

In the Beginning... Creation Genesis 1

HOW and WHEN did God create the world, and how can we reconcile that with science? That is perhaps the most frequent question I've gotten over the years as a pastor! It's a good question, and we'll talk about it in depth, but we must never forget that Genesis 1 wasn't written to answer that question. It was written to tell us WHO created and WHY. Those are the questions that really matter in life, and God's answers will fill you with peace and joy!

Next week we'll start new series: Cover-to-Cover – 3 sermons – walk you thru whole Bible
Today... we'll prepare for that series by going deep in just Gen 1 – turn there

This won't be a typical sermon – will feel more like a college class – no way around that!

- A lot of people in a college town wrestle with how to reconcile the Creation account with science – this question comes up often
- Can't answer it in a 20-min sermon – really have to dig deep

This is a complicated chapter made even more difficult by the fact that most of us miss the point when read it

- Like the time I took my son to the only Aggie football game he's ever attended
- It was not fun – he was too young, and he didn't get the point of being there
- All he wanted to do in Kyle Field was ride the escalator – up and down and up and down!
- He could care less about the game – too far away – too hard to see
- After the Aggies scored their first touchdown and that cannon fired – he was done!
- Back to escalator, dad!
- He didn't get the point of being there – didn't understand what it was all about

So many people make that same mistake with Genesis 1

- **we miss the point - we lose sight of what the passage is really about**
- **we get caught up in minor things - like riding the escalator - and miss the big idea**

What are the minor things in Gen 1 that distract us? The questions HOW & WHEN

- Most people assume Gen 1 is about HOW and WHEN God made the world
- That's what many of us fixate on when we read Gen 1
 - o Is earth young or old? Did God use evolution? How does it line up with science?
- The most important thing I want you to grasp this morning:
 - o **Genesis 1 is NOT primarily about HOW or WHEN the world was made**
- Those are modern questions we ask... not the questions the Israelites would have asked

To understand Gen 1, you must read it like an Israelite living 3500 yrs ago

- You don't know anything about science
- All you know is that life is hard, brief, painful, and scary
- Spent your whole life a slave in Egypt
- Raised hearing about Egyptian gods & how they made the world - and it wasn't pretty!
 - o Many gods – finite - not good - immoral, competitive, cruel
 - o They cared nothing about you - humanity just slave labor for the gods
- Now you've been led out of Egypt into harsh desert of the Sinai Peninsula...

- ...by a guy named Moses who claims to know a great God who's promised you land
 - o The God of Moses did powerful stuff back in Egypt - 10 plagues – Red Sea
 - o But is He powerful enough to keep you alive in the desert?
 - o Will the gods of Canaan get in His way?
 - o Will He get tired of you and abandon you like the gods of Egypt would?

The Israelites didn't care about the mechanics of creation They wanted to know: does this God have my back?

- When it's 110°F and there's no food and enemies are coming... Can we trust this God?

With that context in mind, let's read Genesis 1 and hear it as they would have heard it

- Read the whole thing at once - that's how it was meant to be read
- **Read Gen 1**

First, point out 3 things that would have been clear to original audience

1) This isn't a myth

- o The Israelites took it for granted that this was a real account - described truth
- o Believed it was revealed by God directly to Moses - not made up

2) It is apologetics

- o They hear it as Moses proving our God is better than the gods of Egypt
- o Hear him use same language & imagery they heard in Egyptian creation stories
 - E.g. - Day 2 – Egyptians had same descriptions: waters above & below; sky
 - But all 3 were gods - sky god stepped in to stop sex between others
 - Same imagery in Gen 1 - but radically different message
- o Conrad Hyer, "Each day of creation...dismisses an additional cluster of deities...."
- o So to the Israelites: Gen 1 wasn't a science textbook... it was a **smackdown on the gods of Egypt!**

3) It is poetry

- o When I say, "**Roses are red, violets are blue, sugar is sweet, and so are you**"...
 - how do you know that's poetry?
 - you observe the defining marks of English poetry: rhyme and rhythm
- o **The defining mark Hebrew poetry = repetition** - repeated words & structures
- o Guess what? You see a lot of repetition in Gen 1!
 - "God said..." "evening... morning..." "it was good"
- o To the Israelites Gen 1 would have read like a poem
- o Tim Keller: to original audience, this would have sounded like a song, not a textbook

Gen 1 isn't myth or textbook... it's a poem that declares our God is better than the gods of Egypt

With that in mind, let's now look at the details:

Chapter begins with a summary statement: read v1

- "**the heavens and the earth**" - one phrase = "the universe"
- "**created**" by God - *bara*
 - o means "to create something fresh / new"
 - o in the Bible – it's only God who "bara's"
 - o humans can make stuff; Satan can twist stuff; only God can create something new!
- God **creates the universe out of nothing**
 - o **Heb 11:3**

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.

o No preexisting materials - created out of nothing

- But there are a couple deficiencies with creation - 2 things that aren't quite right yet...

Read v2

- The earth exists but there are 2 problems...
 - o **"formless"** - like a lump of clay that hasn't been shaped into anything
 - unformed lump of clay is useless - can't hold water or food
 - the earth is useless at this point - can't support life
 - o Result: **"void"** - empty - no plants, no animals, no people
- Earth is just a glob of ground covered by a chaotic, unending ocean - no sky, air, light
 - o Not yet ready for what God wants to accomplish with it
- So at end of v2 - God's Spirit comes - hovers with power over the chaos

And in v3, God begins to fix these 2 deficiencies - that's what Days 1-6 are about

- **Days 1-3 - gives it form**
- **Days 4-6 - fills it**

Day 1

- God creates light & differentiates it from darkness
- There are now 2 distinct realms: day & night
- He has begun to bring order to creation

Notice 4 significant things...

1) All God does is speak

- o Each day begins with "Then God said..."
- o Creation is a speech act of God - no tools required
- o Radically different from creation stories in most ancient cultures
 - creation came through war or sex among the gods
- o NO: Creation is a product of God's all-powerful speech
 - He speaks & all matter & energy obey!

2) God often separates rather than creates

- o Makes light - then separates it from darkness & gives each its own domain
- o Much of Gen 1 is about God separating & ordering rather than just creating
- o He is a God who loves order - major theme of creation

3) God names what He's made

- o "day... night... sky... land... sea..."
- o = an act of sovereignty – He has the right to define what it is - means He is king
- o gets interesting in ch2 when God let's someone else give out some names!

4) God declares it "good"

- o At end of almost every day, God declares His work "good" or even "very good"
- o = God's evaluation of creation – affirming that it is exactly what He intended
- o So notice: **nothing is bad, evil, or broken in Gen 1** - that doesn't come till later

Day 2

- starts with earth covered by unending water
- God divides that water with a horizontal plane & separates it
- the space between them He calls "sky" - better translation than "heaven" in v8

Day 3

- Focuses on the waters below

- o Pulls them back & causes dry land to appear
- o Sets boundaries & names them - land & ocean
- God immediately begins to work this land - He covers it with all “kinds” of plant life
 - o “kind” - not a scientific term for “species”
 - o We don’t know how broad that word is
 - Did God create every species of plant individually
 - Or did He just create one type of “plant” & let it evolve?

Deficiency 1 is now fixed - the earth has FORM

- God has made multiple realms throughout creation: day, night; sky, land, sea

Now God begins to fix the 2nd deficiency - all these realms are still void/empty So God fills each realm with inhabitants - Days 4-6

Day 4

- Creates the sun to fill the day and rule over it
- Creates the moon and the stars to fill and rule over the night

Day 5

- Creates fish to fill the ocean and birds to fill the sky
- Again don’t know how broad “kinds” is meant to be

Day 6

- This day stands out from all others.
 - o every other day is “a third day... a fourth day...”
 - o but this is “the sixth day” - culmination, goal
- While the other days are “good” - this day is “very good”
- Begins like Day 5 - God fills the land with inhabitants - all animal life
 - o That’s “good” ... what’s “very good” is what He does next...
- Creates - us - humanity
 - o *bara* again - something entirely new
 - o Unlike all other forms of life... we alone are made “in His image”
 - o You cannot overstate how important that is!
 - o We’ll talk much more about that next week
- We are designed in God’s image to fill the land - this is our realm - & rule the world

Both deficiencies are now fixed - earth is formed & filled - God declares it “very good”

And with Creation complete, the Creator finally rests - Day 7

Now on to the question everyone wants to know...

How do we reconcile all we just learned in Gen 1 with modern science?

- This is, again, not the point of Gen 1... but it is a fair question to ask
- What does Genesis 1 teach us about HOW and WHEN God made the world?
- How do we reconcile what it says with science... and particularly with evolution?

First, we have to define that word... EVOLUTION

- In some Christian circles “evolution” is a bad thing; evil; false
- No! Evolution simply means: **genetic change over successive generations**
- All of us believe life changes and adapts to pressures in the environment

- One of the most brilliant features of creation! Life continually improves itself!
- **We all believe in evolution... question is: How broadly has evolution been at work?**
- **Many people outside the church believe evolution has done ALL THE WORK**
 - = Naturalistic evolution
 - There is no Creator guiding the development of life
 - Only evolution working naturally over lots of time to create all the life we see
 - We reject that view because it denies the existence of a Creator (cross off)
- **Within the church, some people believe evolution has done MOST OF THE WORK**
 - = Theistic evolution
 - God created first spark of life and then guided its development through natural evolutionary processes into all the diversity of life we see today...
 - ...with 1 exception: us - somehow specially created - not just evolved monkeys
- **Finally, some people believe evolution has done only a LITTLE OF THE WORK**
 - = confined evolution
 - Using language of Gen 1 - God created distinct “kinds” of creatures
 - Then evolution diversified them into all the life we see today
 - Now again how broad the “kinds” in Gen 1 are is up for debate
 - Did God create one cat-like creature that evolved into all 114 species
 - Or did He create every species of cat uniquely – don’t know
- Key: only the first view is at odds with the Bible
- We believe that evolution is at work in creation to some extent – either lots or little

With that clarification in mind, now let’s talk about...

The 6 MAJOR INTERPRETATIONS of Genesis 1 held by evangelical Christians

- All 6 of these views are biblical and permissible for Christians to hold

1) Young Earth Creationism (YEC)

- Gen 1 describes 6 consecutive, literal 24-hour days - so creation in 144 hours
 - All by instant supernatural miracle not by natural processes over long time
 - Any part of creation that looks old was simply created to look that way
- Creation is in fact quite recent – just a few days older than first human
 - If genealogies in the Bible are comprehensive, then ~8000 years ago
- YEC hold to narrowly confined evolution - no time for much change
- **Advantages:**
 - Simplest reading of the text and easiest view to explain
 - when you combine “day” with “evening and morning” always means “24 hours”
 - most common interpretation of Christians throughout history
- **Disadvantages:**
 - Chapter 2 - different order & explanation
 - suggests something’s not meant to be taken literally
 - Days 1 & 4 – somehow you have light without sources of light
 - What does “day, morning, evening” even mean without sun & moon?
 - Doesn’t line up with consensus of modern science
 - e.g. we can see stars billions of light years away
 - o how if they’re only 8000 years old?
 - o unless God bent the laws of physics or created the stars
 - + all the light from them to our eyes
 - YEC answer, “God created the universe with the appearance of age - just like Adam & Eve were created full grown, not as babies!”
 - OK, but leads to 4th problem...
 - The Universe is not what it appears - looks old, but is in fact young

- o Why would God do that?
- o Creation was designed to reveal God to us. But if I can't trust what creation is saying about itself, how can I trust what it says about God?
- So YEC has strengths and weaknesses - like every other view!

2) Day/Age

- **Each "day" = an "age" = a long period of time – as it does occasionally in scripture**
 - o read 2:4 - ch1: 6 days; ch2: 1 day - clearly both can't be a literal day
 - o These days could be ages lasting thousands, millions, even billions of years long
- Often called **"Progressive Creationism"** - God created progressively over these ages
 - o ...through both miraculous & natural processes
- **In this view: the language of Gen 1 is experiential, not scientific**
 - o Not describing scientific processes; describing what earth would look like to you
 - o Sun and stars had to exist long before earth – that's how solar systems work
 - o So Day 4 – God gradually cleared the atmosphere of debris so we could see sun...
- **Advantages:**
 - o "Day" can indeed refer to a long period of time
 - o And you can better fit with the consensus of modern science
- **But there are a couple disadvantages:**
 - o "Day" + "morning and evening" always 24-hrs in Old Testament - this would be unique
 - o Still scientific problems - order of events challenging to fit with science

3) Days of Proclamation or Revelation

- 6 days are literal, sequential 24-hour days... but God isn't actually creating on these days
- He is simply proclaiming what He will do, or revealing what He's already done
 - o If it's proclamation – it's before – these 6 days could be billions of years ago when God told the angels what He was about to do
 - o If it's revelation – it's after – these 6 days occurred 3500 years ago when God spoke to Moses on Mt Sinia and told Moses what to write down in this chapter
- Either way: it's like when a football coach draws a play on the board - all the x's and o's
 - o Gen 1 = God drawing out the play either before or after it actually takes place
- So how did the earth actually form and life come to exist? Through natural processes
- **Advantages:**
 - o You get to stick with "day" being literal 24-hours
 - o And you can fit easily with modern science
- **Disadvantage:**
 - Doesn't seem to do justice to the language of ch1
 - God speaks... "and it was so"... "and it was good"
 - Commands seem to be immediately followed by action

4) Gap Theory

- Hypothesizes that there's a gap of unspecified time between v1 & v2 in which an earlier creation was ruined
 - o probably by Satan's fall - it comes under God's judgment
 - o So **"formless and void"** don't mean "incomplete" - they mean "broken" or "evil"
 - o So v3-31 are NOT about creation; they are about **restoration** of a broken world
- **Advantages:**
 - o "formless and void" are often bad things in scripture!
 - o Fits easily with modern science because in this view Gen 1 is silent on original creation
 - Dinosaurs, fossils, distant galaxies - all part of original creation
- **Disadvantages:**

- o Not obvious - chapter seems to be about creating, not restoring
- o Ultimately, an argument from silence!
 - Hebrew grammar does not suggest any gap between 1 & 2

5) Preparation of the Land

- Fascinating! Based on the definition of the Hebrew word: ***eretz*** = “earth” in Gen 1
 - o but throughout most of the Hebrew Bible = “land”
 - o Usually not just any piece of land – the Promised Land – God’s land
 - Where Eden located – land God will promise to Abraham in ch12
- Maybe Gen 1 isn’t about God creating earth... it’s about Him preparing the Promised Land
 - o That’s almost certainly what would have come to mind for original audience
 - had no sense of a globe - eretz = land they could see
- If so, then Gen 1 silent about how God created planet
 - o could be by natural means over billions of years
- But at some point, God began to prepare that particular piece of land
 - o began covered in water, clouded in darkness
 - o God formed it and filled it with life that could have existed elsewhere on planet
 - o Then created this unique creature that didn’t exist anywhere else - us - to fill & rule
- **Advantages:**
 - o That is indeed how the word *eretz* is almost always used in the Old Testament
 - o It lines up with this important theme in the Old Testament - God’s gift of the Promised Land
 - o And it makes Gen 1 easy to reconcile with science because it’s not about the earth
- **Disadvantages:**
 - o I can’t prove this view - nothing clearly states Gen 1 is about just Promised Land
 - o Couple passages in Exodus that say God created the “heavens & earth” in 6 days
 - Grammar not the same as Gen 1, so it may not apply. It’s hard to tell.

6) Literary Framework

- **This view is built on the observation that Gen 1 is poetry**
 - o If it’s poetry then, yes, it does reveal theological truth
 - o But not precise scientific data or sequence of events – poetry isn’t meant to do that
- **This view tries to do justice to the striking similarities to Egyptian creation poetry**
 - o Moses uses imagery of their creation stories to show our God is better than theirs
- **So the creation days are not literal, sequential days...**
- **...they’re a literary device used to craft a poem about God’s power in creation**
- **Advantages**
 - o Does justice to the poetic elements that are clearly here in chapter 1
 - o Explains the surprising repetition, especially between days 1 & 4
 - The Israelites would have recognized that repetition as poetry, not history
 - o Easy to align with modern science
- **Disadvantages**
 - o Complex view - challenging to explain
 - o I can’t prove it - can’t go back to 1500BC and ask an Israelite if this is a poem!
 - o Strips Gen 1 of really any scientific content

Alright, so which do I think is right? I don’t know!!

- Lean towards last 2 views
- but there’s problems with all of these views
- and there’s godly scholars far smarter than me behind all of them

Honestly, I don’t think I’ll know till God tells me!

And you know what, that's okay!!

because Genesis 1 is not about HOW or WHEN the world was made

It's about WHO made it and WHY

- That's what the Israelites in the wilderness needed to know
- They were struggling to trust this God of Moses
- **Genesis wasn't written to a convention of scientists... it was written to a people on a journey of faith**

They needed to know:

1) WHO created this world – the One Almighty God of Moses

- Not the cruel, immoral gods of Egypt
- J.I. Packer
"The message of these two chapters is this: 'You have seen the sea? The sky? Sun, moon, and stars? You have watched the birds and the fish?...You have marveled at the wonderful complexity of human beings...? Fantastic, isn't it? Well now, meet the one who is behind it all!'"

2) WHY He created the world – for us

- **WHY far more important than WHEN or HOW!**
- **Did you notice: not all steps of creation were equal? One rose above the rest: Us!!**
 - everything else is "good" - we are "very good" ...
 - We are the pinnacle, the climax of creation
- **Rest of creation made for us: to provide a good place for us to know & serve God**
 - Days 1-6 are how God made the earth ready for you to live in!
 - It was "formless" and "void" - couldn't support human life
 - God fixes that to make a home for us to live and rule
- **This whole chapter is about how much God loves us!**
 - He literally moved heaven and earth to create a home for us!
 - All that beauty in this world... that's for YOU! It was made for you!
- We get so caught up in the HOW we forget - **this isn't about science - it's about love!**
 - The unmerited love of the Almighty Creator for us

So let me ask...

Do you know this Almighty God who so loved you He made the world for you?

- He loves us so much – not only did He create the world for us, but when humans fell into sin and evil – He created a way of salvation – His Son Jesus lived, died, rose for us
- In love, He offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who will simply say "Thank you!"
- Galileo: "The Bible is not intended to show us how the heavens go but how to go to heaven"
- As Galileo said... it's through faith in this God and in the gift of His Son

For all of us who have believed...

- Fine to study the science and debate the views over HOW and WHEN God created
 - But do it graciously...because the HOW and WHEN of Gen 1 is not a gospel issue
 - it's not nearly as important as the WHO and WHY
 - YEC, day/age, theistic evolutionists - we're all on the same team!
 - Don't waste your energy arguing with one another
 - Focus on introducing people to this powerful and loving God