



HOLY PLACE

We live in a beautiful world, don't we? Whether you're looking at a roaring sea or a colossal mountain range; a lush rainforest or a desert oasis; a jaw-dropping sunset or a clear, starry sky; the world is an amazing place.

But it's also a world in trouble – and to a large extent, it's down to us. To our selfishness, yes. But also, our failure to grasp Genesis 1. What do I mean? Let's take a look.

Genesis 1:1-2:3

I want you to imagine it's 3000+ years ago, you're a Middle Eastern shepherd, and you've led your people out of slavery to one of the greatest superpowers in the ancient world. You've taken them into the desert, where they've had to adapt to living in tents, and you've got them to a mountain. A sacred mountain. The mountain of God Himself. And on that mountain God gives you a set of laws for your people, but He also gives you instructions for a special tent, a holy place where God will dwell with His people.

And then He says this (Exodus 26:30):

"Set up the tent according to the pattern / design / blueprint shown you on the mountain."

Now, who's the shepherd? Moses. Who's the people? Israel. What's the mountain? Sinai. What are the laws? The 10 commandments / Torah. What is the tent? The Tabernacle.

And what is the pattern, the design?

Genesis ch1.

You see, the universe as described in Genesis 1 is a holy place, built by God Himself. Consider these clues:

- God constructs the universe in 7 stages, just as the Tabernacle was commissioned – in 7 stages.
- On days 1-3 God works on the rooms of the universe; then, on days 4-6, He works on the furnishings.
- The verb 'to make', *asah*, means 'to craft' – the same verb used of the construction of the Tabernacle.
- The Hebrew words translated 'expanse', 'seas' and 'lights' literally mean 'roof', 'basins' and 'lamps.'
- The passage ends with God 'resting' or 'taking up residence' in His universe – as in Exodus 40.

I.e. the cosmos is God's holy place – and the Tabernacle in Exodus was a microcosm, a miniature version of that.

But what difference does that make? To you and to me?

3, at least:

1) The World Is A Place Of Artistry. Think of the Pyramids of Giza, the Taj Mahal, the Palace of Versailles, the Forbidden City. What makes them exceptional? The size of them, yes, but also the artistry – and creation is the same. As Psalm 19:1-4 says, the whole thing points to the Genius behind it – which is why we marvel at the beauty, the complexity, and the enormity of it all. Even agnostics like David Attenborough cannot help but talk in awestruck terms (and that familiar, trademark whisper!). The point being: it's not a fluke (and neither are you).

As an aside, did you know that the first reference to people being 'filled with the Spirit' is Bezalel and Oholiab, the artisans who 'designed' the Tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-11)? Why them? Because they were building a scaled-down version of what God Himself has built!

2) The World Is A Place Of Sanctity. If the world is a holy place, then every patch of ground must be sacred. And sometimes even Christians fail to get it! It's like Jacob when he had his vision of the stairway to heaven: "The LORD is in this place and I did not know it" (Genesis 28:16). As David says in Psalm 139: "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?" The answer being: you can't!

Now if that's the case, when human beings rebelled against God and sin entered the picture, it was like a desecration of that world, a desecration of God's cosmic temple. In the same way, when we share the Gospel, we're not just potentially saving the person we're talking to, we're potentially reconsecrating the patch of ground they live on; the bit of the world they live in. Wow!

3) The World Is A Place Of Responsibility. The promise of the Bible is that Jesus will one day return – and when He does, we will live with Him in a redeemed and restored universe. Which, strangely enough, flies in the face of what a lot of Christians actually believe. Because a lot of Christians seem to see the Gospel as little more than a spiritual life-insurance policy, and fail to realise the Gospel is a victory message for the whole of creation. Hence creation “groaning” in readiness (Romans 8:19).

But this is also about the present – because Jesus wants us to live like we’re already there. We say it every time we pray, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done – on earth, as it is in heaven.” It’s also why, in Genesis 2, the verb ‘to tend’, used to describe the work of Adam and Eve in the garden, is also used of the work of the Levites in the Tabernacle. I.e. we are all potential Greta Thunbergs!

It Is Good

So, the Tabernacle was a miniature version of a far bigger ‘holy place’ - the universe itself. Once you realise that, it affects the way you read other bits of the Bible. E.g. here are some quotes from the OT book of Isaiah (chs 6, 40, and 66):

"Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory!"

"He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in."

"Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool; where is the house you will build for Me?"

I.e. “This world belongs to God. It is His holy place.” Which is perhaps why, when we look at those mountains and forests and oceans and skies, we feel closer to the One who made them. And why we need to treat it well.

Anyone seen the movie *The Aeronauts*? In the film, Eddie Redmayne’s character, Victorian scientist James Glaisher, says this as he looks down on the world from a hot-air balloon: “Whilst we may be able to explain the science behind an aureole, or the falling snow, it is not possible to account for its beauty.”

For its beauty. Why do we look at the world and think, “That is beautiful, awesome, incredible?” Perhaps because, as God’s image-bearers, we are thinking God’s thoughts after Him.

We’re saying, “It is good.”

So ... will we recognise the truths of Genesis ch1? Will we recognise the artistry? Will we recognise the sanctity? Will we recognise our responsibility? Will we look after the world? Will we care for His temple?