

THE BIBLICAL TESTIMONY TO SPECIAL CREATION

“the worlds were prepared by the Word of God.”

Key question

How are we to understand the significance of the Biblical creation narrative?

Key text

Hebrews 11:3

“By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.”

Key Term

Special Creation

By special creation we mean the work of God through His Son whereby He brought into being the material world (including human kind) and the ages (history) by the power of His Word for His designed purpose.

Introduction

1. The first chapters of Genesis are among the most profound in Scripture. They set the stage for a Biblical world-view and outline the context of the Biblical message.
 2. “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” Heb.11:3
- A. **Christians should be able to address four practical questions that surround this subject.**
1. What is the literary nature of Genesis 1-2?
 - a. Is this material to be understood as historical and scientifically accurate?
 - b. Is this material to be understood as a parable or mythical (having significance and conveying truths that are accepted uncritically, not dependent upon historic or scientific accuracy)?
 2. What is the relationship between humans, God, and the cosmos?
 - a. Are we simply an extension of the evolutionary development of animal life?
 - b. What is the nature of our freedom and responsibility as creative agents and as caretakers of the earth?

- c. What does it mean to be made in the image of God and yet formed from the dust of the ground?
- 3. How are we to understand the relationship between theology and science?
 - a. Must science assume a philosophical naturalism?
 - b. Does science have its roots in theology?
 - c. Why is there often a conflict between scientists and theologians?
- 4. What is at stake in the creation / evolution debate as it relates to public education?
 - a. How are we to understand the creation narratives of Genesis and the modern theories of evolution?
 - b. What are the moral and social implications of our understanding of origins?

B. **Hebrews 11:3 reveals the framework for understanding Gen.1-2**

- 1. Heb.11:3 “By faith we understand that the worlds (ages) were prepared (have been adjusted) by the word (rhema) of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.”
- 2. This text is important in that it challenges us to respect three things we must understand before we read Gen.1-3.
 - a. The priority of faith in understanding certain truths.
 - b. The priority of the word in understanding God’s hand in the world. “by the word”
 - c. The priority of the spiritual in understanding ultimate reality. “by the spiritual”
- 3. “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared”
 - a. There are three Greek words translated “world” in the NT.
 - 1. **KOSMOS** - an orderly place. (Heb.4:3 “his works which were finished from the foundation of the world”)
 - 2. **OIKOUMENE** - an abode for people (Matt.24:14 “this gospel . . . shall be preached in the whole world”)
 - 3. **AION** - an age or period of time. (Rom.12:1 “be not conformed to this world”)
 - b. The word for “world” in this text is AION not cosmos. It suggests the whole of history (space, matter, and time) with all the systems of life that compose the cosmos and the forces and systems over time within it.
 - 1. God created more than the heavens and the earth. What was created was all of history, all world systems, all events and experiences because there is no time, as we know it, with God.
 - 2. Eph.2:1-2 “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course (aion) of this world (cosmos), according to the prince of the power of the air.”
 - c. The fact that God created everything that is a part of time and space is known only by faith.
 - 1. Christians have always understood truth to come from **special revelation** (The Bible) as well as **general revelation** human observation, experience, and reason.

God's Works	God's Words
Seen by all	Seen by those to whom it is given
Given through Creation, Culture,	Given through Scripture, Special

& Conscience	inspiration, & Illumination
Science	Faith

2. Faith is the doorway to the most important questions of life.
 - Where did I come from?
 - Where am I going?
 - Why am I here?
 - Who am I?
3. The question of the **Origin** of the universe and life - cannot be answered by science. Science only gives us hints at what happened and how with little information about why.
- d. By FAITH we do not mean blind faith in whatever one's imagination concocts, but faith in authority beyond our senses.
- e. There are two contrasting kinds of wisdom - (not science vs. Scripture) but (open vs. closed). Wisdom that is not open to the spiritual, supernatural dimension of life will not only be limited but misguided on many counts.

Closed	Open
Materialistic science or Religious tradition held uncritically. Science and faith are incompatible.	True Science & Scripture rightly understood. There is need for both science and faith.
Dogmatic, defensive, uncritical of self.	Humble, teachable, patient, & honest.

4. “By the Word of God”
 - a. The Bible is consistent in repeatedly saying that God spoke the world into existence. Ps.33:6,9 “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made . . .” Ps.148:5 “Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created.” What does this mean? Did God speak and there was in an instant full blown creation?
 - b. Another way of saying it is that God willed it into existence.
 1. We are born of the Word of God according to I Peter 1:23 “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is through the living and abiding word of God.”
 2. The Word of God when spoken works through other instruments to bring about God’s will.
 3. ILLUSTRATION: We are born again by the word of God but we can also point to many instruments through which the word worked to bring us to faith and new birth. - preaching, witness, conviction of sin, etc.
 4. Could God use natural forces to shape the world? Yes. This would not contradict His speaking it into existence. Does this mean that the evolutionary theory of Darwin and his followers is the way God shaped the creation? Not necessarily. We would have to weigh the theory on the basis of the evidence for it.
 5. But if there is a contradiction with Scripture it is not with the fact that God spoke the world’s into existence.

- c. The Word is a priority in our understanding of God's power.
 - 1. The Scripture as the Word of God comes with an awesome legacy of power to change things, to bring into being that which does not now exist.
 - 2. Treat the message of the book with great respect. Expect its message to change lives - dramatically and through natural forces under God's control.
- 5. "By the spiritual"
 - a. The spiritual dimension of life is the hard-core reality behind the superficial material dimension of life.
 - 1. The text says in effect that the visible physical world that we know was formed from the invisible reality of the spiritual dimension of life that preceded it. (It did not come from nothing.)
 - 2. ILLUSTRATION: The greatest witness to the fact that such a world exists is the human experience. We know that there is more to us than the physical.
 - 3. In Romans 1:20 explains that the invisible attributes of God are seen in the visible creation. One reality reflects the other. Those who are sensitive to this fact - see God.
 - b. This also means that the nature and the natural is not outside God's domain or control.
 - 1. God who is the basis of all that exists in the physical world.
 - 2. Paul talks of Christ as the one who creates and sustains all life. He is the spiritual life force behind the physical world that we experience and see.

Col. 1 "15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."
 - c. Spirituality is a priority in our understanding of reality.
 - 1. Don't follow that growing popular notion that we are nothing but a body, a complex physics lab.
 - 2. The spiritual dimension is very real.

C. **The First Creation Narrative (Genesis 1:1-2:3) deals more with the relationships within the cosmos than the mechanics of its origin.**

1. **What is the literary nature of Genesis 1?**
 - a. The literary genre of Gen.1 is a narrative cast in a historico-artistic framework consisting of two parallel triads. Note the following poetic features:
 1. Repetition of phrases (i.e. "according to their kind").
 2. Parallelism (i.e. three days of structure followed by three days of substance).

Problem	Preparation	Population
darkness	Day #1 dividing light from darkness	Day #4 luminaries
"the great deep"	Day #2 dividing the waters from above and below	Day #5 fish and fowl

"formless and void"	Day #3 dividing land from sea	Day #6 mammals and man
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- 3. Many words and phrases in the passage are repeated three, seven, and ten times (i.e.. "and it was so").
- 4. There are many anthropomorphism's (ascribing to God the actions of people) such as resting on the Sabbath, looking and seeing that creation was good, and speaking so as to create.
- b. This text is rational and logical in a cosmological sense (concerned about relationships between God, humanity, and the universe). Its concern is not scientific or historical. Its concerns are teleological (end or purpose) rather than chronological.
- c. Some scholars have described Genesis one and two as mega-history that is to say they describe events that are real but not capable of being recorded as normal history which is bound by time in a way that the original creation was not. A parallel example might be found in Luke 16:19-31 where the story of the rich man and Lazarus is not meant to describe the geography of the afterlife but does reveal important aspects of the afterlife.
- d. Some scholars look at the first chapters of Genesis as a literary myth (a story that is accepted uncritically to justify a collective belief in support of a social institution) that may or may not be grounded in historical fact. Its historicity is insignificant and cannot be verified.
- e. Attempts to read Genesis one and two as a technical scientifically sensitive account seems inappropriate.
 - 1. We should not demand that the text answer questions that it does not address such as, the length of the days of creation and the number of animals named by Adam.
 - 2. When we try to harmonize these chapters with today's scientific demands and then change our interpretation to meet tomorrow's demands we do not build the text's credibility.

2. Outline

- a. Title sentence (see 2:1) 1:1
- b. Chaos (the problems)
 - 1. Darkness
 - 2. Formlessness
 - 3. Lifelessness
- c. Cosmos (order)
 - 1. Structure (preparation)
 - 1. Day #1 (light) 1:3-5
 - 2. Day #2 (matter and air) 1:6-8
 - 3. Day #3 (land, sea, & plants) 1:9-13
 - 2. Substance (population)
 - 1. Day #4 (sun, moon & stars) 1:14-19
 - 2. Day #5 (fish and fowl) 1:20-23
 - 3. Day #6 (ANIMALS AND MAN) 1:24-31
 - 3. Sabbath Day - Day #7 2:1-3

3. What is the Purpose of Genesis 1?

Genesis is a cosmological, and theological, not a scientific, account of creation. The story is a literary device to communicate basic truths relevant to a world that tended to worship nature or gods who were a part of nature.

Genesis	Ancient beliefs	Modern beliefs
one God	many gods	ideological pluralism
temporal cosmos	nature = gods	eternal matter
creation subject to God	gods are a part of creation	creation independent of God
universe is orderly & purposeful	universe is chaotic	universe is random

a. POLYTHEISM VERSUS MONOTHEISM.

1. The notion of one God over all nature was revolutionary in Moses' day.
2. This is the primary message of Gen.1.
3. On each day of creation another set of idols is smashed. Example: The sun and moon are referred to as "lights" because in Semitic languages the words "sun" and "moon" are also the names of gods.
4. Genesis 1 achieves a radical and comprehensive affirmation of monotheism versus every kind of false religion (polytheism, idolatry, animism, pantheism and syncretism); superstition (astrology and magic); and philosophy (materialism, ethical dualism, naturalism and nihilism).

b. PROCREATION VERSUS CREATION.

1. The Egyptians, Canaanites, Assyrians and Babylonians all had their "generations of the gods."
2. The one true God reveals Himself as creator of all other wonders (stars, seas, life). This stands in contrast to other ancient cosmologies which were based on procreation. A cosmic egg is produced and hatches. A cosmic womb gives birth. Or a god and goddess mate and beget further gods and goddesses.

c. THE PROLOGUE TO THE COVENANT.

1. The central theme of the Scripture seems to be the covenant relationship between God and man.
2. The first chapters of Genesis set the stage for that relationship.
3. The unique nature of human beings - made in the image of God - is key.
4. The role of the Sabbath as the climactic point of the creation is to be seen as an important emphasis.

d. MAN - BETWEEN CREATOR AND CREATION.

1. Everything that is not God has derived its existence from him.
2. The original act of divine creation is unique. It is not like the creative acts of man.
3. Nothing made by God is intrinsically evil. The physical body and the earth are good.
4. Mankind is responsible to God.

5. There is a relationship between all parts of the creation. We are capable of meaningful relationships with God, other people, and the cosmos.
 6. Mankind lives under certain limitations.
 7. Man is the climactic act of creation.
 8. Man, like God is to rest on the seventh day. Ex.20:9-11
- e. **A chart contrasting the Biblical Creation with Pagan tradition of the time.**

Surrounding Ancient Beliefs:	Ancient Hebrew Revelation:
The universe created the gods	God created the universe
There are many gods	There is one God
The gods are visible as sun, moon, stars etc.	God has no visible form
The gods can be represented by physical, man made idols	No image should be made of God
The gods are sexual beings	God has no physical "shape" or form
The gods are part of the universe	God is set apart from creation
The gods do evil as well as good	God is righteous
The names of the gods connote their dependence on the physical	God's name, "I AM," connotes self-existence
The gods are limited in power	God is "Almighty"
The world was formed through violent conflicts between older and younger generations of gods	God created in orderly stages, seeing that each was "good," until all was prepared for humans and pronounced "very good"
Sun, moon, and stars are gods	Sun, moon, and stars give light and help us mark times and seasons
Sea monsters, left over from primeval struggles with gods, still lurk in deep waters	Large sea creatures are simply categorized with other sea life
Life is rekindled each spring by copulation between the gods	God delegates to creatures the ability to generate seed to reproduce after their own kind

f. **Evangelicals have held various views of Genesis 1.**

1. **Liberal critics** have often dismissed the Biblical record of creation as a literary fairy tail reflecting the primitive culture of ancient peoples. It is not to be taken seriously.
2. **Conservative Old earth interpretations.** Prior to 1959, these views were most popular.
 - a. **The Catastrophism group of Theories:** Proponents of these theories have in common the belief that there were millions or billions of years between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, that the original creation of Earth was destroyed in one or more catastrophes, (the fall of Satan) and that Genesis 1:2ff describes its re-creation in six literal days.
 - b. **The Day-Age Theorists** assert that the "days" of the creation account were ages. "Evening and Morning" means "Beginning and End."
 - c. **The Alternate Day-Age Theorists** say that the "days" were twenty-four hours long each, but that they were separated by vast expanses of time to allow the newly created plants and animals to multiply.
 - d. **The Revelation Day Theorists** interpret the "days" of creation, not as days in which God created the various things, but as days in which God spoke to Moses about His creative work.
 - e. **The Eden Only Theorists** hold that the Earth is billions of years old, but that Genesis 1:2ff is recent and pertains to Eden only.
 - f. **The Relativity Theory** suggests that the "days" of Genesis 1 are measured not as man measures time but as God does. "A day with the Lord is as a thousand years."

- g. **The Cosmological Theorists** hold that the Genesis account is written in a style of Hebrew that is not employed in literal historical sections, as is found in the bulk of the Pentateuch. The language is a lofty, majestic form of Hebrew that strongly suggests other than a strictly literal interpretation. It is a cosmological (showing the orderliness of Creation) rather than a historical sequential account. This theory may be the most literal in that it expresses the literary nature of the text as it was composed within ancient culture. The questions posed by our modern scientific culture would have seemed strange to Moses. The Genesis text is best understood as addressed to ancient questions in a way that reflects ancient styles of apologetics.
3. **Conservative Young earth interpretations.** Since 1959, these views have become more popular.
- The Wooden Literal Theorists** assert that the earth and the universe were created in 4,004 B.C. in six literal days.
 - The Extended Literal Theorists** recognize that Ussher miscalculated the date 4,004 B.C., and that the earth and the universe were evidently created at least a few thousands of years earlier.
 - The Flood Geology Theorists** assert that the earth and the universe were created only a few thousands of years ago and that the Genesis Flood caused practically all of the fossils and strata observed by modern geologists.
 - The Apparent Ages Theorists** say that the Earth was created only a few thousands of years ago. Some say that the Flood gave it a false appearance of vast age. Others say that God created it with an appearance of great age.

4. The first two verses of Genesis have been understood in different ways.

- a. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and empty"* (King James Version)

1:1 Original creation	1:2 formless & empty	1:3-2:3 Six days of creation
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- b. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was (became) formless and empty"*

1:1 Original creation	gap of time ? Fall of Satan	1:2 God's judgment = chaos	1:3-2:3 Six days of creation
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- c. *"In the beginning, when God created the universe the earth was formless and desolate."* (The Good News Bible).

Original creation ?	formless & empty chaos	1:1-2 Dependent clause	1:3-2:3 Six days of creation
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- d. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty"* (The New International Version).

1:1 Summary statement.

Original creation ?	1:2 formless & empty	1:3-2:3 Six days of creation
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2:1 Summary statement.

4. How are we to understand the following expressions in the creation narrative?

- a. **"In the beginning"** (Hebrew - bereshit) is a unique term that is used in the Bible to describe an extended or indeterminate duration of time - not a specific moment. It is a block of time not unlike "the end times" in the NT.
- b. **"God"** (Hebrew - Elohim) is a general word for "mighty one" or "one who is awesome." The plural references to God underscore His majesty and may suggest the Trinity. It is the word used in chapter one.
"Lord" (Hebrew - Yahwah) is used in chapter two with Elohim. It is the name of Israel's Covenant maker.
- c. **"Created"** (Hebrew - barah) is a word that means to make new. Its subject is always God in the Bible but it is not always used to create out of nothing. It is the best Hebrew word however to convey the idea of ex nihilo (out of nothing).
 1. **"made"** (Hebrew - asah) is the more general term that also means "to appoint" and "to acquire."
 2. **"formed"** (Hebrew - yatzar) means "to shape." It is used to describe the skilled work of an craftsman.
- d. **"the heavens and the earth"** (the sky and the land) is an expression which means "the whole universe."
- e. **"without form and void"** (Hebrew - tohu wabohu) Gen. 1:2. The idea is one of "wilderness without human life." It is used by the prophets to describe the results of God's judgment but that does not mean that judgment is always the cause of such a condition.
- f. **"let there be"** is a prophetic expression of God's word calling forth something so as to make it good. It can refer to the creation of something out of nothing but more often it refers to the awakening of something to its good purpose. So the expression "let there be light" may mean "let the light shine as I intend" with no specific reference as to whether the light existed before the spoken word. For example in Ex.10:23, Neh.8:3, Gen.44:3 a similar expression is used to describe the sunrise.
- g. **"Image and Likeness of God"** (1:26)
 1. **"Image"** (Hebrew - tselem) - exact copy
 2. **"likeness"** (Hebrew - demut) - resemblance. These two terms are synonyms (Gen.5:3).
 3. The first thing that is said about mankind is that he is a spiritual being - distinct from the rest of created life in a way that links him with God.
 4. What makes mankind unique from all lower forms of animal life is his religious nature and capacity for a covenant relationship with God. (Not that he is a bipedal, tool-maker with language and possessing a certain brain size.)
- h. **"day"** (Hebrew - yom) in Gen.1?
 1. In Gen.1-2 the term is used in three ways:
 - a. Daylight - the opposite of night. 1:14
 - b. A 24 hour day. 1:5 (This is the literary image that is used.)
 - c. An extended period of time. 2:4
 2. The arguments for a literal solar (24 hr.) day in the 6 days of creation.
 - a. A plain reading of the text, with its recurring phrase of "*evening and morning*", suggests a solar day of twenty-four hours. That would have been clear to Moses and his first readers.

- b. Creation is pictured in six familiar periods followed by a seventh for rest, corresponding to the days of the week as Israel knew them. Ex.20:11
- c. The text does not tell us whether the account is an analogy of God's creative activity or a chronological account of how many hours He worked.
- d. It would be assumed that the appearance of history would be present in the creation of fully developed life forms (i.e. trees would be created with rings).
- 3. The following reasons suggest that the day might not be a solar day.
 - a. Gen.2:4 uses the term to refer to the whole creation event - "*These are the generations of the heavens and of the Earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.*" We could also cite Gen.4:3, Isa.2:12, 4:2, and Josh.24:7.
 - b. It is unlikely that all of the activity ascribed to the 6th day could have taken place in 24 hrs.
 - c. If the sun's appearance is not until the fourth day, it could not have been used as a means of measuring the length of the previous three days.
 - d. If the stars were created on the fourth day and the nearest star is Alpha Centauri (four and a half light years away), how could they be "*for signs and for seasons, and for days and for years*"?
 - e. On what side of the earth was the world created? Morning and evening do not coincide at all points of the earth's surface.
 - f. We are expressly told, both in the Old and New Testament, that God's time is not to be confused with man's time - II Pet.3:8.
 - g. The fact that the Scripture commonly refers to a 24 hour period whenever it associates the word "day" with a number, is true but it is not a rule of Hebrew grammar and therefore of limited significance.
 - h. The reference to "evening and morning" is used in Psalm 90:4-6 in conjunction with the expression of "one day is as a thousand years." This suggests that it may be a poetic expression in Genesis one.
- 4. The length of the days is not the point of this text.
 - a. Ireneaus, Origen, Basil, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas held the extended day view long before the present evolutionary debate.
 - b. To be dogmatic in insisting on a "24 hr. day view" at this point may unnecessarily discredit the witness of one seeking to win a favorable hearing of the gospel among nonbelievers. If evangelicals can't be trusted in a simple matter such as the age of the earth, which can be easily verified, then how can they be believed on the doctrine of vicarious atonement?

D. The Second Creation Narrative (Genesis 2:4-25) addresses the responsibilities of man in relationship to his environment.

1. OUTLINE:

- a. Adam's relationship with the creation
 - 1. His purpose - to till 2:4-6
 - 2. His origin - from dust 2:7
 - 3. His location - Eden 2:8-15
- b. Adam's relationship with his Creator 2:16-17

- c. Adam's relationship with his counterpart
 - 1. The reason for male and female 2:18-20
 - 2. The relationship between male and female 2:21-22
 - 3. The responsibilities of male and female 2:23-25
- 2. Comparison and contrast between the first and second chapters of Genesis:
 - a. The ordering of the events of creation differ in chapter 1 and 2 of Genesis. This has caused some to see a contradiction and thus two competing versions of creation.
 - b. It is more likely that we have two renditions of the same event with different purposes.

General (universal) Genesis 1:1-2:3	Specific (man) Genesis 2:4-2:25
Elohim (power) ORDER & SIGNIFICANCE ADAM = mankind	Yahweh (covenant) RELATIONSHIPS Adam = an individual male

- 1. The first chapter is concerned about the ordering of the events and the subordination of the elements in the universe.
- 2. The second chapter deals with man's relationship and responsibility to key elements in his world.

E. The following considerations pose challenging questions to the harmonization of Genesis and evolutionary biology.

- 1. The text seems to assume that all natural phenomena are the result of God's creative word not an impersonal and meaningless "natural" process.
- 2. The original creation precedes Genesis 1:1. The account here is an ordering of creation. This starts with "let there be light". This cannot be anything like the "big bang" unless we assume that the whole universe started as water.
- 3. General evolution demands competition and death, both of which are linked to the fall not the creation.
- 4. Natural selection leads us to ethics that are at best nonsensical and at worst bestial. Survival of the fittest and strongest seems contrary to the nature of God revealed in Christ.
- 5. Other Biblical texts speak of God's creation of the world - Ex.20:11; 31:17; I Chron.1:1; Job 38:4-7; Matt.19:4-5; I Cor.11:7-8.

Pastoral advice

What are the implications of creation?

1. Reaffirm your value and the value of the world. Everything that exists has value.
2. Recognize your significance. God's creative activity includes not only the initial creative activity, but also his later indirect workings through man.

3. There is justification for scientifically investigating the creation.
4. Nothing other than God is self-sufficient or eternal.
5. Humans have great freedom and responsibility in God's created order.

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. Apart from Gen.1-2 where does the Bible speak about God as the creator?
- b. Why are the two creation accounts in Genesis different?
- c. What is the purpose of the creation narratives in Genesis 1-2?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. What is the apologetic purpose of Genesis 1-2?
- b. Is theistic evolution a viable option from the Biblical perspective? Why or why not?

3. Questions you should wrestle with.

- a. If the naturalistic evolutionary theory could be confirmed, how would that effect the Christian faith?
- b. How important is the doctrine of special creation? Why?