

## “Creative Genius” (Genesis 1:1-2)

A New Year marks a season of new beginnings. Thus, many people begin the New Year with “New Year’s resolutions.” The goal is to maintain these resolutions throughout the year...or realistically, at least through the month of January. Those of us that keep our resolutions into February are especially disciplined people. Since most well-intentioned people fail to honor their resolutions, I’d like to suggest starting a New Year with a new study through the book of new beginnings—Genesis.

The purpose of our journey through Genesis is to acquaint ourselves with the roots of our faith, giving us a solid base on which to begin our New Year with God. Perhaps it has been awhile since you frequented the pages of the first book of the Bible. Here is a simple test to see if you need to familiarize yourself with the truths of Genesis. I want to share with you the “*Top Ten Ways to Know You Need to Study Genesis*”:

1. Your pastor announces a new sermon series from Genesis and you check the Table of Contents to see if it’s in your Bible.
2. You think Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had a few hits during the sixties.
3. You open to Genesis and a WWII War Bond falls out.
4. Your favorite Old Testament patriarch is Hercules.
5. A small family of woodchucks has taken up residence in the Book.
6. You become frustrated because Charlton Heston isn’t listed in your Bible’s concordance.
7. You catch your kids looking at pictures in their Bibles of the garden of Eden and you demand, “Who gave you this trash?”
8. You think the Tower of Babel is in Paris, France.
9. You keep falling for it every time your pastor says, “Please turn to the book of Melchizedek, ch. 14.”
10. The kids are asking you too many questions about your unusual bedtime Bible story: “Noah the Shepherd Boy and His Ark of Many Colors.”

I want to begin our much-needed study of the book of Genesis by summarizing the book and noting some unique and interesting facts about the book itself. Moses wrote the book of Genesis. Chronologically speaking, it is interesting to note that the first three chapters of Genesis cover over a third of the Bible’s history! God has packed a lot of time into three chapters of the Bible. Genesis can be easily divided into two main sections. The first section, chapters 1-11, has to do with the physical universe and with creation, but in the last part, chapters 12-50, God begins to personally deal with man and with His chosen people. God was more interested in Abraham than He was in the entire created universe. What that tells me is that God is more interested in you and attaches more value to you than He does to the entire physical universe. God emphasizes the value of His human creation over the physical universe throughout the book of Genesis.

Let me illustrate this further by way of the four Gospels in the New Testament. Of the 89 chapters that are in the four Gospel accounts, only four chapters cover the first 30 years of Jesus’ life while 85 chapters cover the last three years of His life. (Twenty-seven of those chapters cover the final eight days of His life.) Where does that indicate that the Spirit of God is placing the emphasis? I am sure you will agree that the emphasis is on the last part, the last eight days covered by the 27 chapters. And what is that last part all about? It’s about the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:1-19). That is the most important part of the Gospel record. God has given the Gospels that you might believe that Christ died for your sins and that He was raised from the dead to give you eternal life (John 20:30-31). That is essential. That is the all-important truth that God wants to emphasize. In the same way, the all-important truth of Genesis is that the God of the universe loves and values you more than anything else.

On Christmas Day 1968, the three astronauts of Apollo 8 circled the dark side of the moon and headed for home. Suddenly, over the horizon of the moon rose the blue and white earth, garlanded by the glistening light of the sun against the black void of space. Those sophisticated men, trained in science and technology, did not utter Einstein's name. They did not even go to the poets, the lyricists, or the dramatists. Only one thing could capture the awe-inspiring thrill of this magnificent observation. Billions heard the voice from outer space as the astronaut read it: "In the beginning God"—the only concept worthy enough to describe that unspeakable awe, unutterable in any other way. "In the beginning God created"—the invasive, the inescapable sense of the infinite and the eternal.<sup>1</sup>

There is no other way to approach the book of Genesis but to recognize that our God is awesome. Carefully read these words: "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth**"<sup>2</sup> (1:1).<sup>3</sup> There are two purposes in this opening statement: (1) to identify God as the Creator and (2) to explain the origin of the world. The origin does not imply that absolutely nothing existed or had happened before this. The separate creation of angels and other heavenly beings is already assumed (see 1:26).

The first three words in our English Bible ("**In the beginning**") translate a single Hebrew word *bereshit*.<sup>4</sup> This word does not necessarily connote a brief period of time. This means the Bible never intended for us to pinpoint the age of the universe. We cannot say for certain when God created the universe or how long He took to create it. He may have taken billions of years or He may have taken six 24-hour days. The biblical text does not satisfy our raging curiosity. It simply says, "**In the beginning God...**"<sup>5</sup>

This is an important acknowledgement. The debate of the age of the earth has brought disunity into the Christian community. Those that hold to a young earth criticize old earth Christians. Those that hold to an old earth criticize young earth Christians as having little upstairs. Yet, when all of the crossfire concludes, we must humble ourselves and acknowledge that this is a non-essential issue. When we state or imply otherwise, we are grieving the Lord.

In my previous pastorate, I developed a friendship with a brilliant student at Oregon State University. He was pursuing a PhD in biology. When we began talking about spiritual subjects, the topic of creation came up. My friend believed that God created the universe but he believed the scientific evidence clearly points to an old earth. I agree with this assessment. So I began to explain to him that there are several views proposed by conservative, biblical scholars. Unfortunately, in his college and graduate training, he had been told that to be a Christian you had to subscribe to a literal 24-hour view of creation. I told him that nothing could be further from the truth. I then began to share the Gospel with him and had the privilege of leading him to faith in Christ.

Now, I don't want to suggest that this is what typically happens. It is not. My point is this: The Christian community has been guilty of making the age of the universe a stickler issue. As a result, we turn many people off and we turn many people with a scientific background away from faith in Christ. We really have to pick and choose our battles as Christians. To be fair to the Bible, we have a responsibility to teach the clear tenets of Scripture (e.g., sin, hell, Christ as the only way to God). These are difficult enough; let's not further complicate matters. The issue is not *when* the universe was created; the issue is *who* created the universe.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately, the Bible tells us. The next keyword is the word "**God,**" a rendering from the Hebrew word *Elohim*,<sup>7</sup> which shows that the Creator is the beginning of all things.<sup>8</sup> The word *Elohim* occurs 32 times in Genesis 1. The point that is being made is that God existed before all things. There is no attempt in Genesis to prove His existence, because His existence is assumed to be true. From a biblical perspective, only a fool says that there is no God (Ps 14:1). So the Bible just begins talking about God.<sup>9</sup>

It is worth noting that the word *Elohim* is a plural word. Even in the first sentence of the Bible, God lets us know that He is plural even as He is singular. Later, in 1:26, He shows this in the creation of man because He says, “Let us make man in *Our* own image” (emphasis added). But then in the very next verse He says, “God created man in *His* own image” (emphasis added). The text moves freely from singular to plural. Why? Because our God is made up of three Persons.<sup>10</sup>

The Bible says that God “**created.**”<sup>11</sup> The Bible only uses the word “create” with God as the subject. It never has any man or woman as a subject. It never says any person “created” anything. Nowadays we often speak of people being “creative.” It is all right to speak that way but we ought to notice that the Bible specially reserves the word “create” for things only God can do.<sup>12</sup> This verse and many others clearly teach that God made all things out of nothing. An artist creates a picture, but he uses acrylics or oils. An engineer constructs a building, but it is made of glass, steel, or concrete. Just think of what that tells us about the power, wisdom, and glory of God. What an awesome creator God!

One day a scientist approached God and said, “God, we don’t need You anymore. Science has finally figured out a way to create life out of nothing. We can now do what You did in the beginning.” “Oh, is that so?” replies God. “Yes,” says the scientist, “We can take dirt and form it into a human likeness, and breath life into it, thus, creating man.” “Well, that’s very interesting,” God said. “Show Me.” So the scientist reaches down, grabs a handful of dirt, and starts to mold the soil into the shape of a man. “No, no,” interrupts God, “get your own dirt!”

God created the earth, the universe, and everything that exists. This fact is certain. Several years ago a scientist wrote an article entitled, *Seven Reasons Why I Believe in God*. He argued his case as follows:

1. Consider the rotation of the earth. Our globe spins on its axis at the rate of one thousand miles an hour. If it were just a hundred miles an hour, our days and nights would be ten times as long. The vegetation would freeze in the long night or it would burn in the long day; and there could be no life.
2. Consider the heat of the sun. Twelve thousand degrees at surface temperature, and we’re just far enough away to be blessed by that terrific heat. If the sun gave off half its radiation, we would freeze to death. If it gave off one half more, we would all be crispy critters.
3. Consider the twenty-three degree slant of the earth. If it were different than that, the vapors from the oceans would ice over the continents. There could be no life.
4. Consider the moon. If the moon were fifty thousand miles away rather than its present distance, twice each day giant tides would inundate every bit of land mass on this earth.
5. Consider the crust of the earth. Just a little bit thicker and there could be no life because there would be no oxygen.
6. Consider the thinness of the atmosphere. If our atmosphere was just a little thinner, the millions of meteors now burning themselves out in space would plummet this earth into oblivion.
7. Finally, the fact that man is capable of grasping the idea of the existence of God is in itself sufficient evidence.

He concluded by saying, “These are reasons why I believe in God.”<sup>13</sup>

The last four words in this verse, **“the heavens and the earth”** describe the entire universe. The Hebrew language has no word for “universe,” so instead the author used the phrase “heavens and earth.” This figure of speech, called a merism, refers to EVERYTHING (the sun, moon, stars, plants, rocks, rivers, mountains, and everything else).<sup>14</sup> God created absolutely everything!

Genesis 1:1 offers several repudiations of views opposing biblical faith. For example, it repudiates atheism, because Genesis assumes the existence of God. Furthermore, Genesis sets forth a personal God, as well as a universe that was created by God. Second, Genesis repudiates agnosticism, because in reality God does reveal Himself, as well as what He has done. Third, Genesis refutes pantheism, because God is absolutely transcendent to what He creates. Fourth, Genesis repudiates polytheism, as the Scriptures make clear that only one God created all things. Fifth, Genesis repudiates materialism, because there was a clear distinction between God and His material creation. Matter did have a beginning; matter is not eternal. Sixth, Genesis repudiates naturalism. We know that nature, itself, has its own origins. Seventh, Genesis repudiates dualism, as God was certainly alone when He created. Eighth, Genesis rejects humanism. It is God, and not man, who is the ultimate reality. Ninth, Genesis repudiates evolutionism, because God did create all things.

Now back to our text. In 1:2, Moses writes, **“The earth was<sup>15</sup> formless and void,<sup>16</sup> and darkness was over the surface of the deep,<sup>17</sup> and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”<sup>18</sup>** First, we must note that the word **“earth”** (*eretz*) can be translated either “earth” or “land.” In this context, the translation “land” is preferred. When we hear the word “earth” in our scientific age, we generally think of the big jewel we are on which orbits around the sun. But the term did not generally suggest such a meaning to those in the pre-space-age time when Genesis was written, for they did not generally know of the “global” dimensions of the planet.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the term “earth,” (*eretz*) in Genesis, does not usually refer to the entire planet, but to a specific section of land.<sup>20</sup>

Second, the phrase **“formless and void”** is a Hebrew figure of speech<sup>21</sup> that uses two independent words connected by “and” to express a single concept. For example, “nice and warm” means “nicely warm.” The word **“formless”** means undeveloped, like a blank chalkboard. The word **“void”** means that the land had no people on it (cf. Isa 45:18). Thus, the phrase means the land was yet unfashioned and uninhabited.<sup>22</sup> To summarize: 1:1 explains the origin of the universe and 1:2 pictures the land before God prepared it for human beings. Light is needful for man. Ground is needed instead of seas. There has to be a provision of rain. The sky has to come into being. Vegetation has to be created for people. The sun and the moon are for people to tell time. The animals are for humankind.<sup>23</sup>

How did this shaping of creation for the human race take place? **“The Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”** God used the Holy Spirit to prepare the world for the human race. Since this is the first reference to the Holy Spirit in the Bible, it gives us an idea what He will always do. The Holy Spirit is the One that gives life, the One who gives form and direction to our lives.

It is interesting that salvation also follows a similar pattern to what we find here. When God first comes to us He finds our lives empty and without shape or purpose. Then He speaks into our lives. His Spirit moves upon us. This is what Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” God’s ways of working in creation and salvation are similar. Salvation is His restoration of creation, using a similar pattern. God comes to us in our emptiness. He finds our darkness, emptiness, and hopelessness. His creative Word brings life to us. Again, Paul says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.<sup>24</sup> The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17, ESV).<sup>25</sup>

The implications of this are great. ***First, if God is the Creator of all things out of nothing, then He owns all things and all people absolutely*** (Ps 24:1; 89:11; 95:5). God owns all things absolutely. We may think of ourselves as owners only in relation to other people. That is, they have no right to take certain things from us without compensation. But in relation to God we own nothing, absolutely nothing, and He has every right to dispose of all our so-called possessions and us exactly as He pleases. This means that with regard to our possessions we are stewards or trustees of God's estate, and with regard to ourselves we are slaves of the Almighty. It is very wrong to think that a tithe of our income belongs to God and 90% belongs to us. It is all God's, absolutely, and we have no right to dispense it in any way but what pleases its Owner. The doctrine of creation implies that we should ask of every expenditure: Am I, by this purchase, achieving the purposes of my Creator?

Not only does God own our possessions, He also owns us absolutely. We are the clay and He is the potter, and He may do with us exactly as He pleases (Ps 29:16; 45:9). As Paul states in Romans 9:20-21: "The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?"<sup>21</sup> Or does not the potter have a right over the clay...?" The answer is, yes, the potter has absolute right over the clay. Take your spiritual temperature here. If this is sweet to you and you readily submit to God's ownership, it is the mark of grace and maturity in your life. But if this is offensive to you and you resent the thought of God having an absolute right to do with you as He pleases, it is a mark of the flesh and of need for repentance.

***A second implication of the doctrine of creation is that everything that exists has a purpose, a goal, and a reason for being.*** If God did not create the world then any man's goal is as good as another. There are no absolutes and everything is aimless and absurd. The only meaning in life is what you arbitrarily create by doing your own thing. But if God did create the world then it has an absolute purpose and goal, for God is not whimsical or frivolous. Nor is His purpose ever in jeopardy for He says in Isaiah 46:10, "My counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purpose."

The ultimate purpose of God in creation was and is to display His glory in all its fullness. According to Numbers 14:21, God's intention to fill the earth with the glory of the Lord is as certain as His very existence. He says in Isaiah 43:7, "I created Israel for my glory." And, in Ephesians 1:12, rebellious creatures are brought back to God for this purpose: "to live for the praise of His glory." Since God created everything, He owns everything; everything we have and are belongs to God. Therefore we must ask of every expenditure and every act, "Does this achieve the purpose of my Owner?" And now we know what this purpose is and so we must ask, "Does this purchase or this act or this attitude display God's glory?" Thus, the second implication of the doctrine of creation is that God has a purpose in creation, to display His glory, and therefore the purpose of all His creatures is to join Him in that aim. That's why we exist.

***A third implication of this doctrine that I want to mention is simply this: If we are creatures, we are totally and utterly dependent on our Creator for everything.*** We are weaker than the weakest baby apart from Him, because apart from Him we fly into nothingness. Every breath we take, every calorie of energy we expend, and every good intention we fulfill is a gift from our merciful Creator who owes us nothing. So the lesson is clear: You can't glorify God as the all-sufficient Creator and Sustainer unless you turn and become like little children who gladly depend upon their Father for everything.<sup>26</sup>

***The final implication is that everything that exists must be under God's control.*** The creation must be in subjection to the Creator. Forces of nature, enemies, creatures, and objects that became pagan deities—none of these would pose a threat to the servants of the living God.<sup>27</sup> So what are you currently worried about? Are you worried you will become a financial burden to your children? Are you worried about pending surgery or poor health? Are you worried about the future of your children—their physical safety, financial security, and spiritual well being? Are you worried about your career and if it will take you where you want to go? Are you worried that you may not be able to adapt to all the technological changes in our world today and thus be unable to cope in your business?

Perhaps you are like the little girl whose mother found her sobbing uncontrollably. When the mother asked the little girl why she was crying, the little girl raised her tear-dampened hand, pointed to the wall, and said between her sniffles that she was afraid of the nail that was protruding there. The mother gazed at her in consternation and asked why on earth she would be afraid of the nail on the wall. The little girl burst into a fresh deluge as she sobbed, “I’m afraid that one day I will have a little girl, and she will grow up and bump her head on that nail.”

What nail on the wall are you afraid of? Whether they are real or imaginary, worries about our future can rob us of peace and joy at the present.<sup>28</sup> Will you release your nail to *Elohim* today?

## Genesis 1-2: A Biblical Perspective

As we seek to accurately interpret the first two chapters of Genesis, we must strive to honestly respond to the following questions:

**1. What is the purpose of the Pentateuch?** The purpose of the Pentateuch (i.e., the first five books of the Bible) is found in one very important event: the covenant between God and Israel, established at Mount Sinai (Exodus-Deuteronomy). This covenant relates directly back to God's initial desire to bless the human race through the descendants of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). Yet, we know from reading the Pentateuch that this covenant failed on account of Israel's failure to trust God and obey His will (Num 14:22-23; 20:12; Deut 34:1-12). Fortunately, the author goes on to demonstrate that God's promise to restore the blessing will one day succeed, because God Himself promised to give Israel a heart that would trust and obey Him (Deut 30:1-10). Therefore, the entire Pentateuch looks to the future as the time when God's faithful promise would ultimately be fulfilled.

**2. What is the purpose(s) of the book of Genesis?** There are at least three purposes of Genesis: (1) to connect the God of the Sinai Covenant with the God who created the world; (2) to link the call of the patriarchs and the Sinai Covenant with the goal of the ultimate reestablishment of God's original purpose in creation; and (3) to tie the individuals and events of the Pentateuch account to future revelation (typology).

**3. What is the purpose(s) of Genesis 1 and 2?** A close study of Genesis 1-2 reveals that Moses was mainly concerned about three specific subjects: (1) God, (2) man/woman, and (3) the land. He tells us that God is owner of the land; He created and prepared it, and He can give it to whomever He chooses (Jer 27:5).

**4. What expectations do we bring to Genesis 1 and 2?** In our attempt to answer this question, we must be able to acknowledge our preconceived notions and expectations and be willing to part with any excess baggage we may be carrying. The following four faulty expectations seem most relevant:

*First, we expect to be able to mix and match the creation account with our scientific bias.* The vast majority of interpretive views attempt to do justice to both the Bible and science (not necessarily in that order). This is frequently done by combining exegesis of the Hebrew text with recent scientific theories and conclusions. (What I call "the mix and match approach.") Yet, there are several problems with this approach. (1) All too often we allow our modern, scientific views of the world to determine what we understand the biblical writers to be saying. But the primary question for any interpreter must always be, "What does the text say?" Although science and history may provide interesting and helpful insights, the focus of all interpretation must be the text itself. We must always remember, the Genesis account is not dependent upon a "proper" understanding of science. After all, the discoveries that have been made and our understanding of science is relatively recent in origin. What must interpreters have done with the Genesis account before the age of enlightenment? That is a question worth pondering. (2) Scientific research is forever in a state of shifting sand. While the Word of God is stayed upon the Rock, scientific conclusions are always disputable and dependent upon further data. Of course, some will say, "Well, the same could be said of hermeneutics" (the science of biblical interpretation). Yet there is a significant difference. Modern science does not hold the answer to the meaning of the biblical text. Rather, the Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God (His special, unique revelation) and science is our pursuit of God in His general revelation.

While it is true, on this side of heaven, both sciences will remain ultimately inconclusive (due to the finite, sinful mind of man), there is much more to be said for our illuminating ability to understand and accurately interpret the Word. A truly legitimate view must be one that could have “worked” before the rise of science and its use in biblical interpretation.

***Second, we expect to be able to study the creation account in our own historical context.*** Granted, this particular error is all too common and very easy to commit. The truth is, most students of the Word adopt a perspective that is close to home and timely (e.g., a western, 21<sup>st</sup> century hermeneutic). While this is difficult to change, we must both acknowledge this to be true and wrestle with the honesty of our interpretive skills.

In the case of the book of Genesis, the background is that of those who first received this book. This background is vital to our grasp of the meaning and message of creation. Assuming Moses to be the author of Genesis, the book most likely would have been written sometime after the exodus and before the entrance into the land of Canaan. So, before we approach the question of what the creation should mean to us, we must deal with its meaning for those who first read these inspired words from the pen of Moses. The initial purpose of this account was for the Israelites of Moses’ day. What was the situation at the time of the writing of this creation account? Who received this revelation and what needs were to be met by it? What should they have learned? How should they have responded? The ability to answer these questions is crucial to rightly interpreting and applying the message of the creation.

***Third, we expect to be able to use the creation account for apologetic purposes.*** While this may be of some value, this is not in keeping with the author’s purpose for writing. Genesis was written to the people of God, not unbelievers. Men who refuse to believe in creationism do not do so for lack of facts or proof (cf. Rom 1:18ff), or due to their greater knowledge (Ps 14:1), but due to a lack of faith (Heb 11:3). Genesis is much more of a declaration than a defense. After all, Genesis 1:1 assumes God’s existence (c.f. “In the beginning was God...”). The author sees no need for further evidence.

***Fourth, we expect to find in the creation account the answers to mysteries that may or may not be explained elsewhere.*** We may wish to learn, for example, the age of the earth, how and when God created either the universe or man, or just where Satan’s fall and judgment fits into the creation account, but may not be given such information because it was not the purpose of the author to answer such questions. The problem is that these chapters were not intended to give us an account of the creation that would answer all of the scientific problems and phenomenon. It simply wasn’t the purpose of the author. There is an air of mystery that permeates these two chapters. We must be satisfied with that realization.

## Genesis: The Creation Views

“People who demand to have Creation explained from beginning to end are asking the impossible. We are limited creatures. How can any one of us encompass infinity?”

—Morris West

With the above quote in the forefront of our minds, the following paragraphs will seek to define the various views that exist among evangelicals. Although there are a handful of other respectable views, the following seem to be the most prevalent.

**1. Scientific Creationism:** Advocates of young-earth creation believe that God created the earth in six literal days and that the whole universe is approximately 10,000 years old. It is also believed that most fossils were formed during Noah’s flood, which they view as a worldwide catastrophe (Gen 6:17; 7:21-23). Creationists apply their scientific methods to the flood account in Genesis 6-9 and are convinced that the present condition of the earth, which gives the appearance of being much older, reflects the catastrophic destruction wrought by Noah’s flood. Proponents: Henry Morris and Duane Gish.

**2. Historical Creationism:** God created the universe during an unspecified time, which the writer calls “the beginning” (Gen 1:1). That “beginning” was not a point of time but a period of time, in all likelihood a long period of time. After that period of time, God went on to prepare the “land” as a place for human beings to dwell. This view understands 1:2-2:4a to be a description of God’s preparation of the garden of Eden, or more specifically, the Promised Land. Proponent: John Sailhamer.

**3. The Gap Theory:** Advocates of what is called the gap theory believe that Genesis 1:1 speaks of an initial creation, followed by an extremely long time period. Most organisms that we now find in the fossil record lived during that time. According to the gap theory, Genesis 1:2 describes a time of death and ruin, caused by Satan when God cast him down to earth. The remainder of Genesis 1 describes how the Lord restored creation in six literal days. Although this view allows one to see Genesis as factual history, while still believing in an old earth, Scripture doesn’t seem to show much support. Nowhere does the Bible directly mention such a gap or any worldwide destruction caused by Satan. What’s more, other passages (such as Exod 20:11) explicitly refer to the six days of creation, not re-creation. Proponents: C.I. Scofield, Merrill Unger, M.R. DeHaan, and J. Vernon McGee. This view is not widely held today.

**4. Progressive Creationism:** Advocates of this day-age position believe that the days in Genesis 1 refer not to six literal 24-hour periods, but to six indefinitely long ages. It is believed that the universe is anywhere from eight to sixteen billion years old and that life began on earth some 3.5 billion years ago. Progressive creationists point out that the Hebrew word for day (*yom*) is used in three different ways in the creation narrative (1:4-5; 2:4). In these three verses, *yom* is used to describe a 12-hour period, a 24-hour period, and the whole period of creation. Progressive creationists also quote Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 as evidence that “days” on God’s timescale are a great deal longer than our days. Proponents: Hugh Ross, Gleason Archer, and Millard Erickson.

**5. Theistic Evolution:** Advocates of theistic evolution teach that plants, animals, and man gradually evolved from lower forms, but that God supervised the process. While young-earth and old-earth creationists believe that God created life forms by divine command, theistic evolutionists believe that God used evolution, or something similar, to do most of His work. Most theistic evolutionists draw on passages like Genesis 1:1-1:24 to argue that God created living forms indirectly, using the laws of nature. By their own admission, theistic evolutionists take a poetic or allegorical approach in interpreting Genesis 1:1-2:4. Proponents: C.S. Lewis and Howard van Till.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Preaching Today Citation: Ravi Zacharias, “If the Foundations Be Destroyed,” *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 142.

<sup>2</sup> The New Revised Standard Version renders Gen 1:1 a bit differently: “In the beginning *when* God created the heavens and the earth” (italics mine).” These translators understand this verse to be defining the situation when God started to create. Stuart writes, “The Hebrew is better translated “God, in beginning, created...” or “When God began to create...” Douglas Stuart, *Favorite Old Testament Passages* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 10. Stuart’s interpretation is hotly debated.

<sup>3</sup> In the Hebrew text there are only seven words in Gen 1:1. The number “seven” is quite significant in the biblical record as it came to symbolize completeness and perfection. Interestingly, this fits a larger numerical pattern throughout this chapter and the remainder of the Pentateuch. What a reminder that every word in every verse is significant!

<sup>4</sup> The “beginning” is the beginning of the creation of the cosmos, not the beginning of all things (cf. Mark 1:1; John 1:1). This appears to be clear from the context.

<sup>5</sup> If we were to rearrange things chronologically, we would say that John 1:1, which says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” actually precedes Gen 1:1. We know this because we are told in John 1:3 that it was the logos, the Word, the Messiah, through whom the universe was created. Though John 1:1 begins the same way as Gen 1:1 with “In the beginning,” chronologically speaking John 1:1 precedes Gen 1:1.

<sup>6</sup> Youngblood asserts, “The Old Testament is far more interested in the fact of creation than in the time of creation.” Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Elohim* is a generic term for deity as well as a proper name for the true God. It is used of pagan gods (Gen 31:30; Exod 12:12), angels (Ps 8:5), men (Ps 82:6), and judges (Exod 21:6), though most frequently of the true God. Its basic meaning is “strong one, mighty leader, supreme Deity.” The form of the word is plural, indicating plentitude of power and majesty and allowing for the NT revelation of the triunity of the Godhead. The word is used throughout the Bible only with God as its subject. It occurs more than 2,500 times in the Old Testament.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this section, the word God or *Elohim* is used 35 times, again showing the prominence of the number seven.

<sup>9</sup> Moses wants it to be known that the God of the Bible has intentionally set Himself apart from all other “gods.” The sense of Genesis 1:1 is similar to the message Jeremiah gives Israel to carry to all the nations: “Thus you shall say to them, ‘The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens’” (Jer 10:11). Psalm 96:5 also shows that the purpose of Genesis 1:1 was fully appreciated by the later biblical writers: “For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.” Throughout the Scriptures, God’s creative work is always the Bible’s final ground of appeal in establishing God’s power and deity (Ps 33:6; John 1:3; Heb 11:3).

<sup>10</sup> Tony Evans, *Our God is Awesome* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 51.

<sup>11</sup> Heb. *bara* is used throughout the Bible only with God as its subject. There is one and only one related word in Hebrew, the word *briyah* that has the same root. It is a feminine noun used in only one place in the entire Hebrew Bible: in Numbers 16:30, where it also refers to God fashioning something new. *Bara* (“created”) may express creation out of nothing, but it certainly cannot be limited to that (cf. Gen 2:7). Rather, it stresses that what was formed was new and perfect.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through the Bible: Genesis 1-11* (England: Sovereign World, 1997), 17.

<sup>13</sup> A. Cresesy Morrison, *Seven Reasons Why a Scientist Believes in God*: <http://www.sivanandaslshq.org/messages/sciblgod.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> “The phrase ‘the heavens and the earth’ points to the totality of creation, just as it does in every other occurrence in the Old Testament.” William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 16

<sup>15</sup> Some understand a “gap” of an indeterminate period of time between Gen 1:1 and 1:2, and translate “became” rather than “was.” Although the Hebrew word may mean, “became” (as in 19:26), the construction of the clause does not support a consecutive statement describing something that happened subsequent to 1:1 (“and”) but rather describing something included in 1:1 (“but”).

<sup>16</sup> “The meaning of the word *tohu* is identical to that of Isaiah 45:18: ‘[God] did not create it [the land] to be empty [*tohu*], but formed it to be inhabited.’ The term ‘empty’ in the Isaiah passage stands in opposition to the phrase ‘to be inhabited.’ This is the same meaning of the word *tohu* in Deuteronomy 32:10. There ‘formless’ (*tohu*) is parallel to ‘desert’ (*midbar*), an uninhabitable wasteland.” Sailhamer, *Genesis*, Electronic Ed.

<sup>17</sup> “Deep” (*tahom*) describes the world. In the Old Testament *tahom* refers to the ocean, which the ancient world regarded as symbolic of chaos and evil that needed overcoming and which the Lord overcame. However its use in

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the Pentateuch helps us understand the writer's intent in using this term here...he calls the global ocean (the 'deep') in 1:2 a 'desert.' This is not apparent in the English translation 'formless,' but the NASB notes it in the margin as a 'wasteland.' . . . Moses uses this term (Deut 32:10) to describe the desert wasteland where Israel wandered for forty years. Why call an ocean a desert? What better way to teach the people that the God who will lead them out of the wilderness and give them the Promised Land is the same God who once prepared the *land* for them by dividing the waters and producing the 'dry land'? The God of the Pentateuch is One who leads his people from the wasteland to the promised land. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, Electronic Ed.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 1:2 contains a total of 14 words, which is two times seven, again emphasizing the number seven.

<sup>19</sup> The context of the creation account itself suggests that we are to interpret *eretz* in verse two as "land" and not "whole planet." In Gen 1:10, "land" [*eretz*] is defined as the dry ground where Adam and Eve were to dwell as opposed to the seas. Sailhamer points out that "the 'seas' do not cover the 'land,' as would be the case if the term meant 'earth.' Rather the 'seas' lie adjacent to the 'land' and within it." Further, "land" is defined by its contrast to the seas (1:10) and sky (1:20) not in contrast to the stars and planets as would be the case if "land" (*eretz*) was being used to mean "planet earth." Thus, there is good precedent in the text to understand *eretz* in a restricted sense in 1:2. Consequently, since verse two refers to a certain piece of land and not the whole planet, the rest of the chapter, which describes God's work on this land to make it inhabited, is not about the entire planet but a section of land within the planet. See Dr. John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), 49.

<sup>20</sup> Sometimes *eretz* does refer to the whole world (Gen 18:25). But most often it does not. Most of the time *eretz* ("earth") refers to a localized segment of the planet, such as the "land of Egypt" (45:8), the "dry ground" (1:10), or the land promised to Abraham (15:18). In these cases, *eretz* is best translated as "land," not "earth," as many translations reflect.

<sup>21</sup> This figure of speech is called a hendiadys.

<sup>22</sup> This pair of words occurs again only in Jer 4:23 and Isa 34:11, both in the context of divine judgment. However, we are not required to read Gen 1:1 in this light.

<sup>23</sup> These thoughts are revised from Eaton, *Genesis 1-11*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Gk. *ktisis*. Note the three categories of meaning from the most popular Greek lexicon: 1. An act of creation (Rom 1:20). 2a. The result of a creative act, that which is created (Rom 8:39; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Col 1:15, 23; Heb 4:13). 2b. The sum total of everything created, creation, world (Mark 10:6; 13:19; 16:15; Rom 1:25; 8:19-22; Heb 9:11; 2 Pet 3:4; Rev 3:14). 3. System of established authority that is the result of some founding action, governance system, authority system (1 Pet 2:13). See BDAG, Electronic Ed.

<sup>25</sup> See Eaton, *Genesis 1-11*, 22-23.

<sup>26</sup> These implications have been revised from Dr. John Piper, "He Commanded and They Were Created," *Piper's Notes*: October 4, 1981 (Morning) Bethlehem Baptist Church [www.soundofgrace.com/piper81/100481m.htm](http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper81/100481m.htm).

<sup>27</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002 [1988]), 102.

<sup>28</sup> Lotz, *God's Story*, xxii-xxiii.