**Lecture #1 Creation in Genesis**

“He Spoke and It Was”: Creation in Genesis: Making Sense of the Text

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December 2018

**Slide 1:**

Scripture begins with the most essential statement that anchors everything else. Everything that follows after Genesis 1:1 is a commentary on the foundational fact that God is the Creator, that life in this universe had a beginning, that God stands right at the center of that moment, in fact, He makes the moment happen. In fact, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT names the first book of the Bible *geneseos*, which means “origins” (and appears also in the summary statement of the first chapter in Gen 2:4).

**Slide 2:**

Throughout the ages, Jewish and Christian commentators understood Moses to be the author and editor of the Pentateuch. Based on biblical chronology and the data concerning the Exodus, Moses lived in the fifteenth century B.C. in a world that was dominated by Egyptian power. Later biblical writers refer to him as the author of the *torah*, the Pentateuch. In fact, Jesus Himself uses the phrase “the law of Moses” to point to the Pentateuch as the first of the three major divisions of the Old Testament (Luke 24:27, 44). Over the past 200 years, modern scholars have developed an alternative hypothesis called “the Documentary Hypothesis” that suggests that there were four different sources (J-E-D-P) that were combined by anonymous editors throughout hundreds of years into, what we now call, the Pentateuch. Many good arguments have been made to question this position. How could the most foundational book of the Hebrew Bible be compiled by an unknown compiler in a time far removed from the events described and still get historical facts right?

**Slide 3:**

Before we continue to talk about “In the beginning” let’s quickly talk about the foundations of these modern methods of studying the Bible that affect their outcomes. These methods all share basic philosophical presuppositions that grew out of the enlightenment period: Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), a German Protestant theologian, formulated three main principles that still provide the philosophical basis for the use of the historical-critical method. They are: (1) the principle of *correlation* (suggesting that every event can only be understood in terms of a specific historical context; God cannot intervene in history because He is not verifiable); (2) the principle of *analogy* (submitting that all historical events described in Scripture need to be judged by present experience and conditions; miracles are thus impossible because they are outside of our system); and (3) the principle of *criticism* (proposing that a critical attitude is the basic approach to research—including also reading the Bible). These three principles do not leave any space for a divine Being outside of our reality. These principles led scholars to develop a number of methods that analyze Scripture from different angles—like any other ancient text, thus leaving God and divine revelation out of the picture. Can you see these principles shine through methods used in your field of study or teaching?

**Slide 4:**

The first two verses of Genesis function as a title or summary statement for the rest of the chapter. The biblical author introduces the story of creation with a bang—not the “big bang” though. Scripture states right from the outset that the universe has a beginning, because God created it out of nothing. The creation stories of Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) cultures usually describe the gods using preexisting material. Genesis 1:1 challenges this concept by simply implying that God created from nothing (see Heb. 11:3).

**Slide 5:**

John 1:1 echoes Genesis 1:1. “The heaven and the earth” can point to our planet and its atmosphere heaven surrounding it; or it could point to the creation of the larger universe. The fact is that God created, using a verb that only applies to His creative activity. The Trinity is an integral part of creation (see John 1:1-3; Gen 1:2).

**Slide 6:**

Genesis 1 offers us the big picture, the bird’s eye view of creation; Genesis 2 focuses on the creation of humanity.

**Slide 7:**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day** | **Form** | **Fill** | **Day** |
| 1 | Light (1:3-5) | Lights (1:14-19) | 4 |
| 2 | Firmament (1:6-8)  Sky  Seas | Inhabitants (1:20-23)  Birds  Fish | 5 |
| 3 | Dry land (1:9-10)  Vegetation (1:11-13) | Land animals (1:24-25)  Human beings (1:26-31) | 6 |
| **Creation and Sanctification of the Sabbath (2:2-3)** | | | |

**Slide 8:**

Each creation day follows the same pattern: (1) God speaks; (2) it happens; (3) God evaluates and sees that it is *good* (or *very good*, Gen. 1:31); (4) time summary statement involving evening and morning.

**Slide 9:**

So what light did God create on Day 1? Two possibilities: (1) the sun, even though the time-signaling function is only introduced in vv. 14-19; (2) the light refers to light emanating from God Himself.

Option 1 seems to be preferable as day divisions exist already; also, the light was created–and God is eternal. Note also that sun and moon are never named in Genesis 1. They are called the “greater light” and the “lesser light” due to their important roles as deities in the surrounding nations. Genesis does not give them names since they do not deserve worship (no name = no worship)

**Slide 10:**

The expression referring to “evening” and “morning” implies a regular day that is part of a regular week. In the Hebrew Bible the word *yom*, “day,” generally refers to a 24-hour period of time, esp. when used with a numeral. The interaction between vegetation, lights, and animals requires a short period. The Sabbath highlight of creation week presupposes a 24-hour day.

**Slide 11:**

God sees each creation day activity and then declares it *good* (1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25) or even *very good* at the end of the sixth day (1:31). The Hebrew notion of “good” does not only have a purely functional dimension (“it works”) but is more comprehensive. Good refers also to aesthetic beauty, especially when associated with seeing (cf. Gen. 6:2; 24:16; Dan. 1:4; 1 Kin. 1:6; 1 Sam. 16:36), as well as to ethical choices (1 Sam. 18:5). **There is no space for sin and evil in a good creation!**

**Slide 12:**

Day 2: The second day of creation (1:6–8) describes the creation of the firmament. The Hebrew term marks an “expanse,” which is most likely an indication of the atmosphere surrounding earth (and is called heaven in v. 8). “God made the expanse” utilizes a verb that is often associated with the work of an artisan (e.g., a potter in Jer. 18:3–4). Again, God speaks and then makes the sky, separating the atmosphere surrounding earth and establishing the crucial water cycle—though described in pre-scientific phenomenological language.

**Slide 13:**

Scripture and Science

The relationship has been discussed for centuries, esp. following the Enlightenment. Christian engagement with science can be described using three models: (1) Science and religion should be considered as separate entities; (2) Science and religion are parallel but separate: both help us discover truth, but they should not cross-pollinate (theistic evolution); (3) Science and religion should interact, while giving God’s revelation priority. Christians are not hostile to science but recognize God as the Creator of natural laws and seek to understand creation based on this premise.

Up to that time of the Enlightenment most scholars had presupposed the existence of God and the truthfulness of the Bible. Science was the handmaid of theology. This relationship changed dramatically when rationalism and materialism became the underlying philosophical presuppositions of science. Thus, reason, logic, and matter were elevated as the all-encompassing building blocks of knowledge and truth. Since God’s existence and His interventions could not be rationally demonstrated or explained scholars began to exclude God from their science. They suggested that the distinction between faith and science made science more objective and faith became a private matter. Over the past centuries scientists have recognized that objectivity is impossible—due to the human factor and our worldviews. Yet, the goal of achieving objectivity still remains a high priority for modern scientists. Scripture, on the other hand, begins with an assumption: In the beginning—there was God. Creation, albeit described in the first chapters of Genesis in phenomenological language, has God as its cause and agent. He speaks—and it is.

**Slide 14:**

Day 3: On the third day of creation (1:9–13) the water is separated from the dry land and vegetation is created. Twice God calls His creation good on the third day. The preparatory act of dividing the dry land and the water created the environment that was needed for fauna, flora, and the human inhabitants of the earth. Water is subject to divine commands and not an independent divine agent as in many creation accounts found around the world. Water can also become an agent of divine judgment (cf. Gen. 6–8). Once dry land has been established God furnishes the land with grass, bushes, and trees.

**Slide 15:**

Day 4: After having created the form and “outline” of the earth, God begins to fill it on the fourth day (1:14–18). Sun, moon, and stars are under the dominion of the Creator God and are not independent, and often times dangerous, deities as most cultures surrounding Israel thought (Ps. 121:5–7). A literal translation of v. 14 would be “let the lights in the expanse be for separating,” supporting the notion that the sun had already been created on the first day but is only given its purpose and function on the fourth day. Similar to v. 5 light played a key role in determining time and marked the distinction between day and night and different seasons.

**Slide 16:**

Day 5: Day 5 witnesses the creation of fish and birds (1:20–23) who are described as living creatures, a Hebrew term that is used for all living beings (including human beings as well [2:7]) and is often translated as “soul.” The biblical text reflects the abundance of life and life-forms that fill both water and sky, including the great sea creatures (cf. Job 3:8; Ps. 74:13–17; Is. 27:1). In ANE myths these creatures represented primeval monsters—in the biblical text they are part of a list of living creatures that all derive their existence from an all-powerful Creator. Each animal species, as well as the flora (1:11) was created according to its kind and followed God’s divine master plan and purpose (1:21). The command to be fruitful and multiply was part of the divine blessing and would result in the filling of the earth. Creation is dynamic and presupposes growth.

**Slide 17:**

Day 6: Day 6 sees the creation of land animals and human beings. You can’t tell me that God doesn’t have humor! Just look at this face. The Hebrew text distinguishes between cattle (i.e., domesticated animals), creeping things (i.e., animals moving on the ground), and beast of the earth (i.e., wild animals). God made each animal species according to its kind (see above).

**Slide 18:**

Day 6 cont.: However, the creation of humanity followed a different pattern. A personal “let us” distinguishes this initial phrase from previous commands. The plurality of the command points to the plurality of the Godhead, even though it does not explicitly refer to the Trinity (see John 1:3; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16). *Image* emphasizes the external, concrete form whereas *likeness* highlights the inward, abstract character qualities (GC, 45). While plants and animals were made according to its kind, humans were made in the image of God and reflected divine characteristics (such as morality, the ability to choose, abstract thinking, and complex language), but they were not inherently divine. Verse 27 represents the first poetic line in Scripture, emphasizing further the significant difference of the creation of humanity from the rest of creation. The distinction between male and female in humanity’s creation points to the complementary nature of the two sexes. Sexuality is a God-given gift and would be the vehicle to realize God’s blessing in v. 28. Furthermore, neither male nor female were made exclusively in the image of God. Only together they formed complete humanity.

**Slide 19:**

Day 6 cont.: “Have dominion” (Gen. 1:28): God’s blessing of future descendants was forward looking and involved not only filling the earth but also representing the Creator as stewards. Have dominion (1:28) referred to supreme rule (1 Kin. 4:24; Ezek. 34:4). Instead of suggesting exploitation of the natural world it rather points to sharing in the divine rule. This dominion is given to humanity because they are created in God’s image and are thus capable of distinguishing between exploitation and stewardship. God took also care of the dietary needs of His creatures. Unlike Mesopotamian deities who required “being fed,” the divine Provider indicated a vegetarian diet as appropriate for human consumption (1:29). Only after the flood did meat become part of the human diet (Gen. 9:3), and even then with restrictions (Lev. 11; Deut. 14; Gen. 7:2–3 establish the difference between clean and unclean before the flood). Habits of diet can become a sign of one’s fidelity towards God (Dan. 1:8; Acts 10:12–14; Col. 2:16). Scripture’s resounding it was very good (1:31) provides a fitting summary statement of God’s forming and filling activities. Order and structure point toward the Creator who enjoys different colors, shapes, and a multiplicity of life.

**Slide 20:**

The seventh-day Sabbath was the culmination of creation and provided time and space for holiness and communion. God did not ***rest*** because He was tired (Is. 40:28), but rather because He cherishes community. God uniquely blessed and sanctified the seventh day, indicating that it belongs to Him in a special way. The blessing of the seventh day was intricately linked to the sanctification of the Sabbath, which reappears in Ex. 20:8–11 as part of the Sabbath command. The Sabbath rest did not originate at Mount Sinai, rather it originated with God’s creative activity during the creation week. The rest motif pointed beyond the Sabbath. In a post-fall world we are reminded that salvation rest is closely linked to Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:1–10)—we can truly rest in God’s grace and from our own works, and look expectantly toward the ultimate rest with our Creator and Savior.

**Slide 21:**

Genesis 2 offers a closer focus on humans and their garden home. God is portrayed in more intimate terms (His personal name; the detailed description of the creation of humanity). God forms Adam (who is taken from *’adamah*, “earth”) like a potter forms a clay vessel; He breathes in spirit. The divine life-giving breath of God transformed man from dust to a creature made in the image of God and continually dependent on God (Job 27:3; cf. the similar imagery in Ezek. 37:9–10). Both animals and humans are described as *khayah* (“living” Gen. 1:20, 21, 24, 30; 2:7, 19) but it is only humankind whose life forces came directly from the Creator. This image of close physical contact emphasizes intimacy.

**Slide 22:**

Choices: God created Adam and Eve with the capacity to choose. That too is a reflection of having been created in the image of God. ***Now*** captures well the link between the creation narrative and the story of the fall. The conjunction is used to highlight this important connection and is typical of Hebrew narratives. After a perfect creation the unsuspecting reader expects another story full of “good” or “very good” things. However, a creature, ***more cunning*** (*‘arum*) than any other animal, becomes the mouthpiece of the tempter and antagonist of God. ***Cunning*** can be both negative and positive in the OT (Prov. 12:16, 23; 13:16). In this context the use suggests a negative connotation.

Hebrew readers would catch the play on sounds with ***naked*** (*‘arumim*) in 2:25. Cunningness moved the human population of the garden from a state of perfect harmony to a sense of shameful self-consciousness, recognizing one’s nakedness (3:10–11). The craftiness of the serpent is highlighted by her ability to speak and by the wording of her question. The question was not a frontal attack but represents a more subtle approach. In ANE mythology snakes were often opposing the creator-god. Job 26:12–14 seems to refer to the primeval snake that God defeated and Rev. 12:9 and 20:2 identify the snake as Satan, the one who challenged God at the beginning of the cosmic conflict in heaven (Is. 14:12–14). The serpent’s question does not outright contradict God’s command, but only adds the negative ***not***, which suddenly transforms God’s loving command into an absolute prohibition. It sounded similar, yet communicated something entirely different—a good reminder of the power of words.

Eve’s first mistake is to enter into a dialogue with the serpent. We may consider ourselves solidly grounded, balanced, and careful thinkers but discussion with the master of deception will ultimately lead to our downfall. Eve is no match for her opponent and is immediately moved into a defensive position. Her wavering is highlighted by the final words of v. 3, ***lest you die***, which did not reflect the clear divine order (2:17). Adam and Eve do not immediately die, but separated from God and without access to the tree of life (3:22–24) their bodies begin to weaken and ultimately they die (5:5). Their existence is destined to disappear forever. The snake’s bold challenge to the divine order is tempered with the insinuation of an ulterior divine motive. Eve is still listening. The promise of knowledge (***your eyes will be opened***) is alluring. In Scripture God at times opens eyes for people to see the real balance of power in the cosmic conflict (Gen. 21:19; 2 Kin. 6:17, 20). The opening phrase of Gen. 3:6 mimics Gen. 1 where God ***saw*** and it was ***good***, suggesting that Eve has usurped the Creator’s role in determining what was ***good***. Suspicion of an all-powerful God, and our limited understanding and selfish interest still warp our recognition of good and evil and often leads us to call good what is really evil (Is. 5:20). Eve’s attraction affected three key areas: taste, vision, and intellect. James 1:14–15 details the same sequence in temptations. The Hebrew term ***desirable*** describes covetousness in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:17). After Eve has eaten she gives the fruit to Adam. While Eve was deceived (1 Tim. 2:14) Adam chose consciously to eat. As a result of their eyes being ***opened*** both Adam and Eve ***knew***—yet this knowledge involved shame. They immediately set out to cover themselves, providing the first illustration of righteousness by works.

**Slide 23:**

The entrance of death: The result of Adam and Eve’s choice is death. Ellen White describes how horrific the experience of the first fall season was for Adam and Eve. Yet God does not abandon His creation. He searches for humanity, asks questions, and then pronounces judgment (3:8-24). That’s how God always works for He is a righteous judge—it’s also a good illustration of the pre-Advent judgment. God works didactically, using questions. “Where are you?” (v. 9), “Who told you?” (v. 11), “Have you eaten?” (v. 11). All three questions are directed at Adam (“you” is singular) who immediately begins pointing fingers. Sin had changed forever the relationship between God and humanity and between husband and wife. Eve in turn points to the serpent as the cause of her deception (v. 13). Indirectly both Adam and Eve insinuate that God was responsible for sin (***the woman whom* you *gave***).

**Slide 24:**

The proto-Gospel—the plan in miniature: Genesis 3:15 is known as the first gospel promise (or *protoevangelium*) and has been interpreted as the first messianic prophecy. Enmity between the serpent and the descendants of Eve would ultimately lead to a fight unto death. The ***seed*** of the woman is singular and can refer to an immediate offspring (Gen. 4:25; 15:3), a distant descendant, or a large group of descendants. David is promised a seed (2 Sam. 7:12), a promise that contains also multiple reference points. Paul applies the Abrahamic seed promise to Jesus Christ but also includes the church in Christ as Abraham’s seed (Gal. 3:16, 29). The Hebrew term appears repeatedly in the contexts of genealogies, leaving the reader wondering when *the* seed will finally appear. The male seed would ***bruise*** the head of the serpent (NIV ***crush***) while the serpent would bruise the heel (NIV ***strike***). Since the Hebrew term is the same for both actions the verb communicates similar enmity between both opponents—yet with different results due to the nature of the organs involved.

**Slide 25:**

**Beginnings**

1. Theology (who and how is God?)
2. Anthropology (who are we? What makes us human?)
3. Sociology (family, marriage, and larger community)
4. Cosmology (origins of the cosmos)
5. Soteriology (plan of salvation in light of creation and fall)
6. Ecology (creation care)

Beginnings are foundational—and affect every element of who we are and what we do.

Creation is also closely linked to re-creation. Following the fall, we are all in need of salvation. The fact that the Creator is also my Saviour assures me of His ability and the surety of His grace. Salvation is secure in Christ.

Slide 26:

**Applications**

* Beyond the walls of our churches, what significance does the biblical concept of creation have in my life?
* What does it mean for my classroom? I am teaching maths or literature—not religion or Bible?
* How can I communicate the foundational nature of biblical creation to my students who live increasingly in a digital and virtual reality?

**Slide 27:**

* Where does this lead us?
* Why is the biblical concept of creation so foundational?
* Is there a belief in the second coming of Jesus without recognizing a real and literal creation where everything began?