

Teaching Creation According To The Creator's Revelation (Brief Look At The Scriptural Facts About Creation)

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By James J. Westendorf

At first glance this topic may seem to be an extremely elementary one for a pastoral conference. After all, Scripture's teaching on creation is hardly a new or lightly considered subject among us. We have been teaching God's truth on this matter in confirmation and adult information classes, Sunday School teachers meetings, and Bible classes throughout our ministries. So what's new?

There is nothing new. The people of God have been proclaiming God's Word concerning creation for 3500 years and more. It's rather difficult to come up with something new and improved in such a case and still remain in agreement with Scripture. There may be nothing new, but there is good reason to review the old and the familiar because the circumstances around us do change. The audience to which God's unchanging truth is proclaimed and the theories that the members of that audience devise based on what they know or think they know, do change. Consider the following categories of teachers on origins and the need to return to the Word that each creates for us:

The atheistic evolutionist - of course, nobody could be further away, both philosophically and practically, from the Biblical confessor and proclaimer than this individual and his multitude of allies. His god is human reason, and his source of revelation is the scientific method. He claims to accept only what is rational, provable, and in keeping with the "every-effect-has-a-natural-cause" principle. With this principle, of course, he has no answer to the question of where matter and/or energy came from, nor can he demonstrate any natural reason for the existence of plant and animal life or the multitude of species. Often he goes beyond the scientific method that is limited to observing what is happening or what has happened, and he elevates his theories of how or why something has taken place to indisputable fact. In addition he denies what the Bible says his reason ought to reveal to him: a Final Cause and a Grand Designer of what he sees in an ordered universe. St. Paul describes this individual in his Letter to the Romans when he says, "**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 person's purpose is to get God out of the picture. His final goal is a creation without a creator, and to be free, he would say, from superstition that can only retard progress. One is reminded of the attitude of the rebellious kings in Psalm 2: "**Why do the nations conspire and the people plot in vain; The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. 'Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters.**" [Psalm 2:1-3]. The atheistic evolutionist considers himself wise, and he considers his methodology and guiding principles the only acceptable ones. He considers the creationist with the same condescending pity and scorn that otherwise he would reserve for a member of the "earth-is-flat" society. He sees the Biblical creationist, if he considers him at all, as steeped in myths and fairy tales. The psalmist David records the Lord's judgment on this unbeliever, however: "**The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.**" [Psalm 14:1]

The theistic evolutionist - This living oxymoron wants to have his cake and eat it too. He wishes to embrace a set of theories designed to explain all on the basis of natural causes and laws, but he still wants to give the Creator his due. "God is the creator of everything, but his method is

evolution,” says the theistic evolutionist. “God is the final cause, but he limited himself to operating within the natural laws of preservation which we can observe in effect today.” His creed would be similar to that of Herman Gunkel, the Father of Old Testament form criticism at the beginning of the 20th century:

We believe that God works in the universe in the silent and secret background of all things; sometimes his influence seems almost tangible, as in the case of exceptionally great and impressive events and personalities; we divine his control in the marvelous inter dependence of things; but nowhere does he appear as an operative fact or beside others, but always as the last and ultimate cause of everything. (Herman Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis*, p. 9).

Scripture faces the same ridicule from this individual that it faced from the atheist. God’s revelation is relegated to the realm of fantasy and myth. He ignores “Thus says the Lord,” and does obeisance to human reason by prefacing all of his assertions with the question: “Well, couldn’t God have...?” Many of this man’s allies consider themselves members-in-good-standing in the Christian churches of this world.

The Six-age Creationist - This person (his title is my own creation) represents a group of people who want to give the Creator and the Creator’s revelation their due. He may be a very vocal defender of verbal inspiration. Yet, at the same time, he feels that the creation record must be reinterpreted, not rewritten or ignored, but reinterpreted in view of the pronouncements of modern science. Dr. Gleason Archer is the author of *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, a book which with the exception of his comments on creation has been recommended with minimal qualification to students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for years. He begins his discussion entitled Genesis 1 and Modern Scientific Evidence with the words:

From a superficial reading of Genesis 1, the impression would seem to be that the entire creative process took place in six twenty-four hour days. If this was the true intent of the Hebrew author (a questionable deduction, as will be presently shown [Archer’s parenthetical remark]), this seems to run counter to modern scientific research, which indicates that the planet Earth was created several billion years ago. (Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, P. 196 [1994 Ed.]).

Archer begins with the layers of sediment and the fossil record and from them draws a conclusion about the earth’s age. Then he turns to Scripture with a preconceived idea of what it must say. In this case that idea is that “day” in Genesis 1 must mean “age” and not a 24-hour day.

The Six-day Creationist - This person begins with the Scriptures. He lets those Scriptures speak on their own terms, interpreting themselves. Then he turns to the scientific facts and seeks to interpret them in the light of God’s Word. It is then that he evaluates the pronouncements scientists make and the theories they propose. This is his methodology, not because it removes all the hard questions, but because it lets the Lord speak first. Hard questions do remain and the Biblical creationist makes his own attempts to deal with them. He has his theories on the water cycle, mountain building, sedimentation, fossils, etc. His fellow believers may have carpeting theories. They all, however, will be constantly reviewing those theories to see whether they do justice to the Scripture’s witness and whether they deal honestly with the facts, as they are known.

These four categories of teachers on origins, especially the last two, are reason enough for reviewing briefly what the Scriptures have to say on creation. We must be in a position to judge for ourselves theories and pronouncements on origins, and we must be able to assist those entrusted to our care to arrive at their own conclusions based on Scripture. So we let Scripture speak on the following matters:

1. GOD IS ETERNAL, ALL ELSE IS CREATED

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” [Ps 90:1-2] With these opening words of his psalm Moses proclaims that God is eternal as clearly as he assumes it in Genesis 1:1. There is no cause given for God’s presence in the opening verses of the Bible. He is the final cause. There is no attempt to explain his existence; there are no reasoned arguments why God must exist. He simply does. His eternal presence is proclaimed, not argued.

Scripture leaves no doubt as to whom that God is either. He is the Triune God. In words that echo Genesis 1:1 (*b:reshith*) John begins his Gospel (*en arche*) **“in the-beginning was the word.”** This Word is he who became flesh and made his dwelling among us. He is the preincarnate Christ, the Son of God and there is no explaining, his presence in the beginning either. Yes, he is begotten of the Father, but in all eternity. That divine revelation does not satisfy our reason. It only raises more questions. The eternally proceeding Holy Spirit, was there as well, in the beginning. Genesis 1:2 speaks of him **“hovering over the waters.”** (Translating *ruach-elohim* as a “divine wind”, removing the personality of the Spirit from this verse, does not do justice to the verb, a piel participle from *rachaph*, “to hover”. Winds do not hover. Eagles do (Dt. 32:11), and the Holy Spirit does, but not winds.) All three persons of the Trinity are present in the beginning. They all participate in creation. All three contemplate the creation of the human race as they decide, **“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.”** [Genesis 1:26]

Except for the Triune God himself all else is created. That this is proclaimed in Genesis 1 rests on how we translate the first two verses. The grammatical relationship of the clauses to each other in these verses has been understood in three different ways.

The first, the one we are used to, understands verse 1 as an independent sentence: “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” [NIV]

The second takes the first clause as a dependent, temporal clause with the first clause of verse two forming the independent clause: “When God began creating the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and empty. . . .” (My wording)

The third also takes the first clause as dependent, the clauses of verse two as parenthetical, and seeks the main clause in verse three: “When God began creating the heavens and the earth, (the earth being formless and empty with darkness over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovering over the waters), God said...” (Again my wording)

We can translate verse one as an independent sentence because we understand the first word *reshith*, the objective of the inseparable preposition, *b:*, to be in the absolute state. This is the way the Masoretes understood the text for they punctuated the word with a disjunctive accent. The LXX had the same understanding, using *en arche* to translate *b:reshith*, an understanding which is carried forward into John 1:1. All the other ancient versions follow suit.

To translate verse one as a dependent clause means understanding *reshith* as being in the construct state. A literal translation of the verse would then read “In the beginning of God’s creating the heavens and the earth...” This construction is grammatically possible; but it has several things against it. The first is a grammatical objection. The word order of the first clause in verse two does not lend itself to being the apodosis of verse one. We would expect the verb first, not the subject. The first clause of verse two also does not appear to be parenthetical. Then in all likelihood there would be no verb at all. The second and more serious objection is theological. Translating verse one as a temporal clause makes these verses teach the eternal existence of the chaotic material from which the earth was formed. The text would say that when God began creating, the material was already there. Critics like this understanding because it makes Genesis agree with heathen accounts like the Babylonian Creation Epic, which do teach the eternal existence of chaotic matter. Many modern scientists have the same opinion. But this would set these verses in opposition to Hebrews 11:3: **“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." Matter is not eternal, but was created by God.

The truth that all matter and energy in the universe were created by God, "*ex nihilo*" is taught in the passage above from Hebrews. It is implied in passages like Romans 11:36: "**For from him and through him and to him are things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.**" It is often sought in Genesis 1:1 in the verb *bara'*, create. It is true that the word is used only when God is the subject, and it denotes the activity of bringing about something new and momentous, but its meaning does not in itself include a creation out of nothing. In Genesis 1:27 and 28 we are informed that God created man. Genesis 2:7 reveals that the Lord made Adam out of preexistent material, dust which he had made previously. The "*ex nihilo*"...is found rather in the prepositional phrase, *b:reshith*. This is the absolute beginning. Nothing besides God himself was in existence when God began creating.

2. THE LENGTH OF THE DAYS OF CREATION

In the paragraph I quoted from Archer's Old Testament Introduction earlier, he began by saying, "From a superficial reading of Genesis 1, the impression would seem to be that the entire creative process took place in six twenty-four hour days." There is good reason for that first impression. It is what the text says. A more careful, second and third readings will yield the same results. The text is describing 24-hour days. The narrative for each day of creation follows the same sequence. It begins with a description of God's creating activity for that day. This is followed by the formula, *vayhi-'ereb vayhi-boqer yom ...*, best translated: "Then it became evening, then it became morning, day..." Each day ends in the morning as a new period of creation begins. The length of each day is the same for they are all part of a series of like items. Even the seventh day whose end is not recorded is part of the series and therefore like the others in length.

It is hard to imagine how Moses could have made his meaning more clear. Moses could have simply described each day's activities and then stated that that was the end of the day. He could have mentioned the formula once and then left it up to us to apply it to succeeding days. He doesn't do that, however. He includes the formula, over and over again, for each day. I often recall the time I spend at UW-Madison in the Hebrew department preparing for Old Testament teaching at the seminary. During that time one of my critical professors made the remark that he did not care what anyone believed about creation (and he didn't); but don't let anybody try to tell him that the Genesis 1 speaks of something other than 24-hour days. I sometimes wonder if the Lord made sure his message could not be misunderstood because he knew what attempts would be made to reinterpret the obvious meaning.

Those who would reinterpret the length of the creation days usually jump on the meaning of the word *Yom*. The Hebrew word is just like our English word day. It can describe the light portion of each day, approximately a 12-hour period. It can mean a 24-hour revolution of the earth on its axis. It can also mean an indefinite period of time. All three meanings occur in Genesis 1 and 2. In Genesis 1:5 we are told, *vayyigra' 'e:lohim la'or yom*. In opposition to the night the light portion of the 24-hour period is called day. In the reoccurring formula ending each day *yom* means a 24-hour period. In 2:4 Moses writes, "**This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—**" (*b:yom 'a:soth yhv'h 'e:lohim 'eret'z v:shamayim*) Here *yom* covers the entire period of creation. These three meanings are not interchangeable, however. The context must decide which meaning of *yom* is to be used in each instance. If a commentator insists that *yom* in the daily formula means a literal day, but is used in a figurative sense to represent an era of great length, we would have to wonder if anything in Scripture is literal if these straight forward statements reporting history can be taken figuratively.

Another witness from the Bible to the length of the days of creation is the Lord himself as he gives the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. Of the Third Commandment to remember the Sabbath day he says, "**Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God... in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**" [Exodus 20:9-10a, 11] Here

the Lord uses the creation week as a model for Israel's week. If the week of Genesis 1 is only figurative, the Lord's use of it certainly hides that fact.

Of course, the need to lengthen the days of creation arises from a desire to harmonize the creation account with the age of the earth as calculated by evolutionists. For the Biblical creationist this causes more problems than it solves, however; for it places eons of development according to God's laws of preservation into a time when the Bible says God creative power was a work, a methodology which God stopped after six days, never to take up again. Lengthening the creation days like all attempts to harmonize creation and evolution results in a blurring of God's creative work with his work of preservation.

It might be mentioned here that Archer feels there is just too much activity reported for the sixth day to cram it into one 24-hour period. Not only is man created, but chapter two reveals that he was introduced to the garden, instructed about the tree, given time to study the animals and to come to the conclusion that he was alone, and finally put to sleep for the creation of Eve. Again the focus of this line of thinking is not "what do the Scriptures say", but rather "what is possible, and then we will decide what Scripture might be saying."

3. THE AGE OF THE EARTH

Closely connected to the length of the days of creation is the matter of the age of the earth. How long ago was creation? How old is the earth? If the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 10 are treated as chronologies then the answer would be 6,008 years ago in the year 4113 BC. Abraham was born in 2167 BC. There are 290 years between him and the Flood, putting us in 2457 BC. Then there are 1,656 years between the Flood and Adam, putting us in 4113 BC.

There is a very legitimate question, however, whether these genealogies should be used as chronologies. The fact that the number of years between generations are not added up gives some indication that they should not be. Generations may be skipped. The pattern of ten pre-flood generations and ten post-flood generations looks suspiciously like the 14-14-14 pattern of Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1 where we know there are missing links. Moses' line in Exodus 6 consists of four generations, while Joshua's line [cf. 1 Chronicles 7:20-26] over the same period of time has eleven generations. In addition, if there are only four generations between Levi and Moses, then Moses had 8,600 male first cousins who made up the clan of Kohath [cf. Numbers 3:28].

But can these genealogies in Genesis be compared to genealogies in other parts of the Bible? These genealogies are different? Here the number of years between each generation is given. In each generation the formula is used, "When A had lived xx number of years, he became the father of B." In at least one case in these genealogies, however, we know that the number of years refers to the firstborn son; but the son named is the one carrying on the promise, and he is not the firstborn. Genesis 11:26 says, "After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran." This sounds as though Terah was 70 when Abraham was born, one of triplets. But a compilation of the facts given in Genesis 11:32, 12:4 and Acts 7:4 indicate that Abraham left Haran after the death of Terah, who died when he was 205. Abraham arrived in Canaan when he was 75. Therefore, Abraham was born 60 years after Terah's firstborn, when Terah was 130. This increases the time in this generation by 80%. Supposing that the genealogies of both chapters could be increased by this amount across the board, there would now be 3,503 years between Abraham and creation.

The fact that the span of years these genealogies cover may be increased does not change the overall picture, however. The Bible presents us with a planet and, indeed, a universe of far, far, far fewer years than modern evolutionists are willing to accept. Archer says:

In the genealogy of the Lord Jesus given in Matt. 1:2-17 there are only seven possible links missing as against a total of forty-two given (during the 2000 years between Abraham and Christ), or a ratio of one to six. This is slender ground upon which to build a theory that 1,980 generations were omitted from the list between Adam and Abraham, and only nineteen or twenty were given. It therefore seem a dubious option for one who holds to the accuracy of the Genesis record to accept a date of 200,000 BC for Adam. (Archer, *ibid*, p. 210-211)

Is part of the solution to the problem that God created the earth with an appearance of age? The record certainly shows that he did. Adam and Eve appeared to be about twenty years old when they were a day. Same

of the trees in the Garden of Eden may have appeared to be fifty to one hundred years old moments after they were created. Were some of the stars that Adam and Eve could see millions of light years away? How the appearance of age can be applied things used to calculate the age of the earth, however, such as sedimentation and the fossil record goes beyond my expertise and the scope of this paper.

4. THE ORDER AND PURPOSE OF CREATION

There is a definite order to God's activity as reported in Genesis 1. God begins by creating chaos, the raw materials from which he would make the ordered earth and universe. Verse one of Genesis 1 describes that first creative act of God. Verse two describes the condition of that material, but only in so far as the earth is concerned. The focus is a geocentric one. Three things are noted about the chaotic material in verse two. First of all it is formless, second it is lifeless and empty, third there is no life-giving light. The next verses of the chapter, 3-25, now describe God's creative activity in bringing to completion his creative work. Each of the three hindering states of incompleteness are removed one at a time. Verse three records the creating of light, the source is not given, and verse four tells us that God pronounced the completing of this step good. It was in accord with his gracious good will. Verse 6-10 speaks of God giving order and form to the earth's raw materials. Again he pronounces his work good. In verse 11-25 God introduces life to the earth, beginning with the plant kingdom and then moving through ascending orders of the animal kingdom. Several times in this section God states his pleasure with his work. And finally we come to the creation of the human race.

Why did God do these things in this fashion? When we consider the almighty power of the Creator, our problem is not how he got it all done in six days, but why he took so long. Why create chaos first and then put order into the mix? Why develop things over a period of time? God acts in a certain ways and then reveals his actions to us so that we might see him in action and learn from that. He created the world the way he did for our edification.

Think of Jesus' actions when he healed the blind man at Bethsaida. Mark reports: **"They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly."** (Mark 8:22-25) Why did Jesus act this way? Because his healing powers were suddenly limited? No, but because he desired to teach patient trust. So God lets us see him in his creative work, lighting, shaping and filling. This is not because he could do it no other way, but because he wants us to see him preparing a world for us according to his good pleasure. He wants us to see his amazing love.

5. THE HUMAN RACE, THE CROWN OF GOD'S CREATION

To see the creating of the human race as the crown of God's creating activity is not doing an injustice to Genesis 1. The entire account points to verses 26-27. Throughout the chapter God acts like a householder who is expecting a very important guest. He busies himself preparing every detail. Everything must be good. It must be to his satisfaction before that guest arrives. Everything that guest needs must be available beforehand. God says as much after he has created mankind. **"I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."** [Genesis 1:29]

When we finally get to verse 26, God does something he has not done before. He consults with himself. We are allowed to view the deliberations within the Trinity as he determines to make man. Again we see God acting for our benefit. He certainly did not have to spend time deliberating on whether and then how he should create man. No, he wants us to see him thinking out loud. He wants us to understand that this is what he has had in mind all along.

Even the manner of speaking in verse 27 is different. We have become used to a certain sameness in the account. Now we are confronted with what commentators have described as elevated prose. The chief

characteristic of Hebrew poetry, parallelism, becomes a part of this verse, and it stands out from the straightforward narrative that precedes. **“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”**[Gen. 1: 27]

Chapter two also adds loving details about man’s creation. Only one pair was made. Adam is formed (*yatzar*) as a potter lovingly forms an individual vessel. And Adam receives the breath of God, giving him not a pantheistic divine element, but an eternal soul.

God also reveals that he has a plan for mankind. **“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and ‘over every living creature that moves on the ground. [Genesis 1: 28]** Adam and Eve are to be his stewards on this earth. He puts his creation under man’s management, not so that man can plunder that earth to satisfy his lust, a thing that has occurred only too often since the fall into sin, but that he might care for it the way the Creator himself would do. The claim of some environmentalist and animal-rights activists that the Biblical account of creation gives mankind divine sanction to rape and plunder the earth is unwarranted. When the Lord condemns the violent greed and imperial expansion of the Babylonians through the prophet Habbakkuk, he not only condemns their blood lust. He also condemns their plundering of the natural resources in the lands they conquered. **“The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed man’s blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.”** [Habbakkuk 2:17]

Last, but certainly not least, God created man in his image. We often describe that image in a negative way, saying what it was not. We speak of man as being without sin. It surely can be described in a positive way as well. Man was in harmony with God. We don’t get much opportunity to observe that image at work. The fall into sin comes so soon. But we do get a glimpse of it when the Lord brings Eve to Adam. Adam is not omniscient, but he does understand God’s purpose in creating Eve. He finds joy and delight in what God has willed for him, and he is willing to receive this marvelous gift of God’s love for the purpose God had given it. His intellect, emotions and will were all attuned to God. They were in harmony with the Creator.

The verdict certainly is clear from Genesis 1 and 2. Man is not a higher animal perched on the top rung of the evolutionary ladder. He is the crown of God’s creation. In some very important ways he is as different from the other animals as they are from the plants. I like to think of three kingdoms of living things: the plants, the animals and human beings.

6. GENESIS I AND 2 ARE HISTORICAL

No matter what verdict critical Bible scholars place on the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2 (actually Genesis 1-11), there can be little doubt what the man who penned these words thought. He reports as one giving a historical account. There is no “once upon a time, in a land far away.” Instead we have an account of origins connected by genealogies and a steady flow of history to the world in which we live.

Jesus understood this account to be historical revelation. He used the Creator’s intent and activity in instituting marriage as historical proof of God’s displeasure with anything that breaks the marriage bond. Paul understood these chapters as historical as well. His assertion in Romans 5 that Christ, the victorious second Adam, succeeded for us where the first Adam failed, is built on air if the first Adam is nothing more than a figment of the ancient storyteller’s imagination. He has no historical and divinely sanctioned basis for his teaching on the role of man and woman if his references to creation in 1 Corinthians 11, and I Timothy 2 are only references to fairy tales.

The whole account of redemption history as it flows through the Scriptures has the historical creation as its foundation. Christ’s work of redemption is to bring a fallen creation back to its state of purity. Eternal life is often pictured as a new heaven and a new earth. The Holy Spirit works within people’s hearts with the sanctifying power of the Gospel so that the original image of God might be restored. You cannot dismiss Genesis 1 and 2 and still make sense of the rest of what God says in his Word.

CONCLUSION

We have ranged far and wide across a very broad topic. Much more could be said. Let me just close with this thought: Genesis 1 and 2 do allow us to form judgments on various theories on origins. But that was never their purpose. The Holy Spirit recorded these truths for us so that we can view the Creator's love in addition to his power. His purpose in creation was to bless man beyond anything human beings could imagine. He goes to the extent of sacrificing his Son to redeem the world he created. He sends his Spirit to sanctify human hearts that those blessings he originally intended to shower on mankind might not be lost. This is the chief message we take from the creation account and the rest of Scripture, and this is what we proclaim.