

Week 5: Creation Part 1

Class Introduction:

DOCTRINE OF CREATION

Where did we come from? Why are we here? Is there a creator? Why did he create? What's his relationship with his creation? These basic questions have boggled the minds of men for millennia.

Admittedly, these are not just challenging questions, but hugely significant questions. When confronted with the crushing weight of such questions, some worldviews give up. *Postmodernism* doesn't even attempt an answer. You're on your own to make sense of such questions. And even *naturalism*, that juggernaut of the scientific elite, doesn't attempt to directly answer such questions. For Darwinian evolution, it isn't about *origins* (where did matter itself come from), but merely *beginnings* (how did mankind arise as one species among other species).

But the Bible's not bashful about such things. It's bold and confident in its assertions. So, where would you turn in your Bibles to learn about our origins?

Genesis 1.1! Exactly. "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*"

Let's reflect on these first ten words for a moment. What do they tell us about creation?

God created. Creation owes itself not to chance and impersonal forces, but to God.

God created *in the beginning*. God created time. He's pre-existent, eternal. Matter is not, matter will come later.

God created the *heavens and the earth*. So all we see, all there is, all that exists owes itself to God.

God's not embarrassed by the biblical worldview. He doesn't bury this account deep within Israel's history because he's timid and apprehensive. This might be hard for my people to accept. "I'll introduce it later, soften the edges a bit. Make it compatible for them." God doesn't do this. He boldly and confidently leads with the doctrine of creation. If you want answers to some of the most pressing questions in life - look no further than the first words of the Bible.

And there's an enormous amount of theology contained in those first ten words! There is no Christianity without creation! That the Bible begins with creation establishes who God is and the entire God-world relationship. It helps establish the proper interpretation and place of human beings in the world. It teaches the goodness of the world and thus what eventually goes wrong with it. But the beginning of history also points to the end of history. Creation, fall, redemption, to new creation. It points us forward to our everlasting hope as Christians. It's hugely important, especially in today's skeptical age.

This word Genesis literally means "beginnings." Moses penned these words, but he obviously wasn't there to observe and record what happened (Luke 24:44, John 7:22). Like Revelation, which speaks to the end of all things, this had to be *revealed* to him.

But this raises the question about how Gen 1-2 should be read? Is it merely mythical? Poetic? Scientific? It's not a scientific textbook. It's not merely giving cause-and-effect as if we live in merely a natural world governed by impersonal forces. Nor is it merely poetry. Moses uses symbolism (like Rev), yet he speaks plainly and concretely. The main point of Gen 1-2 is to give us a theology of creation, especially God's relationship with humanity.

Now there are many parallels between this account and other pagan accounts of the time Moses was writing (c.1500BC). But that shouldn't surprise us. It's what we should expect as God wants his people, after their deliverance from Egypt, to shed itself of the polytheism and paganism of Egypt. Therefore, it's the points of *difference*, not similarities, that are most significant. Namely, Yahweh is the covenant Lord.

Now if you were to tell someone on the street that God created the heavens and the earth - what kind of discussions might ensue?

You would be bombarded by a barrage of questions. What about dinosaurs? Age of the earth? Carbon 14 dating? The fossil record? Evolution? Etc.

So often creation is co-opted by these conversations. And if we're not careful, all these competing voices will drown out the one voice we need to hear - that's God's voice. We're going to think more about age of the earth, how exactly we're to read Gen 1-2 etc. at the end of this class. But what we first need to do is NOT put God in the dock and start drilling him like he's on trial. What we need to do first is close our mouths, so we can hear His.

So what does God have to say about creation? We want to consider 7 specific statements from the Bible related to the opening chapters of Genesis. Then, with that foundation, we can talk about the age of the earth and other matters.

Comments, questions?

7 BIBLICAL TRUTHS ABOUT CREATION

1. God created the universe out of nothing.

God created the universe *ex nihilo*; that's Latin for "out of nothing." "*In the beginning, God created.*" Not "when God began to create." In other words, God created without the use of pre-existing materials. He didn't merely stumble across some cosmic play-dough and refashion or shape that which already was. He merely spoke and things came into existence.

Listen to what the Word of God has to say about creating the universe out of nothing ... Heb 11.3, a great passage, says "*by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*"

Or Rom. 4:17 says that God is the one who "*gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.*"

Psalm 33:6-9 – "*The heavens were made by the word of God, by the breath of His mouth. So also regarding the earth and its inhabitants: He spoke and commanded, and it was done.*"

And because God created the entire universe out of nothing there is no matter in the universe that is eternal. All that we see all came into existence when God

created it. There was a time when it—matter—did *not* exist. Take Psalm 90:2, for example, “*Before the mountains were born, or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*”

Creation *ex nihilo* strikes a blow to naturalism which suggests that in the beginning matter existed, and through a random, blind, purposeless series of events we get our world. But the Bible says, “*in the beginning*” ... not “matter created,” ... but “God created!”

So, the first truth ... God created the world out of nothing.

Comments or questions?

2. God created all things --- both visible and invisible, both in the heavens and the earth.

This is clearly asserted in Gen 1.1. But not just here. Listen to the universal statement in John’s gospel: “*Through Him (i.e., Christ) all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made*” (John 1:3).

Similarly, John writes in Revelation 4:11, “*For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.*”

Acts 4:24 speaks of God as the “*Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.*” The inclusion of heaven and earth and everything in them indicates that God created the entire universe.

The creation of the entire universe includes the creation of an unseen, spiritual realm of existence. In addition to creating the visible, tangible, physical universe, God created the angels and other kinds of heavenly beings. He also created heaven as a place where his presence is especially evident.

This is explicitly stated in both the Old and New Testaments. In the book of Nehemiah, Ezra prays, “**You are the Lord, you alone; you have made *heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host***” (Nehemiah 9:6). The host of heaven refers to the angels and other heavenly creatures, since Ezra says that they engage in the activity of worshiping God – the same term “host” is used to speak of angels who worship God in Ps. 103:21 and 148:2).

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul specifies that in Christ “**all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible**” (Col. 1:16). Here, the creation of invisible heavenly beings is also explicitly affirmed.

So, God is the creator of all things, the physical as well as the spiritual.

3. God created time.=

Physics tells us that time is a property resulting from the existence of matter. The succession of moments one after another which is dependent on the existence of a material substance. Accordingly, time exists when matter exists. But God is not matter; God, in fact, created matter. Before that, God was simply existing. Since there was no matter, and because God does not change, time had no existence and therefore no meaning and no relation to Him. This is why he can say in verse 1, “in the beginning” ... He created the beginning.

So what does this mean? Well, it means that God is not bound by time like human beings. God’s existence is independent of time. Not only did he create the reality in which we live ... not only did he create you and me ... he actually created the space-time continuum that we exist in. How amazing is our God!

Recall Psalm 90:2 that says that, “*Before the mountains were born, or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*”

Or recall Revelation 1:8 which reads, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*” says the Lord God, “*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*”

Or how about Psalm 102... “*Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end.*”

These verses show that God is eternal. And, in contrast, it also shows that universe is *not* eternal. The universe had a beginning. It’s temporal.

This strikes a blow to our Darwinian friends who look for a time-space answer to the problem of beginnings. God has no beginning and, so, has not time-space limitations. They are, in a very real sense, looking in the wrong place.

So, God not only created the universe, he created the time-space continuum that the universe is found in.

4. God created by his word.

What's one of the common refrains of Gen 1.1-2.3? "*And God said...*"

Ten times in the Genesis account we find those words, "*And God said....*" The point is unmistakable - God calls things into existence by his word.

God literally spoke the universe into existence by His word and created something where there was nothing before. God spoke, and it was done. God's Word is necessary for salvation, as we learned in the first class, but it's also the means to life, as we know it. And so we see that God's word brings life both spiritually and physically.

Hebrews 11:3 states that, "*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.*"

Consider for a moment the power of God's word! The picture is not of God sweating, toiling, laboring for years if not millennia to create. He merely speaks, and it is so. It may take us more than a decade to build light rail out to Dulles, but in a nano-second God speaks galaxies into existence. There is unbridled power when God chooses to speak. We speak, and our words trail right off into the air. How many mornings do they pass right through my son's ears, without any change. How often do my wife's words sadly pass through my ears without any change. But not so with God. His word is effectual. It creates. The world doesn't just turn at God's command, the world literally hangs on God's word.

The picture is not one of trial and error, like some crazed inventor scratching his head. God's word is powerful (it creates), and perfect (it creates exactly what he intended them to create).

So, God created everything by his word.

5. Creation is a Triune Act

Gen 1.26 reveals that the Creator God is triune. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” God the Father was a primary agent. We see this in Gen 1-2, and texts like Ps 19.1, “*The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*”

But God the Son also created. John 1.3, “*all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*” Or Col 1.16, “*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*”

We read that the Son is the one “*through whom*” God “*created the world*” (Heb. 1:2).

And God the Holy Spirit created. He’s generally pictured as completing, filling, and giving life to God’s creation. Genesis 1 hints at the preserving and sustaining function of the Spirit when it says, “*the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters*” (Gen. 1:2).

Or Job 33.4, “*The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*”

In Psalm 104:30, the psalmist writes concerning the great variety of creatures on the earth and in the sea, saying “*When you send forth your Spirit, they are created.*”

And in John 6, we see that it is the Spirit that indwells a person upon regeneration, giving spiritual life to the spiritually dead. Jesus says in verse 63, “*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you--they are full of the Spirit and life.*”

So, the Father gives creates. The Son creates. And the Holy Spirit creates, bringing new life.

6. The Universe God Created was “Very Good.”

What's the constant refrain of Gen 1? And God saw that what He had done was "good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Then at the end of the six days of creation, "*God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good*" (Gen. 1:31). God delighted in the creation that he had made, just as he had purposed to do.

Though sin has marred this material world, even to the point that creation groans (Rom 8.22), the material world is still good in God's sight and should be seen as "good" by us as well. This knowledge will free us from a false asceticism; that is, the belief that the use and enjoyment of God's material blessings is wrong. For Paul says that those who "*forbid marriage*" and "*order [people] to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth*" (1 Tim. 4:1-3) are giving heed to the "*doctrines of demons.*"

One author put it like this, "whereas God could have created air filtration machines, he instead chose to create trees. Whereas God could have chosen to cast creation in black and white, he instead chose to paint from a vast pallet of colors." (*Doctrine*, 88). He gives both water *and* wine. Bread *and* cheese. Breathtaking sunsets and harvest moons. God's not stingy. He's not some scrooge. He's not tight-fisted... Creation teaches us he's a wonderfully good God who's open-handed with his people. He's pro-pleasure, pro our joy. His good gifts are for our gratification, *so that* we might give him praise and thanks. That's the logic of 1Tim 4.4-5.

7. God Created the Universe to Show His Glory.

Both mankind and the universe were created for the glory of God. Psalm 19 states, "*The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.*"

The song of the living creatures in Revelation 4 shows that God's creation is to give praise and glory to its creator. The creatures sing, "*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you have created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.*"

We are designed, created even, to glorify God for his creation. That's why God can say in Isaiah 43:6, "*Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end*

of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” He designed it all so that he could bring glory to his name.

But it’s important to understand that God did not need to create to bring him glory. He is, by himself, already infinitely glorious. God desired to create the universe to demonstrate his excellence. He created it to take delight in his creation and creating powers.

So, God created the universe to show off his glory.

Views of Creation

We’ve spent a good bit of time on these seven statements, because the Bible’s not silent or confused when it comes to creation. But we often get frustrated because the Bible’s not answering my specific question - “what’s the age of the earth?”

Imagine President Obama were to announce a press-briefing tomorrow to discuss the current state of ISIS. He delivers it, only to be met with a slew of skeptical and angry op-ed pieces in the papers the next day because he didn’t address all their questions about *financial* reform. Any rational person would say, “hey, uh... he did say the briefing was about *ISIS* guys.”

My point is this. Sometimes we need to stop and ask ourselves, “is the problem with the Bible, or with my question?” For the creation account is far more concerned with the *who* and *why* of creation, than exactly the *how* and *when*. It’s not that God doesn’t possess such knowledge, but it’s also not knowledge that God in his wisdom believes we must have in order to rightly know him, and trust him. It was Galileo who once famously said, “the Bible’s about how to get to heaven, not how the heavens go.” Now, you can push that too far to suggest the Bible has nothing to say about creation. But his point is well-taken. The Bible as a whole deals with the most pressing human questions of suffering, sin and salvation, not carbon-14 dating.

That being said, there are a number of different ways Christians have understood the account of creation in Gen 1-2.

(1) ***Theistic Evolution***. This view seeks to marry naturalistic evolution with the biblical God. God created the first matter and set in place the natural laws of the universe, and then evolution was the means by which he brought creation into existence.

But this view faces a number of challenges. First, it has to say that something the Bible posits as an evil result of the fall (namely death and suffering), was not only present before the fall but was the very mechanism God used to bring about all that is good (namely life).

Second, it has to affirm that species evolve from one into another, whereas the Bible says God made each “according to its kind” (Gen 1.21; 24, 25).

Third, the Bible portrays God as actively and sovereignly involved in each step of creation and preparation of the land for his people, which evolution denies outright.

(2) ***The Gap Theory***. This view holds to a gap of billions of years between Gen 1.1, and Gen 1.2. There was a first creation in Gen 1.1 of the heavens and the earth. But somewhere along the way there was some cosmic rebellion (Satan and the angels?), some cataclysmic event that left the earth largely destroyed (“formless and void”) by 1.2. So in Gen 1.3ff you don’t have the first creation, but a second creation of six literal days.

You like this view if you hold to an old-earth, but you want to take “day” and “evening and morning” to be what they normally mean - literal 24 hour solar days. The great challenge to this view is that the Bible never speaks of two creations. There’s not a single verse one can marshal for support. It must be read into the text, not read out of the text. And it would be hard to understand how God could make the universe, and prepare the land for his people and say that it was “very good,” when in fact it had first been made very bad and nearly obliterated.

(3) ***Day-Age View***. In this view, God created the universe, including Adam and Eve, in six sequential periods of time. But those periods were not 24-days, but “ages” that spanned perhaps millions of years. If you’re convinced the earth is 4.5 billion years old, this view accords with that prior commitment.

But there are a few challenges. Namely, the sequence of events in Gen 1 doesn’t square up with the scientific understandings of life as we know it. So

sea creatures on Day 5 come before vegetation on Day 3. More to the point, the sun, moon and stars come millions of years *after* plants and trees.

(4) ***Literary-Framework View***. In this view, Gen 1 is not intended to be a chronological sequence of events, but is a “literary-framework,” a topical ordering of the events. The point is not exactly “when and in what order,” but merely “what.” They notice, helpfully I think, that days 1-3 are days of *forming* (lights, sky/water, land), and days 4-6 are days of *filling* (stars, birds/fish, animals and man). So day 1 light and darkness are formed, and then in day 4 they are filled with the stars. Day 2 sky and waters are formed, day 5 they’re filled with birds and fish, etc.

The view has good insights into the text, and it does sidestep the whole “age of the earth” question. But it does so by largely reading the text through the lens of poetry. And though Gen 1 has poetic elements, it’s not really of the poetry genre. So it’s tough to know what’s merely figurative, and what’s literal. And though there is this element of forming and filling, there does seem to be something of *sequence* in the six days that culminates in day 7.

(5) ***Young-Earth Creationism***. God made the world, and Adam and Eve, in six, literal 24-hour days. At face value, this is the natural reading of most our English translations. If science says the earth is old, it’s either because God made the earth mature, like he did Adam and Eve, or because science is mistaken. Perhaps the flood and other cataclysmic events affected our dating methodologies. They rightly recognize that science as a discipline is predicated upon challenging an established hypothesis based on ever-changing data. So if I have to choose, I’ll go with divine revelation over human reason.

(6) ***Historic-Creationism***. This view says that Genesis 1:1, instead of being a title for what’s to come, actually records the creation of everything. “Heaven and earth,” acts as a merism (combination of two contrasting words, to refer to an entirety), and so the phrase “in the beginning” is not punctiliar but a duration of an indeterminate amount of time. With the universe already created in Genesis 1:1, the six creative days refer not to the establishment of the universe, but rather, God’s preparation of Eden for His people. Gen 1.2, then, describes the state of the world before God prepared a land for his people.

Hence, from Genesis 1:2 to the end of the Revelation, the Bible speaks of the people of God in relationship to the Garden of Eden. It is a journey from the

original Eden to a new Eden, so to speak, as we see the narrative of human history played out from its beginning to its end.

There are several advantages to this view. First, both believers in a young-earth and believers in an old-earth creationists could both hold this view since there is not a definite time given between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. Genesis 1:1 simply doesn't specify a time.

Second, this view reads biblical terms as they're read later in the Scriptures, such as the Hebrew words for time, land, and waters.

Third, this view makes sense of the Bible's huge concern for God's people to live in his blessed land from Eden to the new creation.

The disadvantage to this view is that it is merely one way to approach and read the Hebrew text. It reads biblical terms in a particular way that is helpful but may not be the only way to read the text. Thus, the view itself is written off by some who read the Hebrew language differently.

Conclusion

All in all, we must understand that the Bible doesn't give us all of the details necessary to understand exactly the age of the earth. What is important to God is that we understand who created the earth and why he created it ... for his glory, ultimately shown through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is my hope that in today's class, we were able to glean more of what God has to say to us in his word why he created the world and the way in which he made it. In next week's class, we will cover two more truths that the Bible has for us about the matter of creation, including what is perhaps most important for us – the relationship of man to God's creation. We'll look forward to that next week, but before we end today's class, let me pray ...

PRAYER