

Dr. Kenneth A. Mathews, Genesis, Session 2, Creation (Genesis 1:1-2:3)

NotebookLM's 20-min. Podcast

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All right, let's dive into these notes, shall we? We're looking at Dr. Kenneth Mathews today. Pretty big name when it comes to the Old Testament, right? Definitely a leading scholar. And I know you've been wanting to unpack the Genesis creation account.

Oh yeah, one of my favorites. So that's where we're headed. It's funny, you think you know a text like Genesis, and then you read someone like Dr. Mathews, and you're like- totally new insights, yeah.

Bam. Mind blown. Okay, so let's start with the basics.

The structure: six days of creation, plus that day of rest. We're talking Genesis 1.1 through 2.3. Yep. The classic framework.

But right away, Genesis 1:1, Dr. Mathews points out this thing called a merism: heavens and earth. What is that? What's the significance? A merism. It's a figure of speech where you use two opposites to express a totality.

So high and low would mean everything in between. Ah, got it. Heavens and earth here isn't just about the sky and the ground.

It means everything, the whole universe, all that exists. So like those epic movie opening shots where you zoom out from a single leaf to the whole galaxy. Exactly.

God created it all. Every bit of substance and material. Okay, that makes a lot more sense now.

So God creates everything. But then in Genesis 1:2, the earth is this formless, empty, dark void with the spirit of God just sort of hovering over the waters. It's like this, I don't know, cosmic pre-party before the real action starts.

What do you think about that image? Well, it's important to note that the earth at this point can't support life. It's a blank canvas waiting for the master artist to start working. So formless and empty, yes, but full of potential.

Right. Okay. So then we get into days one through three, and it's all about bringing form to this void.

Light and darkness get separated. The sky from the waters, land from the seas, order out of chaos. Exactly.

Separation and distinction. It's like God is creating structure out of the formlessness. I love that.

And you know, it's interesting, on day three, there are two O creation events. Really? Not only the separation of land and sea, but God also commands the land to produce vegetation. Wait a minute.

Stop right there. Yeah. That is interesting.

It's like the land itself is participating in the creation process. Yes. It's not just being formed.

It's bursting forth with life. Okay. So we've got form, but it's still pretty empty, right? Yeah.

We've got to fill that emptiness. Cue days four through six. All right.

Bring on the life. So day four brings us the light bearers in the sky. Sun, moon, and stars, the whole shebang.

Exactly. And suddenly we have day and night, seasons, this cosmic rhythm to creation. I've always loved that part.

It's like God setting the clock of the universe. And then on days five and six, we get all the creatures. Right.

The waters in the sky teeming with life. And finally, the land animals and humans arrive on the scene. Okay.

Wait. Hold on. I've always noticed this, but never really thought about it.

There's this parallel structure between days one, three, and four, six. Oh, absolutely. Dr. Mathews points that out too.

Form then filling. Form then filling. Okay.

Like a cosmic dance or something. It's intentional design balance. Days one through three establish the framework, the bare bones, if you will.

Right. And then days four to six, flesh it all out. God is setting up the stage and then filling it in.

Not just random. There's a purpose behind each step. That is so cool.

Okay. Six days of amazing creative action. And then we get day seven, the Sabbath.

This one's always intrigued me. It's a day of rest and holiness, but it doesn't have that evening and morning language like the other six days. You're right.

Dr. Mathews suggests this might mean God's rest is ongoing. Interesting thought. Not just a 24-hour timeout.

It connects to the idea in Hebrews that we can enter into God's rest through faith in Jesus Christ. Wow. That's huge.

From the very beginning to the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan. Okay. But wait a minute.

There's another creation account that starts in Genesis 2:4, right? Why two creation stories back to back? Right. Good question. Dr. Mathews addresses that directly.

He says it's not a contradiction, but a change in perspective, like zooming in on a specific detail of a photograph. Oh, okay. So instead of the broad overview.

Got it. It focuses on day six, the creation of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, and the animals. So it's not that the first account is wrong or anything.

It's just that we're getting a more intimate look at the creation of humanity and their special place in creation. Precise. I like that.

Okay. But we can't talk Genesis without addressing the elephant in the room. The day debate.

Yes. Does yom, the Hebrew word for day, literally mean a 24-hour period? Because honestly, if the sun isn't created until day four, how can the first three days be regular days? It doesn't make sense. You're hitting on one of the big debates surrounding the creation account.

The traditional view, because of that evening and morning language, is that they are solar days, but- but then there's the sun issue. Exactly. And the seventh day doesn't have the evening and morning marker either.

So another interpretation is that day represents a much longer period, maybe aligning with geological history. And what's interesting, Dr. Mathews points out that yom is actually used figuratively in other parts of Genesis. No way.

Like in Genesis 1:5, where light is called day. And Genesis 2.4, where day refers to the entire period of creation. So day might be a bit more flexible than we initially thought.

Where does Dr. Mathews land on this? He leans toward the figurative interpretation, mainly because of those inconsistencies with the strict solar day reading. He also suggests that the language might be what we call phenomenological. Phenomenological.

Meaning, it's based on how humans experience things, rather than strict scientific precision. So less about a science textbook, and more about communicating God's power and purpose in a way that ancient people could understand. Kind of like how we still say sunrise, even though it's the earth rotating.

Exactly. Meeting people where they are. Okay.

That makes sense. So we've got the structure of the day debate. But what about the main event, the creation of humanity? There's so much there.

Oh yeah. It's fascinating, and a bit perplexing, honestly. Like that whole image of God thing.

What does that even mean? Big question. And why is it such a big deal that God speaks to humanity in Genesis, not just about them, like he does with the animals? Right. Right.

That's where we start to see what makes humanity unique in the creation account. It's not just about being created last. Yeah.

It's about this special relationship with God. All right. We are on to something here.

I am ready to keep going. So we're back, and we're really digging into this idea of humanity's special place in creation. Like what makes us unique? Well, it all goes back to that phrase, image of God.

Right. Image of God. Everybody uses it, but what does it actually mean? It's a question that people have been debating for centuries.

Yeah. Dr. Mathews makes a good point though. He says that instead of focusing on what the image of God asks, the text focuses on what it does.

It's less about physical resemblance and more about function. Gotcha. You know, about the role that humanity plays in creation.

So it's not that we look like God. It's about us reflecting his qualities. Right.

It's more about function and purpose than appearance. Okay. But I mean, are we like mini gods running around then? Not mini gods, exactly.

Right. But we are given a special purpose and responsibility. Like, look at Genesis 1.26-28. God gives humanity this threefold mandate to rule, to subdue, and to procreate.

Powerful verbs, right? Yeah. Definitely not passive. I mean, rule, subdue, that sounds a bit harsh to me.

Like we're given permission to exploit creation or something. I can see why you might say that. Yeah.

But Dr. Mathews brings in some really fascinating cultural context here. He connects this language to ancient Near Eastern practices where kings would set up these stone pillars called steles to mark their territory. And it was a symbol of their rule.

And he suggests that humanity created in God's image is like God's stele on earth. Hold on. I never thought about humans as God's stele before.

It's like we're living monuments to his presence. Yes. And we're meant to reflect his character and care for the world.

That's a powerful image. It is, isn't it? Okay. So we're not just random creatures.

We have a purpose. Right. And it goes against the grain of those ancient cultures where only kings or priests were seen as having a special connection to the divine.

But the Genesis account is different. Dr. Mathews calls it the democratization of the image of God. Every single human, regardless of who they are, bears God's image and this responsibility.

Okay. I'm following you. But I do have a question.

If we're talking about the image of God metaphorically, doesn't that raise questions about the literalness of other parts of the Bible? What do you think? That's a valid point. And it's something a lot of people struggle with. The key is understanding the different genres and literary styles within the Bible.

Not everything is meant to be taken literally. Right. The creation account, with its poetic language and symbolism, falls into a category that invites deeper interpretation.

It's about getting the truth being conveyed; not necessarily every detail is a scientific fact. Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. That's a whole other deep dive. Another day.

Another deep dive. Right. Okay.

So back to the image of God. If it's about reflecting God's qualities, what does that actually look like in practice? Can't just be about having dominion over nature, can it? No, it's not about domination. It's about stewardship.

It's about reflecting God's love, wisdom, justice, and creativity in how we interact with the world and with each other. You know, think about it. If a king erects a monument in his kingdom, he expects it to be cared for, to be a source of beauty and order, not a symbol of neglect or abuse.

It's the same with us. It's not about having power. It's about using that power responsibly.

Exactly. Like I'm picturing a gardener carefully tending their garden, not a dictator conquering a land. Kovic analogy.

Okay. I like it. And this idea ties in beautifully with another crucial element we see in the Genesis creation account, the Sabbath.

Yes. The Sabbath. It really seems to highlight some important things about God, things that are woven throughout the creation account.

Yes, absolutely. It's not just a random day off, is it? Not at all. Dr. Mathews suggests that the Sabbath is an invitation for us to enter into God's own rest, to experience the fullness of his shalom, which is so much more than just the absence of work.

It's about peace, wholeness, harmony, all those things that were present in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the picture. Yeah. And it's interesting that God doesn't just command humanity to rest.

He modeled it himself. He worked and then he rested. It's like he's saying, this is how the world is designed to work.

This rhythm is built into creation. Right. We're not meant to be constantly striving, constantly producing.

Exactly. Rest isn't a luxury. It's a necessity.

It's a chance to recharge, to reconnect with God, to appreciate the goodness of creation. And like we talked about earlier, this idea of Sabbath rest finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, who offers true rest for our souls. Yes.

A deep abiding rest. Such a powerful message, especially in a culture that often glorifies busyness and productivity. Yeah.

It's like we've forgotten how to rest, how to simply be. I think that's why the Genesis account is so relevant to us today. It reminds us of who we are, where we came from, and how we're meant to live.

In harmony with God, with creation, with each other. Exactly. Okay.

So we've covered the structure of creation, the whole day debate, the image of God, the Sabbath. But now we've got to talk about that other big thing, the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, the forbidden fruit, paradise lost. Things are about to get a little less idyllic, aren't they? Yeah.

We're moving into Genesis chapters two and three, where things get complicated, where we see the temptation, the fall. Ooh, heavy stuff. It's a tough topic, but it's essential to understanding who we are and our relationship with God.

I'm ready. Let's do it. It's like, who hasn't been tempted to take a bite of that forbidden fruit, right? We've all been there.

Okay. So, the Garden of Eden- this is where things get really interesting. Dr. Mathews brings out some stuff here that I think will surprise a lot of people.

Oh, yeah. Even folks who think they know the story inside and out. Totally.

So paint us a picture. What's the vibe in the Garden of Eden? Okay. So imagine the ultimate paradise, lush vegetation everywhere, rivers with crystal clear water.

Ooh, I like it. Trees bearing delicious fruit. This is the Garden of Eden, Genesis 2.4. It's specifically designed by God for Adam and Eve.

Okay. Total harmony between humanity and creation. It's interesting though, even in paradise, Adam's got a job to do, right? He's supposed to work the garden, take care of it.

It's not all just lounging around, enjoying the scenery. What do you make of that? Well, it shows that humanity, right from the beginning, was created for a purpose. Responsibility.

Work wasn't some kind of punishment that came later. It was part of the original design. We're caretakers of God's creation.

Stewards of creation. Yes. I like that.

Okay, but then there's that tree, right? The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God says, don't eat from it, and there's that consequence: death. Kind of like that do not touch button you're not supposed to press, but it's so tempting.

Right. The classic test of obedience. It's about trust, respecting God's authority.

He's not trying to withhold something good from them. It's about recognizing that he knows what's best. Yeah.

But then Eve comes along and enters into the serpent, a smooth-talking snake, who tempts her with the forbidden fruit, questions God's word, and promises knowledge and power. It's amazing, though, how often deception is packaged as something good, something desirable. Right.

The oldest trick in the book. It really is. And sadly, Eve falls for it, eats the fruit, gives some to Adam, and the relationship with God is fractured.

What's so fascinating here is that the consequences are immediate, but also long-lasting. They experience shame, they're afraid, they hide from God. Right.

Their eyes are open, but not in the way the serpent promised. Exactly. They see their nakedness, and it's a symbol of their vulnerability, their separation from God.

Talk about buyer's remorse. They thought they were getting freedom, enlightenment, but they got shame and fear. And the punishment, it's swift.

Pain and childbirth, toil and work, and ultimately death, paradise lost. It's tragic, but I'm guessing Dr. Mathews doesn't just see this as like a cautionary tale from a bygone era, does he? No, not at all. He connects it to the core of the human experience, temptation, disobedience, the consequences of sin.

We all face this stuff. Yeah. It's like when you know you shouldn't do something, but you do it anyway.

Right. And you instantly regret it. We've all been there.

Exactly. It helps explain why the world is the way it is, you know, brokenness, suffering, pain, strained relationships. It all goes back to that first bite of the forbidden fruit.

Wow. But there is a glimmer of hope, right? Even in the midst of all this. Oh, absolutely.

Dr. Mathews points out that even as God is pronouncing judgment, he also clothes Adam and Eve. It's the symbol of grace, you know? Yeah. Mercy.

He hasn't abandoned them. Right. It's like he's saying, I see your mess, but I'm still here for you.

There's this promise in the story, a hint that God's plan for humanity isn't over. Exactly. This is the setup for the rest of the biblical narrative, you know, this unfolding story of God's redemption culminating in Jesus.

He's the ultimate answer to the sin and brokenness. Wow. What a journey from the creation of the universe to the fall.

It's all right there in Genesis. It's foundational. It's not just ancient history.

It's a story that gets to the core of who we are. Our place in the world. So to everyone listening, we've covered a lot of ground in this deep dive.

Structure of creation, the day debate, what it means to be made in God's image, the consequences of sin. We wrestled with some tough questions. We did.

But we've only just scratched the surface. There's so much more to explore in Genesis. It's a text you can spend a lifetime unpacking, and it can speak to us in new ways at every stage of life.

So true. Keep digging deeper, ask those tough questions, and see what you discover. And thanks for joining us on this deep dive.

Until next time, keep seeking truth.