
SERMON NOTES

Genesis 2: The Meaning of Creation Genesis 1:1-31

As we seek to unpack these first few chapters of Genesis, it seems to me that we must address an issue created by our modern times. The issue is this: How should we reconcile the Bible's first few chapters on creation with the discoveries and theories of modern science? One of the biggest reasons for this problem is the Theory of Evolution. Some Christians simply abandon the Bible – “science must be right, therefore the Bible must be in error. I'll only trust what has been verified by science.” Others abandon science – “I don't really understand it, but science must be wrong.” But I think we can do better than both of those approaches.

It is true that Evolutionists have often been quite vocal in using the theory of evolution to denounce God in general and Christians in particular. Richard Dawkins is just one such scientist, who seems to take particular pleasure in attacking Christianity. Many other scientists freely admit that they feel God is a dangerous illusion, and they feel compelled to try and defeat all religious faith. In fact it seems obvious to me, that generally speaking, within the scientific community, there is a culture which holds religion and God in contempt. At the same time, the more that scientists discover about the incredible and delicate complexity of life and the universe, the more unlikely it becomes that all of this happened randomly without a Creator. So it is natural to be suspicious of the scientists who are times unreasonably and illogically opposed to the idea of a Supreme Creator even in the face of evidence that strongly suggests that the universe had an Intelligent Designer.

On the other hand, Christians have often been unnecessarily hostile to science. I have my doubts about the theory of evolution – doubts based not on the Bible, but on logic and science. Even so, if somehow, evolution should prove to be true, that would not threaten my faith. If it proves true, then to me, it would simply be a discovery of specifically what mechanisms God used to bring the world and life into their present physical forms.

In addition, sometimes Christians believe things that the Bible does not necessarily teach and become committed to those beliefs as if their faith depended on them. I absolutely believe that God is capable of creating the universe as we know it in six twenty-four-hour days. At the same time, I am not completely convinced that this is exactly what the Bible teaches. The Hebrew word for day, as used in this passage, is *yom*. Like many Hebrews words, it can have several shades of meaning. It can mean a 24 hour period. It can mean some portion of the daylight hours. But it can also mean simply an a segment of time with a definite beginning and end. In this third definition, *yom* could be several weeks, or years, or even an epoch. Maybe one way to capture this sense of the word would be the English expression: “Back in my Grandpa's day, they didn't have running water.” When you say that, you don't mean that there was only one day in which they didn't have running water. You mean it as a time-period. In addition, Peter writes this:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day (1 Peter 3:8).

Therefore “day” in Genesis 1, does not necessarily mean 24 hours. It certainly seems like the first three days of creation should not be interpreted as literal 24 hour periods, since the Sun and Moon and stars do not appear until the fourth day. If the first three days then, are intended to mean something more like “time period” or “era,” then it stands to reason that the other four days should be interpreted the same way. So although certainly, if you believe the Bible you should believe that God is *capable* of creating the world in six days, the Bible does not explicitly and necessarily teach that he did. You can be a good Christian and believe that God took eons to create the world, just as you can be a good Christian and believe he did in 144 hours.

Another unnecessary fight Christians have often picked with scientists is over the age of the earth. The fact is, the Bible never gives us a date for creation. It wasn't until the mid 1600s that James Ussher and John Lightfoot arrived at the conclusion that the world was 10,000 years old. Before that, there was no particular

theological opinion about the age of the earth. Ussher and Lightfoot came to this date by adding up the genealogies found in the Bible (places where the Bible recounts long lists of descendants). One of the problems with this is that there is a certain amount of flexibility in the words “father” and “son” as they are used in Hebrew. Father (*ab*) may mean direct father, or grandfather, or ancestor. Likewise son (*ben*) might be son, or grandson, or descendant. This can't be stretched out indefinitely – in other words, the genealogies *do* imply some sort of association within a reasonable number of generations. Serious and Bible-believing scholars have suggested that, taking the genealogies seriously, Adam and Eve probably lived anywhere from 10,000 to 60,000 years ago. The furthest the range could be stretched is sometime between 7,000 and 100,000 years ago. And of course, if the creation days are not literal 24 periods, then finding out how long ago Adam and Eve lived does not tell us how old the earth is anyway.

Where does all this leave us? Science, of course, could learn from Faith. Many times in the past, Scientists have scoffed at Biblical details, only to have them later confirmed by modern scientific investigation. And it does seem intellectually irresponsible for scientists to continue to insist that the world had no creator when the chances of life happening by “accident” are almost nil.

At the same time, we Christians ought to be careful to not *unnecessarily* interpret the Bible as contrary to science. Of course there are unbelieving scientists who are biased and have predispositions against belief in God. I don't mean we have to always accept what such people say without question. But I do mean that good Biblical interpretation does not conflict with modern science as much as both scientists and Christians might think.

One of my hobbies is to read about scientific discoveries and to consider how they may relate to my faith. At the present time, modern scientists are far from proving most of their assumptions about the origins of the earth and of the development of life. Even so, if they were to prove it, it would not sound terribly different from most of Genesis chapter 1. Just consider this for a moment:

The passage begins with a picture nothingness -- “formless and void.” Suddenly, there is light. This sounds a bit like the “Big Bang” which scientists believe was the beginning of the universe. There's another nuance here too. God creates light, presumably with all its properties. It turns out – according to scientists – that the laws which govern light (particularly, its speed) are foundational to the entire physical system of the universe. Nothing much could get done, from a scientific perspective, until the laws of physics – especially the properties of light – were established.

Next we move from the creation event as a whole to what seems to be the planet earth. The separation of waters sounds a bit like the formation of earth's atmosphere. Dry land heaves itself out of oceans. Scientists are always telling us how mountains which stand hundreds of miles from the nearest salt-water were once part of an ancient sea-floor. Perhaps that is only a confirmation of what the Bible has said for thousands of years.

Next, the first life appears, in the form of simple plants. Many scientists believe that in the very early stages of earth, the atmosphere was opaque – sort of like the atmosphere of Venus at the present time. When the Bible records God setting the Sun and moon and stars in the sky, it could be the period when he allowed the atmosphere to clear to the extent where the light of those heavenly bodies could be seen.

Following this, we have simple marine life, and then birds. It is not until the last day when land dwelling animals and then mammals, and finally humans appear. Modern scientists believe that the world was first populated by simple organisms, then slightly more complex sea creatures and then land dwelling animals, with mammals being late-comers, with human beings latest of all. Once again, this appears to be what the Bible has always said.

Both the Bible and scientists feel that humankind was the last new species to appear. In fact, scientists have long been puzzled because it looks like since the appearance of humans, no new species have emerged, while many have gone extinct. Scientists do not attribute this to human influence alone. This is consistent with the Biblical account, which seems to imply that God quit making new creatures after he made humans.

What is so unique about Genesis one is that it presents the creation narrative in a way that could be understood by unscientific cultures thousands of years ago, and yet remains relevant to our modern culture

also.

I think all of this about creation and science needs to be said, and it is important for Christians to understand. Even so, I don't believe that the main point of Genesis Chapter One is to give a scientific-textbook style account of all the physical mechanisms God used in creating the earth. As we look at this scripture, as well as others in the Bible, it seems to me that there are three major truths being explained here.

The first main truth, is that the universe does in fact have a Creator, and that Creator is good and has in mind the good of His creation. We spoke about the importance of a Creator last week. Without a Creator, there is no meaning to the universe in general, and no significance to our lives in particular. The second major truth here is that God's creation shows us a little bit of what God is like. The third major truth concerns human beings.

We've considered the first truth already. We'll deal with the third truth starting next week. So for now we will focus on the second truth from Genesis 1 – that the world around us reveals the character of the One who created it. The Bible is very clear that this is so. Psalm 19 begins like this:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

²Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

³There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

⁴Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (Psalm 19:1-4)

The Psalmist is saying, essentially, if you spend some time looking at the sky, particularly the night sky, you will learn about the nature of God. The results of modern cosmology confirm this. Studying the universe we find amazing beauty and awesome, powerful forces. Human beings have also learned from studying the stars that the universe had a definite beginning. We have learned that there are physical laws which govern the movements of stars, galaxies and planets, and these laws are orderly. These physical laws interact in complex ways, and they are in delicate balance to one another. If the laws of physics were slightly different, life could not exist in the universe. At the same time, the more we learn, the more we realize that there is so much we don't know, and actually cannot know with certainty. So the "heavens" tell us a bit about the character of God: he is awesome and beautiful, and beyond complete understanding. But he is also orderly and detailed.

Romans chapter 1 also indicates that God's qualities can be grasped from creation.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20)

This passage makes it clear that it is not only outer space, but the whole creation, which tells us about God. I know that one reason I love the outdoors is because I often feel closer to God when I am immersed in the wildness and beauty of His creation. I spend a fair amount of time praying and nurturing my relationship with the Lord out in the woods and on the water.

One of the key thoughts in both Romans 1:18-20 and Psalm 19 is that certain qualities of God should be evident to *everyone* from creation. This is one of the ways he speaks to us. Nature reveals God's creativity, his wildness, his complex intelligence, his extraordinary beauty and his immense power. In theological circles, this is called *general revelation*. Everyone can learn about God in this way. We **also** need *special revelation* – which is what we get from the Bible – more specific information about God which we could not learn any other way. So I am not advocating that we worship nature, or ignore the Bible and church and all that. Don't go and say, "my pastor says, don't worry about going to church or reading the Bible – just go out in the woods." I don't mean that. But I *do* mean that if you want to get closer to God, in addition to reading the Bible and coming to church, you might also consider spending some time contemplating God's creation.

Ultimately the point is to realize how great, awesome, powerful and wonderful he is, and to surrender our lives to him as both our Creator and our Redeemer.