Hello World (Genesis 1:1-25)

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Preacher: William HC

[0:00] Please follow along with your eyes and I'll be reading from verse 1 to verse 25. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty and the darkness covered the deep waters.

And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, let there be light. And there was light. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness.
God called the light day and the darkness night. And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day. Then God said, let there be a space between the waters to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.
And that is what happened. God made the space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. God called the space sky. And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.
Then God said, let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place so dry ground may appear. And that is what happened. God called the dry ground land and the waters seas.
[1:03] And God saw it was good. Then God said, let the land sprout with vegetation, every sort of seed bearing plant and trees that grow seed bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.

And that is what happened. The land produced vegetation, all sorts of seed bearing plants and trees with seed bearing fruits. Their seeds produce plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.
And evening passed and the morning came, marking the third day. Then God said, let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days and years.
Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth. And that is what happened. God made two great lights, the larger one to govern the day and the smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars.
God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.
[2:10] Then God said, let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind. So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the sea or in the water and every sort of bird, each producing offspring of the same kind.

And God saw that it was good. Then God blessed them saying, be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas and let the birds multiply on the earth. And evening marked a past and morning came, marking the fifth day.
Then God said, let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind. Livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground and wild animals.
And that is what happened. God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.
And let's invite William up to speak to us today. Welcome, William. Thanks so much for that reading, Fran. Can everyone hear me okay?
[3:14] Maybe give a thumbs up. Yep. Oh, that's good. And yeah, what a wonderful way to start the Bible, isn't it? Such a powerful first section.

We did stop at verse 25. We will look at 26 through to the rest of the kind of the first section next week. But as Pastor Albert helpfully reminded us last week, Genesis, it's a special book, isn't it?

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It's a book of beginnings. It's where life begins, where humanity begins, where sin begins, and ultimately where salvation begins. And whatever is happening around us, you know, we can be sure of this.
As our church looks back on 30 years of God's faithfulness, we can look back in even these first chapters and see God's faithfulness too, right? How he is powerful, how he relates with humanity. So we see a God who deals with sin through these first 11 chapters, but he shows mercy and grace as well. And so I want to encourage you as we go through this series, while we're going to focus really on the first 11 chapters, I'd love to encourage you, and now that we've got some extra time on our hands, to read the whole book of Genesis.
[4:29] To read the whole book. It takes about 85 minutes to listen through. I checked the audio Bible. That's probably less than how long we spend scrolling social media in a day, right? So, I mean, book it in your calendars.

Let's dive in. It will be such a treat and a privilege for us all to journey through this book together. So let me pray, and then we're going to unpack this first section as a church.
Let's pray. Father God, these are wonderful, amazing words. Help us not to lose the wonder of it. Help us to see in these first sentences a God who is there. You, you who can create by speaking. You who rule over creation.
You who declare this world good and bless it. And help us to respond with worship as we hear from your word. We pray all these things in the name of Jesus Christ.
[5:28] Amen. Every superhero has an origin story, don't they? I mean, before Spider-Man spun webs far from home, what was he doing?

He was Peter Parker, right? The cash-poor science nerd. Before Batman roamed Gotham City to bring justice, who was he? He was a troubled orphan, right?
The one who fell into a cave full of bats. That's a witness. His parents murder. That sort of thing. And they help you understand who this person is. Some origin stories, I think, are fun.
So did you know when Tim Berners-Lee invented the internet, which we're using right now, the first words he typed was, this is for everyone. And I wonder if you've ever watched a game of rugby. Well, did you know that rugby was basically invented when, during a game of soccer, football, a guy called William Wood Ellis decided he's just going to pick up the ball and run with it. And then a new sport was born.
[6:31] And then, of course, there are some controversial origin stories, right? For years, people have been arguing over where did COVID come from? We would love to know right now. Actually, probably we would love to know where did our cases of COVID ultimately come from.

And that's why there's contact traces knocking on our door. Look, all of us love origin stories. And often we need to lean on origin stories to make sense of life's mysteries.
And when Genesis was first written and read, God's people were surrounded by neighboring nations, right? Tribes who made sense of their world with all kinds of different origin stories.
You see, the nation of Israel, right? Their neighbors, right? Were polytheists. What that means is that they believed in all kinds of gods and demigods, much like the movie Moana or the traditional Chinese worldview sometimes, which has lots of different kinds of idols.
And Genesis 1 is written to this kind of people, living among superpowers like Egypt and Babylon. And it opens up with the origin story that truly matters, right?
[7:43] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And whatever you experience with the Bible, some of you may have read this book cover to cover.

Some of you may have never read the Bible before. There's no doubt that these first words are dramatic, aren't they? I think Fran had read it really beautifully, but I think most translations in English, they fall short of kind of capturing the poetry and the beauty of this opening account of creation.
This is actually a majestic origin story. And so today I want us to focus the time we have on the first five and a bit days of creation. So we'll kind of look up to verse 25.
And as the story of creation unfolds, I would love for us to see at least four things that Genesis 1 reveals about God. Okay. And then we'll think up some questions along the way.
By the way, if you do have any questions, there is a new Q&A board. This one should work on your phones as well. We tested it. So yeah, if you have any questions or thoughts along the way, please, yeah, make sure you pop them on this, yeah, on the Q&A board.

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[8:53] Hopefully they can put the link on the Zoom chat. There we are. And yeah, we'd love to hear what you have to say as well about Genesis 1 and what you're reading from it. But let me share four things, I think that we see in these first 25 verses.

Firstly, Genesis 1 reveals the God who is there. Genesis 1 reveals the God who is there. I mean, look at that verse again at the very beginning.
There's an origin story for the heavens and the earth, right? From God. But there's no origin story for God himself. He simply is. And then look down in verse 2, right?
As the author describes kind of an unformed world, wilderness and waste maybe, formless and void, God doesn't come out of this mess.
He doesn't have to fight his way through it. Instead, his spirit is hovering over it. In the world of the Bible, there is no origin story for God.
[9:59] He is not the result of some cosmic procreation story. He didn't have to fight other demigods to be the top dog. And he's certainly not some borrowed myth or legend.

Who made God? No one. He just is. Next, the Bible, this part of the Bible tells us, right?
Of a God who speaks. Do you notice that? Maybe we'll zoom in on the next three verses. And God said, let there be light. And there was light. Did you notice that? Right?
God says it and it happens. There's other doing words in this section too, right? Can you see that? He speaks. He separates. He clears. He calls.
Again, there's no, I won't do it, God. It just happens. When God speaks, it happens. And I want to suggest at this stage, this truth is far more important, right?
[10:57] Than working out how light appeared before the sun and the moon did, or whether it's possible for matter to exist before light does. These are good scientific questions. But here, so far, the author just wants us to tell us this.

When God speaks, it happens. When he names something, that's what it's called. With other powers, other gods, results may vary.
But from the start, we see from the book of Genesis, a talking God, a speaking God, a powerful God. And when he speaks, right, what else do we see as we keep reading?
We see from verse six onwards, I think we see a God who rules over creation. I'll say that again. I think we see a God, the God who rules over all creation.
You see, you want to imagine yourself as the first readers of Genesis, living in kind of societies that believe that all kinds of things in the world were gods, right?
[11:59] If you're a farmer, there was a God of water. There was a God of the sun. There's a God of crops. And you had to worship them and appease them if you wanted your way.

And these were societies that believed all kinds of these kinds of things. And God's people were surrounded by them. You think of Moses, right, surrounded by and living in Egypt, right, with all their gods.
We think of Abraham's family, right, in the midst of Canaan. But as the next few days of creation unfold, what do we see?
We see everything God creates is subject to God's will. Have a look, right? Day by day, everything is subject to God's will.
Right on day one, he separates light from darkness. On day two, he divides between the waters below and sets the sky in place. On day three, he takes the sea, right?
[13:02] A pretty scary place if you are just someone who's just lived in the desert all your life. And he gathers the sea waters exactly where he wants. You see, in the word of Genesis, water, land, sky, and sea, they're not to be worshipped or feared.

Instead, they are part of God's creation. Everything is under his rule in the world around us. And I mean, notice on day four, right, we'll bring that up, verse 14 to 18.
Have a look. Did you notice that God says, let there be lights, right? And then when he names the two lights, he just calls them great lights.
That's intentional. He doesn't name them like gods. He puts them in place. He just calls them great lights because God is the one who lives over them.
And then keep going in verse 16, right? What do you see, all right? At the very end of that verse, right, my translation says he also made the stars. But did you know in the Hebrew, actually, the phrase is even shorter, okay?

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[14:14] Here, we actually have billions of stars in the universe have a throwaway one line. Okay? Literally, the phrase is, and the stars.

Think about that. In a world where some trusted and maybe worshipped star signs, maybe zodiac animals, I don't know how many of you feel strongly about the year of the tiger, but look, in God's world, the stars are not front and center.
God is. And look further down, right? Verse 21, okay? Now we're in day five, and it says, verse 21, God created the great creatures of the sea.
In the original language, great creatures, the term is a very poetic one in Hebrew. It describes not just great creatures, but also kind of mythical ancient beasts.
And the illusion here is this. Whatever ancient beasts lurks beneath the waters that you and I might be scared of, whether it's a whale or a dinosaur, whether it's a dragon or a tanifa, whatever is under the waters, God rules over it.
[15:24] You see, even from these opening words, Genesis 1 reminds us, we live in a world that is not controlled by stars and planets.

Our lives are not at the mercy of strange beasts. Our world is orderly. It's crafted and held together by a God who is there, a God who speaks and creates, and a God who rules over his creation.
And I think finally, right, fourthly, but I think crucially, Genesis 1 shows us that this God is also the God who blesses. There's two ways we see this, I think, in the text.
I wonder, as Fran read it, did you notice how God kept saying, right, he made something and then God saw that it was good. He made something else and then God says it was good, right?
Verse 4, verse 10, verse 12, and so on. He says this phrase at least seven times throughout this chapter. And what's going on here is this. I think Pastor Andrew Reid, he has a good commentary on Genesis.
[16:35] He points out why this is important. He says this, and I quote, where different gods compete for, you know, a worshiper's allegiance and devotion, right, there's going to be different even views of what is good and what is right.

If there was such a thing as a sun god and a moon god and a star god, and each of them have a different way of saying what is good and bad, who do you believe? And it's no different today, isn't it?
We may not have sun gods and moon gods or whatever, but we are confused people over what is good and what is right. I mean, at least when it comes to the environment, how we treat animals, plant trees and so on, we are confused because we don't know which god to bow down to.
But if we worship the one true god who rules over creation, who declares what is good, then we can actually say that there's something good and something not.
And at the very least, he looks over each day's work in creation. He declares what he makes as good. What a blessing to know that there is good in this world. And then you notice on the fifth day, right, in that section, you see in verse 22, God pronounces blessing on his creation for the very first time in the Bible.
[18:00] So he's directing it at the living creatures and the seas and the skies, right? And what does he say? God blessed them and said, be fruitful and many in number. Fill the spaces that I've separated out for you.

And later on, actually, God repeats this exact blessing. You'll see that when we get to chapter eight. And so at the very least, right? Yes, I know we haven't reached chapter three yet where sin has broken this world.
But at the very least, remember, friends, that God's original design for this earth was good. We look around and see the suffering that COVID has brought, but God's original design for planet earth was good.
His original desire for our world was blessing, right? For birds to brood, for fish to team, for wild beasts, livestock, creepy crawlies to grow and flourish, and for seed to bear fruit.
This is our God. He speaks creation into existence. He sees it and he calls it good. He blesses it. And this is all descriptions, really, of a master builder, right?
[19:15] Notice, actually, the symmetry, okay, in all six, the first six days of creation. He forms the universe in days one to three, right? And then he fills it with useful things in days four to six.

Do you see the pattern, right? Day four fills day one. Day five fills day two and so on. Look, if we take a bird's eye view of Genesis, this is actually a really beautifully crafted narrative of a God who

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is there, a God who creates by speaking, a God who rules over his good world, and he blesses it as well.
What an awesome God. But, I mean, William, what about the obvious question, mate? Don't we have fossils that are millions of years old?
And where do the dinosaurs fit in? Which day did they arrive? And isn't this origin story, now that you mention it, isn't it full of holes? Maybe some of those are your questions too.
I mean, how could anyone possibly believe this today in the 21st century? I once heard an atheist told me that, actually, for them, reading Genesis 1 was like having a bad first date.
[20:25] And here, though, right, we need to acknowledge that in 2022, the account of Genesis 1 and 2 does seem, right, to clash with the other origin story, okay, the one that most of Western society has understood now for the past 100 years, right?

The origin story that's often called the theory of evolution. This was first proposed by the naturalist Charles Darwin. I'm sure you've studied up, all of you who did biology in school.
And this theory was built upon by others. And basically, you know, at risk of simplifying it too much, everything, okay, in this theory, everything in the material universe has come about through a gradual process that took billions of years rather than less time.
And this is a sermon on Genesis 1. So we can't get into all the technical details and debates and the time we have, right? And I think it's important to realize that none of us can be experts in all the fields to understand this kind of this debate properly, right?
I mean, who of us knows all about theology, linguistics, geology, biology, and all the other disciplines that contribute to this debate? So I think whatever our position, yours and mine, I think we need to hold it with humility and say, I may be wrong.
[21:50] I'm happy to be corrected. But I think the Bible says this, right? When we talk about, you know, creation and how it fits in with science, look, as one author puts it, far more important than the age of rocks is the rock of ages.

And among Bible-believing Christians, there's basically two main approaches, all right? So thinking about how do we reconcile creation, right, the account we have in Genesis 1, and the theory of evolution.
And so I'll just sketch it for you guys, and feel free to ask questions later. Look, on one side, okay, of the debate, we have Christians who believe that the authors of Genesis 1 to 2 cared about not just who created the world, right, seeing it as God, but also how he did it is specified in exact detail.
So brothers like Ken Ham from Answers in Genesis, there might be a picture of him in the next slide, the team at Creation Ministries, they will argue that what these words outline is a step-by-step creation account, okay, within six, maybe 24-hour days.
And so what happens? Rocks and trees and animals, they're created with the appearance of age. And events like a worldwide flood, maybe that could explain some of the drastic changes, right, in rocks and fossil records.
[23:10] They debate over whether dinosaurs made it onto the boat. That's a story for later. And look, for them, at stake is the truthfulness of God's word, okay? If you give up a literal verse-by-verse understanding of Genesis 1, we're going to give up something important, the Bible's trustworthiness.

So we want to commend that heart as well. And on the other side of the debate, we have Christians as well, right, who believe that the authors of Genesis 1 and 2, look, they care that God created the world.
That's what Genesis 1 and 2 is trying to say. But they are not convinced that this text is trying to explain exactly how he did it blow by blow.
And for that, we can use science and observation to go along with the narrative that's described here. And what they'll see in this narrative is kind of what we've seen too, right?
Beautiful language. And they would see that it uses metaphor and maybe descriptions that are understood by the culture of their time. If you think about it, how the writers of the Proverbs will observe an ant go past, right?
[24:22] Or observe the world around them, and then they'll give a two-liner. Or maybe Job is wrestling with God, right, about his world, and he uses dramatic dialogue. And so for these Christians, they see Genesis 1 as a literary, not a literal account of the creation of the world.

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Something that ancient readers, right, you know, if we followed Fran's advice and went with number one, go back to the Old Testament, they would have understood it. So for some, basically, Genesis 1 tells us the who and the how behind the world around us.
And for others, Genesis 1, it does give us the who. We're clear on that, but it's not so firm on the how. And whichever side you lean towards, I think either way, you'll still have some problems that can't be fully resolved.
If you hold a younger Earth view of Genesis 1, you need to work out some things that we do observe in the world, right? How can we measure stuff in light years? Why do some things look much older than 6,000 or so years?
But then on the flip side, if you're convinced of an older Earth view, you're going to also have to respond to some of the problems with the theory of evolution that other scientists have pointed out, right, such as gaps in the fossil record or irreducible complexity.
[25:42] And if you're a Christian, you need to deal with what to do with Adam and Eve in chapter two, right, as people. And look, at some point, whichever side you're on, both sides have to say, look, from here, I'm taking something by faith.

I think at some point, we all have to trust, no matter how exactly we reconcile Genesis 1 and 2 with science, we need to trust, as Francis Schaeffer once said, at the very end, there will be no final conflict between science and faith.
So be encouraged by that. And I think to cut through all this debate, I think one helpful thing to think about, maybe a helpful approach to better understand Genesis 1 is to think about the original audience.
I think we need to step outside our 21st century, mainly Western influence bubbles, and we need to ask, who was Genesis first written to? Why would they need a creation account?
What kinds of powers did they fear? And if I read to you, Exodus 20, right, verse 2 to 3, maybe that might become a bit clearer. Who are the first recipients of this book?
[26:56] All right? Not just Genesis, but the first five books. It was Israel, wasn't it? And God spoke all these words to Israel. He says, I'm the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of slavery.

And look, here was the nation of Israel. They'd just been rescued later on in the story, but they're always one step away from turning back to the gods of Egypt.
And later on, they sadly turned to the gods of Canaan. And so the Lord has to remind them, you shall have no other gods before me. And he's more specific, right?
Don't bow down, right? Verse 4 says on the screen, to anything in the skies, on the land, in the sea. I made it all. You see, to the first readers of this Genesis 1, they were tempted to pacify Pharaoh. They were tempted to bow to Babylon. God is reminding them through Genesis 1, I am God and no one else. I speak and the world is made. I rule over skyland and sea.
[28:00] It's only me that can bless and declare what is good. I think a better way to view Genesis 1 rather than a science textbook is it's kind of like an ancient defense.

It's a smart defense, right? We've seen how creative it is, right? But it's an old intelligent defense of the one true God, right? Defending God against all the competing ideas of false gods surrounding them at the time.
I think that's the first priority of Genesis 1. And you know what? Genesis 1 isn't the only part of the Bible where we see this kind of defense of God, right?
I wonder if some of you know the story. This is much later in the New Testament, okay? By other authors trying to argue for God's existence. There was one guy called the Apostle Paul.
And once he was standing before the smartest Greek philosophers in Acts chapter 17, right? And towards these philosophers, he actually doesn't argue against ancient Near Eastern gods.
[29:01] He doesn't have to. But he does point out to a statue they have, right? Of an unknown God. And he says, you are very ignorant of the very thing you worship. Let me tell you about the God who made the world and everything in it.

And so Paul, as you can see in the passage, he also says, look, the God of the Bible is a God who is there. He's a God who gives.
He speaks powerfully. He blesses his creation. And yes, he rules over all nations. And because he does, he speaks and commands us to repent, to turn back, to reach out and find him.
Can you see the similarities with Genesis 1, right? Same argument. God is there. He speaks. He rules. He blesses. Different audience. Different gods around them.

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Different group. But the same message. And so perhaps what the Greeks here struggled with in Acts 17, what the Israelites struggled with in Genesis 1, is the same thing that PCBC, you and I are struggling with right now.
[30:13] Amidst all the chaos around us, do you and I struggle to believe that God is there, that he speaks, that he is ruling right now, and that he's even blessing us?

Some of us might mask our fears. Maybe we'll just put our trust and confidence in evolution, maybe. Not as facts, but maybe just functionally as a God, as an idol, right?
Maybe for some people. By believing in the fear of evolution, I am freed from submitting to any higher power. And I have friends like this.
They quote Dawkins and Darwin, but actually underneath it all, underneath all the quotes, they just don't want to submit to anyone but themselves. And look, at this point, can I suggest, science has become scientism, like a belief.
Paul puts it this way in Romans 1.18. He actually says, we become people who suppress the truth by our wickedness. We've turned out to just exchange God's immortal glory for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.
[31:27] So maybe that's you. Or look, other times we may say we believe in God. Lots of us do. We just say, yep, I believe in God. But actually day to day, we functionally behave like atheists and think like atheists.

Because if we're honest, we live our lives with no reference to him. We spend our free time like he's not there. We buy stuff as if he doesn't speak.
And we chase after blessings, whether it's true love or it's lotto, imagining that he doesn't bless himself. What have we done? Is it not the same? Have we not just exchanged what's true for a lie? Have we not just worshipped and served created things? Our careers, our achievements, our family, rather than the creator? Or we look at the world around us and we just pollute.
We pillage this world that God gives us. And for what? We're still empty people. People. Can I suggest the first, those four questions that Genesis 1's first readers struggled with?
[32:32] I think we struggle with it too. Is God there? Does he speak? Does he rule? Will he bless? And if these questions have been on your mind too, even in these last 24 hours, Genesis 1's answer, at least, is the same as the rest of the Bible's answer.

It's a resounding, yes, God is there. He does speak. He does rule. He does bless. In Genesis 1, he invites you to look at creation to see proof of that.
Okay? I wonder if you've ever done that before. Just to go out and admire the world that God has made and praise your maker. Have you ever gone out for a walk and just listen to him speak as the skies declare his creativity, right?
Or as the trees, blown by strong winds today, as they sway to his rhythm, they move at his command. Have you ever just sat by the beach and seen his authority at work?
Like waves crashing? Or just unearth some soil to see pill bugs crawling? Or looked up in a tree to see sparrows nesting? All under the rule of a God who wants to bless this world.
[33:47] Who wants to rule over it with kindness and mercy. I wonder if you'll do that even today after worship. Obviously, in your self-isolated way. And look, thousands of years on from Genesis 1, having seen the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, actually, you and I, PCBC, we can be even more sure that God is there, that he speaks, he rules, and he blesses.

Because here, another version, right, of the creation story. And this one has been told to us by the Apostle John, right? In John chapter 1, he says this, in the beginning was the Word.
And the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning, and through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made.
And you know what? This Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And you know what? We have seen his glory, haven't we? The glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
We have seen Jesus Christ. And so if you've ever wondered, is God there? Well, Jesus has entered our world, and he says, I am.
[35:05] If you've ever wondered, does God speak today? Does he even rule over all this chaotic creation? Jesus has come into this world, and he has said, be still, even to still the storms.

He can speak a word in the blind sea, and the dead live again. This is the kind of God we worship, Jesus. And does God bless this world?

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Yes. We see this so clearly at the cross, don't we? At the cross, by his death in our place, he has blessed all of creation far more than we can imagine.
So please remember this, church, even amidst our chaotic week coming up, even as we are surrounded by all the different gods that pull at our hearts, and they still pull at our hearts, whether we're isolated or not.
But here in the beginning, remember, we see the word. We see light and glory, grace and truth. We see God who is, who speaks, who rules, and who has blessed us far more than we could ever imagine.
[36:19] So would you pray with me as we thank God for that? Lord, you were the word at the beginning.

we can't fully understand it, but Lord Jesus, you were there right in the midst of working, forming, creating our beautiful world.
And so we want to praise you because in you, Jesus, we see, we see so fully, even more than these first readers of Genesis, we see a God who is there, God with us.
We see a God who has blessed us with eternal life. We see a God who rules over all the chaos. We see a God who loves us and cares for us.
So thank you, Father, for this Jesus. Thank you, Father. I pray that you'll continue to help us to lean on him, trust him in these coming days ahead. Father, I pray all these things in Christ's precious name.
[37:29] Amen.

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