of the Bible. And we are going to see how foundational Genesis is for the story of salvation.

1. And we do this for two key reasons: **the first is as an aid to faith**.
   1. Believer, God wants you to have confidence in His word. **2 Timothy 3:16** says, “*All Scripture (beginning from the very first verse) is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work*.”
   2. And we live in times when the vast majority of people, including, sadly, many who profess to be Christians, do not believe that Genesis is the truth. They view it as a myth or a poem, but not as a record of what *actually* happened.
   3. But God wants you to know what *actually* happened, for the sake of His glory, and so that you may have confidence in Him and in salvation in Christ.
2. And that leads into the second reason why we must see how foundational Genesis is, which is that **there are still many today who undermine or attack it.** 
   1. If you have studied the decline of once biblically faithful denominations into theological liberalism, almost always, one of the first things that happened was the undermining of the historicity of Genesis. And this includes in Reformed denominations that were once our sister churches.
   2. And just a couple of weeks ago, I listened to a podcast where the two hosts, who are members of sister churches overseas, with one of them being a ministry student, laughed at and dismissed the six days of creation and the global flood as non-literal.
   3. And we know why this happens. Way back in the Garden of Eden, we are told that the crafty serpent came to Eve. And do you remember his opening line to her? He said, “***Did God really say?***” And that question led Eve to doubt what God had said and eventually to eat the forbidden fruit. Well, the devil has been having a field day with that question in relation to Genesis in recent centuries. Through minister after minister, and seminary professor after seminary professor, and author after author, he has said to the church, “Did God really say?” You see, he knows that once people dismiss the first pages of the Bible as a myth or poem, it becomes easy to do it with the rest of the Bible, to the point that the virgin birth is denied, the atoning work of Christ on the cross is denied, the resurrection is denied, and God is perfectly happy if two men or two women get married. And it all begins by undermining the divine foundation – Genesis.
   * So, it is vital that we understand and believe that God has given us the truth about what happened in the beginning; that when we read about Him creating all things in six days, and creating Adam and Eve as our first parents, and the Fall, our response must be, Amen! Praise God! This is the truth.

Well, we are already well into the sermon, but with the rest of our time we will briefly consider two headings in this connection – **God** and **creation**.

1. And we begin with **God**.
   1. Genesis 1:1 tells us about the beginning of “*the heavens and the earth*.” But **what does not begin in Genesis 1:1 is God**. And that is because, as the Bible makes very clear, God is without beginning, or eternal. **Psalm 90:2**, “*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God*.” And this is why when Moses asked God what His name was at the burning bush, God replied “I AM WHO I AM.” God is the eternally existent one.
      1. And the Apostle John wanted us to understand this also about the Lord Jesus Christ: It is why he began his Gospel with the words: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God*.” So, the second person of the trinity, also, is eternal. And we will come back to this wonderful truth in a moment.
      2. But we are meant to be struck by these remarkable opening words: “*In the beginning, God*.” God is just declared. He isn’t explained. He isn’t described. We will have to read on to learn more about who God is and what He is like. But what is clear, by implication, is that God was not made or created. He is without beginning. He is the uncaused cause. He exists eternally.
   2. And this mind-bending and wonderfully mysterious truth feeds into the next thing we learn about God in this opening verse, which is that **He is Almighty**. I know these words are familiar to most if not all of us: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*.” But think back to the last time you made something,. Think back to how long it took you to plan it, and how often you changed the design, and how you needed to decide which materials to use, and then, having started with one item, you set it aside and found something better. And you probably also threw your first attempt in the rubbish and started all over again, maybe even several times, until you were satisfied with what you made This is typically the process by which we make things. But not God.
      1. This is what we read in **Psalm 33:6**: “*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host*,” and **verse 9**: “*For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm*.” And read **Job 38-40** when you have a moment. There was no design process with God. There was no plan A and plan B, etc. There was no, “Mmmh, how will I do this?” “*He spoke, and it came to be*.” And it was instantly perfect!
      2. It is no wonder then that the Psalmist breaks out in praise when he describes creation: **Psalm 104**: “*Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great! … the earth is full of your creatures*.” **Psalm 147**: “*He determines the number of the stars; He gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure … Praise the LORD!*” Is this your response to God’s almighty creation power and glory? It should be!
   3. I referred a moment ago to the second person of the Trinity. And Trinity is the doctrine that recognizes that there is one God in three persons. Well, we are going to see at the Trinity is an integral part of Genesis 1. And that begins already here in verse 1. You see, the Hebrew verb that is translated as “created” in verse 1 is in the singular – it is He created; not they, many, but He, one. But the Hebrew word that we translate as God is Elohim. It literally means ‘The Putter forth of All Power.’ And Elohim is in the plural form. The singular would be Eloah. And the plural form means at least three, because there is a dual form, which would mean two. And we know from the rest of Scripture that it is exactly three – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, if we wanted to woodenly translate the verse, we could say, “In the beginning, the Putter forth of all power, who is three, this one created the heavens and the earth.” Isn’t that incredible?! Trinity is right there in verse 1 of the Bible!
      1. And just in case you think this is trying to be a bit too clever, if I were to ask you which person of the Trinity is to the fore in creation, my guess is you would reply, “The Father.” Am I right? Well, listen to what **Colossians 1:16** says about the Lord Jesus Christ: “*For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through Him and for Him*.” We are supposed to see the Trinity at work in creation, because creation is the first part of the work of salvation and ultimately re-creation when Jesus comes again.
2. So, there is much that is foundational about **God** in just this first verse of the Bible. But secondly, and more briefly, there is also much that is foundational about **Creation**.
   1. I said a moment ago that “the heavens and the earth” is a Hebrew way of designating the entire visible universe. But let me add to that that “the heavens” also includes the invisible realm of the **angels**. For the angels were also created; they are not eternal. **Psalm 148** calls on all created things to praise the Lord, including the angels. And in **Job 38**, God tells us that the angels “*shouted for joy*” when God created the earth. And **Ephesians 6:12** tells us that the angels live “*in the heavenly places*.” So, even though it is not specifically stated, we can locate the creation of the angels here in Genesis 1:1.
   2. But another thing that God created in Genesis 1:1 is **time**. And I won’t bore you with a long explanation but “*in the beginning*” translates one Hebrew word. And the way that that word is used means not just one beginning among many, or one period within eternity, but the absolute beginning of time itself. And of course, this is where words simply fail us, because we can only think in terms of time. If I say to you, “before God created time,” that suggests time before time. And the only thing that existed before creation was God. So, don’t even think of an empty black space before creation, because that would be a thing! There was just God! It's an incredible mystery, isn’t it.
   3. And this is why the Hebrew word translated as “**created**” is so significant. You see, it is only used in the Bible in relation to God. He also ‘makes’ and ‘fashions’ and ‘forms,’ and we humans ‘make’ and ‘fashion’ and ‘form,’ but only God ‘creates,’ in terms of the Hebrew words.
      1. Sometimes people use the Latin phrase ‘creation ex-nihilo’ to describe this unique activity of God. It means creation out of nothing. And what that means is that God brought into existence materials that had no previous existence to make everything that now exists. Or, to put it another way, God made the universe from materials that He created from “*not even nothing*.”
      2. And that too is another wonderful mystery, isn’t it. **Hebrews 11:3** says, “*By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible*.” This is just something we must believe.
      3. And I want to bring us back here to **the role of the Lord Jesus in creation**. When He was on earth, He turned water into wine, He made a few bits of bread become a huge quantity of bread, He made storms stop, and He healed and raised the dead. And these are all creation miracles. So, the Jesus of the Bible, the Jesus who must be believed in for salvation, is the Creator!
      4. But our **key point** here is that God created all things, including the angels, and time and matter from not even nothing!
   4. And to make this point very personal, this means that He created you! Listen to what **Psalm 139:13-14** says about God: “*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made*.”
      1. And I have quoted this Psalm because there comes a time when pretty much every person that has ever lived looks in the mirror and they do not like what they see. Perhaps it is because others have told them they are too short or too tall or too fat or too skinny or not beautiful or disabled or some other reason. Or maybe this is just what you think about yourself, as you compare how you look or how you sound or your personality with others.
      2. And of course, this is a massive problem today, especially for teenage girls, but not just for them, because of transgender ideology, and our culture’s obsession with athletes and celebrities and what the world says is beautiful. But God wants you to know that He created you. And you are fearfully and wonderfully made! You are created in His image, as a male or a female. You are not a mistake. You are special. You are beautiful.

Well, as we draw to a close, I want to end by quoting the words of the Lord Jesus from **John 5:44-47**. He was talking then to the leaders of the Jews, and rebuking them for claiming to be students of the Scriptures, and especially Moses, while they rejected Jesus as the promised Messiah. He said, “*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life … Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me*.”

Congregation, Genesis is the truth about how the universe began. But it is also the beginning of the story of salvation in Jesus. And you can’t have one without the other. This is why Genesis is the divine foundation for faith and life. And this is why it must be guarded and cherished and believed. Amen.