

Genesis 1:1-1:2 In the Beginning

In considering that the account of creation described in Genesis chapters 1-3 ought to be read literally, we concluded that there was no reasonable argument why a student of Scripture ought to presume that the narratives recorded in Genesis are not real and true. That is to say, the account was intended by its God-inspired, human author to be a literal historical account of creation. In addition, the other biblical writers interpreted it as such, and the facts of creation were used repeatedly to argue that God would bless or punish His people in accordance with their faithfulness, that He was worthy of praise, that He would ultimately judge the unrighteous, and that the righteous would rise again all because of the acts of God as Creator. The literal, historical account of creation, and biblical Christian theology, are inextricably linked.

Today, we want to look at the very beginning of creation as recorded in Genesis 1:1-1:2. And as we look there, we see that in a very few words, we are introduced to the Creator. The first thing we know about this Creator (identified as God), is that He can be known. God is the subject of the first sentence, and “God said” is the key phrase throughout the remainder of chapter 1 describing the creation. God is the main character of this narrative, as He is all of Scripture. The account of creation is theocentric, not creation centered. The biblical narrative intends that we are to enjoy the passage as it identifies and glorifies the Creator.

The creation narrative clearly presents three truths that ought to govern our understanding of God and His creation. First, the account is designed to give us information about the way in which God ordered all of creation. Second, it offers us evidence as to why God is worthy to be praised for His role in creation. Finally, it precludes any attempt to endow the physical parts of the universe with any claims to deity.

The Creator

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (v. 1). This first verse is the foundation of all biblical theology. The God of the Bible (and hence all of salvation history) and the God of creation are One and the same. The Creator is the God of history. The three central themes of the Pentateuch (which begins here) are land, blessing, and seed. And these themes are developed throughout all of salvation history. In the act of creation, the image of God in which all humans are created, received universal promises of blessing. Over time, that would be narrowed to the lineage of one family (Seth) and eventually one man (Abram). Eventually those of the chosen seed would forfeit the blessing of God and lose their land. That story is told throughout the Old Testament. Yet, the framework was laid out here, in the beginning.

The word used for God, *elohim*, is a generic term for a single deity. This is God as He wished to be known as Creator, not as the Yahweh of the covenant. God is the autonomous master of all Creation. He is not a part of creation; He transcends it. There is no sense that any other deity is present. There is no sense that procreation among various deities is the method of creation, as it is in so many ANE (and other) creation myths. God created not through sexual intercourse, but by His very word. The Bible

clearly teaches that God is not bound by creation, but that He set its boundaries. Therefore, God controlled all things in creation. He had ultimate authority. His very word sufficed for action. The word used for ‘made’, *bārā*, implies creation *ex nihilo*, that is creation from nothing. Much has been debated about the use of this word, and I am no Hebrew scholar capable of unpacking all the nuances of the various arguments. But I can say that there are three important points to make here. First, the word is always used with reference to a new activity. Second, when it is used, there is never any reference to any material used in the making. Finally, it is used only in reference to deity.

We also see that God is not only an absolute Creator, He is a Creator by elegant design. There is harmony and symmetry in creation. It is not random or chaotic. It is orderly and even predictable. The clarity of creation implies a plan of the history that is to follow.

Also, Scripture teaches that God is known by His creation. He is known in terms of it. Since it is orderly, He is orderly. Since it is rational, He is rational. And, He is to be praised for His work of Creation,

“Bless the Lord, all you works of His,
In all places of His dominion;
Bless the Lord, O my soul!” (Psalm 103:22).

“⁶By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
And by the breath of His mouth all their host.
⁷He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;
He lays up the deeps in storehouses.
⁸Let all the earth fear the Lord;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
⁹For He spoke, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:6-9).

Finally, the order of creation has implications for human behavior. To offer but one example,

“He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker,
But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him” (Proverbs 14:31).

The Creation

Some have rendered the phrase “in the beginning . . .” to read “in the beginning when . . .” The difference is crucial. The first argues that God began creation. The second states that when God began to create, some elements of creation were already present. Scripture states the earth was without form. That is not to say the earth already existed, but that phrasing was simply the best way the language had at its disposal to describe the potential for becoming what was eventually to be called earth. To describe the situation as God began to create, the Hebrew uses three parallel phrases:

“the earth was formless and void”
“darkness was over the surface of the deep”
“the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters” (v. 2).

The darkness and deep here described are not other primeval deities, associated with evil and with whom *Elohim* must wrestle for control of the cosmos. Those elements are quite common in other ANE myths. The biblical text, on the contrary, makes it clear that these are elements of creation. Furthermore, in the process of creation, God will name them and define their boundaries, this demonstrating His absolute power over them.

Also, we must note that this is the Spirit of God, a personal Spirit and not a created wind. That this is so is made clear by other biblical writers. For example the Psalmist wrote,

“You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;
And You renew the face of the ground” (Psalm 104:30).

These understandings about creation are rehearsed throughout Scripture. In summary then, we can conclude that

God created the heavens and the earth (Psalm 33:6; Jonah 1:9; Jeremiah 32:17; Revelation 14:7).
God created all that is in the heavens and the earth (Nehemiah 9:6; Revelation 10:6; Acts 14:15).
God created the heavens and the earth from the beginning (Hebrews 1:10).
God created the heavens and the earth from nothing that was visible (Hebrews 11:3).
God created the world by Himself, without any help (Isaiah 44:24).

Therefore, the Bible teaches that the physical universe is not eternal. It teaches that the universe had a beginning, and that God was present to make all things. Also, the Bible teaches that the universe did not begin spontaneously. It did not just occur without being brought into being by God. God was the intentional cause of the beginning of the universe.

Challenges (This section and what follows are adapted, with modifications, from the Position Paper “Creationism” on the Valley Bible website).

Gap Theory

The most common challenge to the biblical account of creation to which Bible-believing Christians are seduced is known as the Gap Theory. That is, most evangelical Christians agree that God created everything, and that He did so without either assistance or previous material. But the apparent scientific evidence that purports to demonstrate that the earth, indeed that the universe itself, is billions of years old poses problems for a continuous chronology of creation. In response, many Christians have adopted an understanding of creation known as the Gap Theory.

The Gap Theory offers a solution that allows for both a Creator God, and the apparent scientific evidence. This view argues that there were, in fact, two creations. The first is described in Genesis 1:1 and the second in Genesis 1:2. By placing a ‘gap’ of billions of years between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2, the second creation can occur in six literal days, and the scientific understanding that the universe is billions of years old can be accommodated.

This argument even fills the gap with biblical content. According to its supporters, a great cataclysm supposedly left the earth in darkness and covered with water. That cataclysm was the divine judgment

because of Satan's rebellion against God. While seeming to offer a biblical interpretation to align the narrative of Scripture with modern scientific notions, we must understand that there is no biblical evidence for such an event. This is entirely speculative.

Gap theorists base their case on a distinction between the words 'create' in Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God *created* the heavens and the earth" and 'made' in Exodus 20:11, "for in six days the Lord *made* the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy." It is argued that God re-made in verse 2 what He originally created in verse 1. However, these words are clearly used interchangeably, at least when God is the Maker, not only in Genesis 1:21, 25; 5 1:26-27; 2:4) but throughout the Old Testament (Nehemiah 9:6 and Psalm 146:1-5). That is, there is no distinction between the meaning of the words themselves. They are synonyms.

Gap theorists also claim that 'was' in Genesis 1:2 should be 'became' thus giving the reading, "and the earth became without form and void." While that particular Hebrew word could mean 'became', it simply means 'was' in 98% of its other Old Testament occurrences. This fact, along with the context, has caused every standard translation of the Bible to translate Genesis 1:2 'was' rather than 'became.' There is nothing else in the context of Genesis 1 to conclude this verb should be rendered "became."

Therefore, since there is no biblical evidence supporting the Gap Theory, and since there is grammatical evidence to oppose inserting a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, the Gap Theory should be rejected. The only cause for such a theory comes from an interpretation of evidence outside the Bible, not from any biblical data.

The Age of Humankind

Another challenge has to do with the reputed scientific evidence regarding the age of humankind. Many have investigated the question of the age of the earth. The early evolutionists of the 19th century considered the earth to be around 20 million years old. Today evolutionary theorists generally consider the earth to be 4.543 billion years old. If the earth is that old, when did humankind as we know it emerge onto the scene?

Some have attempted to use the Bible to prove when humankind began. This has been done by using the biblical genealogies in order to determine when God created Adam. The biggest challenge that must be faced is the reality of gaps in the genealogies. Examples of genealogies with gaps in them are found in Ezra 7:3-4 (compare with 1 Chronicles 6:6-10), in Exodus 6:16-20 (compare with 1 Chronicles 7:20-27), and in Matthew 1:8 (compare with 1 Chronicles 3:11-12).

Because biblical genealogies do not necessarily reflect a strict father-son relationship, it is impossible to use the Bible to determine with certainty the exact year when God created Adam. However, because we know of some gaps in genealogies, this does not mean that they are useless to us in developing a biblical chronology. After all, the reason we know that gaps exist in genealogies is because the missing names are supplied elsewhere in the Bible. Also, the gaps that exist are fairly minor, and do not comprise many thousands of years.

Other biblical evidence beyond the genealogies can assist us in determining exact dates back to Abraham. For example, 1 Kings 6:1 states the Exodus took place 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon's reign, which has been identified with considerable certainty as 965/966 B.C. This means that the date of the Exodus was 1446 B.C. The Israelites were in Egypt for 430 years (Exodus 12:40), therefore Jacob arrived there in 1876 B.C. Jacob came to Egypt at age 130 (Genesis 47:9), so we can conclude Jacob was born in 2006 B.C. Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob was born (Genesis 25:26), therefore Isaac was born in 2066 B.C. Since Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5), so we can conclude that Abraham was born in 2166 B.C.

For the years prior to Abraham we have the genealogies from Genesis 5 and 11. The possibility of gaps exist, but it is important to notice that the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 are more specific than other biblical genealogies. They include not only who they fathered, but how long they lived.

Furthermore, Jude 14 describes Enoch as "the seventh generation from Adam." Therefore, at least the first seven generations (of a total of 20 from Adam to Abraham according to Luke 3:34-38) are consecutive and without gaps. Also, Enoch's son, Methuselah died in the year of the flood (Genesis 5:26, 28; 7:6) so we have a literal record of years from Adam to the flood. Therefore, the genealogical record of Genesis 5 is complete and chronologically trustworthy.

Since we have an exact date for the birth of Abraham (2166 B.C.) and since we have exact years from Adam to the flood (a total of 1,656), we are left with only the genealogy between Noah and Abraham. If, like Genesis 5, there are no gaps in the genealogy of Genesis 11, then we could attempt to count the years and come to a conclusion regarding the year of Adam's creation.

However, we cannot settle on the exact date of Adam's creation due to the possible gaps in the genealogical record in Genesis 11. But we can infer a general idea of the time of Adam's creation if we assume that the gaps in Genesis 11 are very few. To do so is not a stretch, since if there are many gaps or if the gaps themselves are great, the genealogy becomes meaningless. We can then conclude that Adam was created before 4000 B.C. and perhaps even several hundreds of years earlier. But clearly, to conclude that humankind is millions of years old is to ignore the biblical record.

From the standpoint of the study of history, what is called the Neolithic Age is said to have begun approximately 8000 BC and lasted until about 4500 BC. Evidence for culture is limited and difficult to date accurately. Clearly, though, civilizations emerged in many different areas about 4500-3000 BC, particularly, between the Huang He and Yangtze Rivers in China, along the Indus River Valley in modern India, along the Nile delta in modern Egypt, and between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern Iraq. This evidence is consistent with the biblical record.

What does this mean for the age of the universe? Since Adam was the first man (Genesis 1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:45), and since God made man from the beginning of the creation (Mark 10:6; 13:19, etc.), we can conclude that man was created at least 6,000 thousand years ago, sometime before 4000 B.C.

Therefore, we can also reasonably conclude that the universe was created only several thousands of years ago.

Objections to a young earth

Arguments against the universe being only several thousand years come mainly from the empirical evidence from science. I have neither the knowledge nor the time to address creation from the lens of the science, though a student of Scripture ought not to be afraid to look diligently at what science has to say. However, one critical fact about God's creation serves to explain many of the scientific objections to a young earth. God created Adam and Eve as adults, not infants. Likewise, God created plants, not only seeds (Genesis 1:11-12). Also, God created the stars so they could be seen (Genesis 1:14), so that man did not have to wait millions of years to see the light God created.

In other words, God's original creation of the universe and all that is in it was mature. Like Adam, God's creation had the appearance of age. If the understanding that God's creation was mature is accepted, then objections to a young earth may be overcome.

Takeaways

The Bible teaches many things about creation. Of first importance is Who created. God created everything. This is undeniable to all men (cf. Romans 1:20) and must be a basic belief for all Christians.

The Bible also informs us how God created. God created everything suddenly and out of nothing. This sudden creation included humankind, whom God uniquely fashioned after His own image. To correctly understand God's special creation of man is an important step toward maturing in the Christian faith, for it impacts our beliefs about who man is, the significance of man's rebellion against God and ultimately the significance of God's grace in salvation through Jesus Christ.

Finally the Bible tells us when God created. God created everything several thousands of years ago, not several billions of years ago. This belief is hotly contested among even conservative, Bible-believing Christians. Many who rightly hold to the inerrancy of the Bible and affirm proper principles of Bible interpretation disagree about this. We must remember that this is not a salvation issue, and grace ought always to be extended when believers disagree about such things.

I would submit, though, that the issue of the age of the creation is important for Christians in terms of the integrity of the Bible. The weight we give to partial information from science as interpreted by a set of assumptions compared to the weight we give to the biblical text reflects our attitude concerning God's Word. We must be careful not to consider what man says about creation to be more important than what God says about creation.

The theological implications are clear. God is to be praised for His creation. He is sovereign over all of His creation.

“The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours;

The world and all it contains, You have founded them” (Psalm 89:11).

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains,
The world, and those who dwell in it” (Psalm 24:1).