

Creation: *Explained*

Genesis 1:1-2:3

Introduction:

Is it important to understand Genesis as it is plainly written? Does it matter whether the words of Genesis 1 are narrative and literal, or is it acceptable to say they are poetic, metaphor, and/or allegorical? Can't we just focus on Jesus and the New Testament? Isn't the Old Testament just that, old, and hasn't science shown us that we cannot take the Genesis at face value?

We'll answer these questions along the way, but to answer the first one, how we view God as Creator will shape our worldview, how we see all of life, our purpose, our future, and our values. If God is not the Creator, or was only partially involved, the implications will be felt in every area of life. Let me illustrate this a bit from the Old Testament.

The Old Testament has some intriguing stories, but also some things that leave you scratching your head a bit, especially as you read through a section and glance over a sentence that creates an audible gasp. One of those phrases is, "*made his son pass through the fire*", or "*burned his son as an offering*". What??!! As if God had to make it explicit that killing your child was not acceptable, He told Israel in no uncertain terms, "*Do not give any of your children to offer them to Molech (the god of the Ammonites) and so profane the name of the Lord.*" (Leviticus 18:21). Fast forward through the history of Israel and come to the divided monarchy with the kings of Judah, the succession from King David himself. Most of these kings were wicked, but every once in a while there was a king who sought to honor the Lord like Hezekiah, who became a king at 25 years old and for 29 years honored the Lord, trusted in Him, and had success. However, history tells of his father, King Ahaz, and his son, King Manasseh, who engaged in child sacrifice (2 Kings 16:3; 2 Kings 21:6). They came to a point where they believed it was the **best thing, the most acceptable and helpful** act to take their son and burn him to death in order to appease some block of wood or metal statue. I've often wondered how does a person and a nation get to a point where they could commit this atrocity without anyone standing up and shouting, without an outcry and rebellion of the people against it. The answer is no different than today.

The text says that Ahaz followed the practices of the nations around him, and Manasseh built high places to worship Baal and Asherah, worshipping the host of heaven and serving them, including going to fortune tellers, omens, mediums and necromancers. This did not happen overnight, but was a **slow burn away from truth, accepting the lie of the culture, and embracing a worldview that puts another god at the center**. For the kings of the Old Testament, this would have been pagan gods. For us today, it is the glorification of self, the raising up of personal desire and preference to the level of truth, and shifting morality to accommodate the latest whims, rather than seek truth from a divine source. How does a culture, any culture, begin to plunge the depths of evil? By replacing the God of creation with something, anything else, and when that happens, there is no end of the rabbit hole until God intervenes with His wrath (Rom. 1:18).

The Foundation of Creation (1:1-2)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Clarifying Words

The first two verses in Genesis are straightforward in English and in the original Hebrew, but they have come under immense scrutiny over the last decades with a growing concern and attempt to accommodate scientific research with what the Bible says. **This is nothing new.** In every generation, the church will either seek to understand and live what Scripture actually says or try to morph it to suit our desires and passions. Over the last 50 or so years, born again believers have had to battle whether the Scripture is inerrant, whether God actually knows the future, whether you can believe Jesus plus some other form of works can still save, and whether a someone who practices open sexual immorality can be saved. There is **always** pressure to give in, to compromise, and accommodate the truth in the name of love, compassion, and relevance. The reality for us moving forward is to exercise love, compassion, and relevance by standing firm in conviction of the truth, loving all people by NOT rejecting them but rather interacting with them, and continually call them to turn to Christ. In other words, all of these issues, including who created the earth, are **gospel issues** since the greatest joy comes from turning from my passions and desires and finding rest in the finished work of Christ.

Our interaction with Genesis is no different. Peter lays out the issue clearly, *"Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days scoffing, following their sinful desires. They will say 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.' For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the Word of God."* 2 Peter 3:3-5 In other words, there is a deliberate attempt to explain away what is so clear: that God created the world by His Word, a legitimate miracle that science cannot explain, on par with the resurrection of Lazarus or Jesus, where there is no reproducing or process that can be reduplicated.

To understand these first two verses properly, we must **first** look at the *genre* of Genesis, and then look at some of the words. By genre, we mean what category of literature these first three chapters fall into, whether historical narrative or poetry. The argument is that if 1-3 are poetry, than they were written NOT for accuracy or declaration, but to explain something else about God and creation, left up to the reader. The problem with trying to prove this as poetry is the fact that it does not follow other poetry in the OT, either in form or vocabulary, but does in fact follow the pattern of historical narrative. Dr. Steven Boyd did a statistical analysis of Genesis 1-3 with other narrative and poetry sections, and came out with a .999942 and .999987 at a 99.5% confidence level that it matches with narrative, making it statistically indefensible to argue that the text is poetry.¹

Second, there are a few words that we should know in discussing Biblical Creation. The first word is the word 'CREATE', which is the Hebrew word '**BARA**'. "In Biblical Hebrew the verb *bara* always has God for its subject and never mentions the material from which He created."² Moses wrote these God inspired words, and though there are other words for making something, there is only one suitable word for creating something out of nothing. This would put the emphasis on God's unique and exclusive activity. The word used for "heavens and earth" simply mean the universe.

Some translations have tried to make Genesis 1:1 say that God began creating, making verse one subordinate to the rest. However this first verse is not a dependent clause in reference to verse 2 or 3, nor is it a mere title prefixed to the chapter. Instead, it is an **independent statement** and is **part of the narrative**. If this were not so, we would have not clear reference to the creation of the heavens and earth in the first chapter.

¹ For a full discussion on Genesis 1:1-2:3 as Historical narrative, see chapter 6 of the book *Coming to Grips with Genesis* ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury, written by Dr. Steven Boyd, pp. 163-192.

² Boyd, p. 189.

The key words in verse 2 are **Hayetha**, translated "was", and **Tohu wa-bohu**, which meant formless and void. In 264 uses in the Pentateuch, "Hayetha" is only translated "became" 6 times, based on the context. Each time it is followed by a construction (preposition lamedth) that is NOT present in 1:2. The reason some press a minor translation is to show a process of creation rather than God declaring. The second is just fun to say, "tohu wa-bohu". It is used in **Isa 34:11** and **Jer. 4:23**, and meant a wasteland, desolate place, desert meaning that at the moment of creation the earth was uninhabitable, not ready for mankind. It was void of life, covered in darkness, but it was not evil. The raw materials were there now but it was a lump of unformed clay that God would mold into the earth for His people.

"And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" - God enveloped, surround and guarded creation, with the word "hover" carrying the image of a mother hen brooding over her chicks. It shows He was **directly and personally** involved in every aspect of creation. Again, this is good news. The Word was there in the beginning (John 1:1-3), and last week we began to look at the fact that the Son is the first born of all creation, meaning He is the highest rank and preeminent (Col. 1:15). The universe was created **by Him, for Him, and through Him**. Jesus was intimately involved in the creation of all things, displaying His care and His power, which was again demonstrated when He **"reconciled to Himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross."** (Col. 1:20).

Why go through these words? It shows that there is nothing in the language that takes away the reality that God created the world with a Word, that He was intimately involved, and it was done by His power. **Words matter.** It is more important to clarify what Scripture says rather than try to refute what science does, although the latter is attainable. Always, always we want to work from Scripture outward, rather than try to impose outside influence on it.

Refuting Arguments

Now, our goal of this study is not to get into a science discussion, waxing eloquent on *entropy and the law of thermodynamics*, which breakdown the theory of evolution, but rather to look at some of the arguments for God using evolution in the creation of the world. There are many who take a literal view of Genesis, take a high view of Scripture, and are true believers who have tension with the appearance of millions (billions?) of years and naturalism and the narrow narrative of Scripture. The onus and burden of proof is on them rather than Scripture, since there are really no loopholes in Scripture itself. Some have put forth a theory called **gap or ruin-reconstruction**, which sees a gap of a long time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. As we have seen, there is NO GRAMMATICAL reason in the text to take this view. Also, if there was an evolutionary process of millions of years, there would HAVE TO BE DEATH to accomplish naturalistic outcomes (survival of the fittest), and **death** clearly did not come into the world until AFTER day 6 and the creation of man (see Romans 5:12-13).

The second argument is called **Day-Age**, which tries to account for geological strata and fossil records by claiming that each day of creation was really a long period of time, possibly millions of years. There are a couple of arguments for this: one, is the word day can mean a long period of time ("day of the Lord" - Zech. 12-14), and the first 3 days of creation did not contain sun and moon, thus nullifying solar days.

Two strong issues refute this. The **first is a grammatical issue**. Day can absolutely mean more than a 24 hour period in Scripture, **however**, whenever the word "yom" is attached to a number, it always means a fixed period of time, and here each reference is attached to a number, i.e. Day 1. The **second** is how Genesis 1-2 would have been understood in Scripture itself. In **Exodus 20:8-11**, the Ten commandments laid out the remembrance of the Sabbath, a day of rest from all work. This was based on the created order of a week and the fact that **God Himself rested on the 7th day**. In verse 11, Moses reiterated that this was based on a six day creation with a rest day at the end. There is no room in this description for a

long time but is rather evidence of literal 24 hour days (Luke 13:14 records this same language, and Jesus did not refute that it was true, simply that the ruler of the Synagogue missed the point of the Sabbath).

Understanding the Creator

Its wise to pause at this point to look at our God, our Creator, who made Himself known and who's love overflowed in creation, sharing His glory with mankind and allowing us to worship Him. Contained in Genesis 1:1 are several excellent characteristics of our God:

- **He is Self-Existent** - *In the beginning, God...* means that God did not depend on anyone or anything to exist, which is unlike anything or anyone else ever. God is the ultimate cause to every effect, and means **He is answerable to no one**. He does not answer to us, and we do not like that. "We want God to give an account of Himself, to defend His actions. But while He sometimes explains things to us (Deut. 29:29), He does not have to and often does not. God does not have to explain Himself to anyone."³
- **He is Self-Sufficient** - This means that God has no needs and therefore depends on no one. This makes Him utterly different than us, since we are dependent every day for so many things (like oxygen and stuff). Mankind strives hard to bring God down to our level, trying to make us equal partners rather than dependent servants. This does not lessen **our value, but enhances it, since God chose to create us in His image**. His grace is poured out to all in creation and to believers in salvation. Though we cannot understand His ways, He does not defend Himself. And because God does NOT NEED US but chose to create and make us His own, we can rest in His sufficiency, and our joy is tied into our total dependency on Him.
- **He is eternal** - Before He was Creator, God existed. He has always been and will always be. This means that God is **unchangeable**, and thus can be trusted. He is always consistent with His character and is not shaken by the reality of sin or shifting sands of the world. He has and always will be powerful, wise, holy, just, good and true. He is also **inescapable**, meaning that we cannot run away from His presence or ignore His existence. He makes Himself known to us, the unknowable becomes knowable, not just through creation itself but also through the Word, both written and the man Jesus Christ. This is why coming to grips with Genesis is so important. There are answers and hope found in our God who created by a Word and saved us through the Word. We can trust that even though we cannot always understand what is going on, and particularly **why things are going on**, we know God knows, and everything is accomplished according to His will and desire.

The Days of Creation (1:3-2:3)

The Pattern

Now, as to the rest of creation that took place over 6 literal, 24 hour days we are left with a pattern that each day followed:

- **The Announcement** ----- "And God said"
- **The Command** ----- "Let there be"

³ James Montgomery Boice, "Genesis, vol. 1), p. 30.

- **The Report** ----- "And there/it was"
- **The Evaluation** ----- What God did
- **The Temporal Frame** ----- "And there was morning and evening"

The First Day (3-5)

Sunless light was created to separate light and darkness

First of three "separations" that prepared the earth for inhabitants

Day 1 - Light	Day 4 - Light Bearers
Day 2 - Firmament	Day 5 - Marine & Animal life
Day 3 - Dry Land	Day 6 - Land Animals and Man

How could there be light without the sun? **John 1:3-5** *All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was **the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*** We also see in **Revelation 21:23** that there will come a time in the New heaven and New earth, there will not be a need for the sun, because the lamp is the Lamb! Christ was there in the beginning, and He provided the light.

The Second Day (6-8)

A separation that divided waters below from waters above

Created the earth's breathable atmosphere

Created a protective "canopy" that shielded the earth from the harmful effects of the sun (Gen. 2:5-6, 7:11 - Windows of heaven), but cannot be proven absolutely by the text

Only day in which the word "good" was not applied - this possibly points to the fact that the work of day 2 was an incomplete step toward making the world inhabitable

The Third Day (9-13)

The ground was instantly dry, and seas were put into place

The fruit trees were created already bearing fruit and seed in them - they did not come from seeds, but contained the ability to reproduce immediately upon creation

Trees were created full grown, mature, and adult

First use of "according to its kind" - This sets a limitation on the degree of difference between any creature and its offspring; plant life cannot produce animal life

Since certain plants require insects to pollinate, it would make sense to have insects come on the scene in a few days instead of long periods of time

The Fourth Day (14-19)

Ushers in the second phase of creation

Uses the language of appearance, since the moon is not a light source, but was given to rule over the night; this was a clear and permanent separation between day and night

Sun, moon and stars were markers to indicate times and seasons --- they regulate our lives, set our calendars, and determine the length of the year. The rotation of the earth on its axis is what determines a 24 hour day --- the moon's orbits around the earth determine our months --- The earth's revolutions around the sun determine our years

The Fifth Day (20-23)

All the kinds of marine creatures and birds that have ever lived were brought into existence simultaneously and instantaneously. Since that day, no new kinds of creatures have been added.

Instead a great number of kinds have become extinct, as an effect of the struggle for existence brought about through the Edenic Curse and various catastrophies, including the Flood.

These kinds were expected to procreate; each living organism has 3 distinct properties; First, they were self-sustaining; second they are self-preparing; third, they are self-reproducing

The Sixth Day (24-31)

There is a repeated emphasis on the limitations God placed on species (according to kinds)

Verse 26 is the first, major and unmistakable evidence of the Trinity; there is a suggestion of both **communion and consultation** within the Members of the Trinity

The Purpose

- **To bear the Creator's image (26)**

Man is created with spiritual attributes - self-consciousness, moral consciousness, and consciousness of others, and awareness of God Himself

Defined by the word PERSONHOOD - we are capable of fellowship, relationships, love, choice, communion, friendship, and communication of ideas

Designed to have a personal relationship with Creator God

Designed to be both an **ethical and spiritual** creature

- **To Propagate Life (28)**

Made mankind distinctly male and female --- each one unique and special yet distinct

Created the institution of marriage

Created to have intimate relationship with each other

- **To Receive Divine Blessing (28)**

Mankind was to enjoy the good creation (1 Tim. 4:4)

Man was meant to prosper and be happy, while enjoying God

- **To Rule Creation (28)**

Man was to both respect and subdue nature, so as to shape it in the directing that will reflect the beauty, order, and glory of the Creator

Christ will one day return to regain dominion and establish Himself as Ruler of this world

The Preview