

The Physical & Biblical Evidence for Creation

III. Interpreting Genesis

Introduction At the heart of the storm we call the creation – evolution controversy stands the first and second chapters of Genesis. These critically important words not only describe the origin of the universe and of humanity, they are also the beginning of God’s revelation that culminates in the salvation of Jesus. They deserve our utmost care and concern. “Princes may persecute me without cause, But my heart stands in awe of Your word” (Psalm 119.161).

1. Read Genesis 1-2. What strikes you as awesome about these words?

2. Are these words to be taken literally or metaphorically?

Literal: Something is what it is. Saul of Tarsus

Metaphorical: Something represents something else. Psalm 23

3. The grammatical structure has many narrative characteristics.

Lack of parallelism.

Use of the direct object marker.

Use of the waw consecutive.



4. Reasons to interpret Genesis 1-2 literally:

Narrative style

There is no distinct boundary line between Genesis 1-2 and the rest of the book.

Metaphorical poetry is usually a complete package.

5. Didn't St. Augustine interpret Genesis 1-2 metaphorical? Yes. But his concern was not about evolution but about why God spent six days doing what He surely must have done (Augustine's assumption) in one day.

6. What about the word "day"?

The references to evening and morning suggest ordinary days.

Whenever the word "day" is associated with ordinal numbers it is referring to ordinary days (7.11; 8.14; 17.12).

Moses associates the days of creation with the days of the week (Exodus 20.6).

7. Why are there “two” creation stories? (Genesis 1.1-2.3 and Genesis 2.4-2.25)

Genesis 2.4 is a Toledoth passage. There are ten of these “chapter divisions” in the book of Genesis (Gn 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2)

Genesis 1.1-2.3 provides a general account of creation. Genesis 2.4-4.26 is the first chapter of human history.

8. How does Jesus interpret Genesis 1.1 – 2.25?

In Matthew 19.4 and Mark 10.6 Jesus refers to Adam and Eve as real people created by God at the beginning.

9. How do the rest of the Scriptures interpret Genesis 1.1-2.25?

Every other reference to the creation gives us a picture of a miraculous creation out of nothing by God through His word of the universe and of Adam and Eve.

To say that God used evolution to create is to stand Genesis 1.1-2.25 and many other passages “on their on their head.”

Genesis 1:1ff.	Hebrews 11:3 Creation “ex nihilo” by God’s word.
1:1–2:3	Exodus 20:8-11 Creation in 6 days; rest on 7th day.
1:1	Psalms 8:3 The heavens made by God.
1:3	II Corinthians 4:6 God commanded light to shine.
1:6,7	Psalms 19:1b God made the sky.
1:6,9	II Peter 3:5 Earth formed out of water, by water.
1:14-18	Psalms 104:19 Purpose of the moon God made. Psalm 136:7-9 Purpose of sun, moon, stars God made. Isaiah 40:26 Stars created by God. Jeremiah 31:35 Purpose of sun, moon, stars.
1:20-22	Psalms 104:24,25 Seas filled with life by God.
1:26,27	Psalms 8:6-8 Man given rulership over creation. Matthew 19:4 God created them male and female. I Corinthians 11:7 Man is the image and glory of God. James 3:9 Man was made in the likeness of God.
1:31	I Timothy 4:4 Everything created by God is good.
2:2	Hebrews 4:4,10 God’s rest on the 7th day.
2:7	I Corinthians 15:45,47 Man made of earth, a “living soul.” I Timothy 2:13 Man was created before woman.
2:17	Romans 5:12 Death came through sin.
2:18	I Corinthians 11:9 Woman was created for man’s sake.
2:21-23	I Corinthians 11:8 Woman originated from man. 2:24 Matthew 19:5 Verse spoken by “the Creator.”

10. In no other passage of Scripture (except in the metaphorical reading of Genesis 1.1-2.25) do we find creation described as a long, random process.

Genesis 1.1

Toledoth

Remainder of Genesis – Connections to real history (Egypt,

How do we know that Genesis 1-2 is not metaphorical. Psalm 23 is a good example of metaphorical language. We know that the Lord is not our hired hand who literally takes care of our sheep.

No one understands the words “light,” “water,” “land,” “plants,” “animals,” etc. to be metaphorical. Why only the word “day”? or “man”?

St. Augustine – He did treat the creation account as metaphor, but he did so to explain what he believed was and instantaneous creation, not a gradual process of evolution.

The narrative style of Genesis 1-11 is similar to other narrative sections of the Hebrew Bible.

Did the Jews consider Genesis to be poetical?

The Meaning of “Day”

Eduard Koenig in his commentary on Genesis (1919) summarizes the reasons for interpreting the word “day” in the ordinary sense as follows: “a) In 1:5a a light and a dark part are specifically differentiated in the total concept, ‘day,’ b) In vs. 5b, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31 the terminations of the two parts referred to are positively named. c) Furthermore, in vs. 16 the days are viewed as being ruled by the sun and moon respectively. Accordingly the author has ascribed a light and a dark portion to the six days of creation also. Consequently, the author was speaking of *ordinary* days.” Ed. Koenig, *Genesis*, Guetersloh, 1919, p. 168

“The Hebrew dictionaries of Buhl, Brown, Briggs, Driver, and Koenig do not record the interpretation of *yom* in the hexaemeron as a long period of time. When in the Old Testament *yom* is associated with a definite numeral, solar days are meant (Gen. 7:11; 8:14; 17:12; Exod. 12:6, and numerous other passages). The wording of the Genesis account seems to indicate a short time for the creative acts described. To illustrate, in Gen. 1:11 God literally commands, ‘Earth, sprout sprouts!’ Immediately v. 12 records the prompt response to the command: ‘The earth caused the plants to go out.’ The Genesis account nowhere even hints that eons or periods

of time are involved. Instantaneous action seems to be what the writer stresses.” Raymond F. Surburg, professor at Concordia Teachers College, Seward, Nebraska, in the book, *Darwin, Evolution, and Creation*,

Finally, we should not overlook the fact that when Jesus in Matthew 19:4 and Mark 10:6 speaks about the creation of the man and the woman, He asserts that God “*at the beginning* made them male and female.” He does not say that God made them thousands or millions of years after the formless and void earth had been called into being.¹

So we have in Genesis I and II three different creations described: “(1) In 1:1 Moses sets forth *cosmic* creation, in 1:2—2:4a, the terrestrial creation, the fashioning of the planet called earth, and in 2:4–24 a detailed discussion of the creation of the parents of the human race, Adam and Eve.” Surburg

"While the Hebrew language may seem frightening to some, it really is not. The style of writing of Genesis 1 is historical, using the *waw*-consecutive to express consecutive action (*waw* = and). Biblical historians use this style to: "express actions, events, or states, which are to be regarded as the temporal or logical sequence of actions, events, or states mentioned immediately before." (Ref. 7) What this means for Genesis 1 is that God describes a sequence of events that occur one after the other throughout the creation week. We see this sequence reflected in the English as 'And God said,' 'And there was,' or 'And it was,' with which each verse in Genesis I begins. Each occurrence signifies that some action followed another in a real time sequence." [E. Kautzsch, *Genesius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd edition revised by A.E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), p. 133.] by James Stambaugh. ICR Impact #251.

2:4These are the generations of the heavens and the earth, when they were created. 5:1This is the book of the generations of Adam. 6:9These are the generations of Noah. 10:1These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. 11:10These are the generations of Shem. 11:27These are the generations of Terah. 25:12These are the generations of Ishmael. 25:19These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son. 36:1These are the generations of Esau (that is, Edom). 36:9These are the generations of Esau, the father of the Edomites. 37:2These are the generations of Jacob.

VERSE CONFIRMED BY SUBJECT 1:1ff. *Hebrews 11:3* Creation “ex nihilo” by God’s word. 1:1–2:3 Exodus 20:8-11 Creation in 6 days; rest on 7th day. 1:1 Psalm 8:3 The heavens made by God. 1:3 *II Corinthians 4:6* God commanded light to shine. 1:6,7 Psalm 19:1b God made the sky. 1:6,9 *II Peter 3:5* Earth formed out of water, by water. 1:14-18 Psalm 104:19 Purpose of the moon God made. Psalm 136:7-9 Purpose of sun, moon, stars God made. Isaiah 40:26 Stars created by God. Jeremiah 31:35 Purpose of sun, moon, stars. 1:20-22 Psalm 104:24,25 Seas filled with life by God. 1:26,27 Psalm 8:6-8 Man given rulership over creation. *Matthew 19:4* God created them male and female. *I Corinthians 11:7* Man is the image and glory of God. *James 3:9* Man was made in the likeness of God. 1:31 *I Timothy 4:4* Everything created by God is good. 2:2 *Hebrews 4:4,10* God’s rest on the 7th day. 2:7 *I Corinthians 15:45,47* Man made of

earth, a “living soul.” *I Timothy 2:13* Man was created before woman. *2:17 Romans 5:12* Death came through sin. *2:18 I Corinthians 11:9* Woman was created for man’s sake. *2:21-23 I Corinthians 11:8* Woman originated from man. *2:24 Matthew 19:5* Verse spoken by “the Creator.”

The *later* chapters of Genesis are plainly intended to be taken as historical — and no distinct boundary line exists before which the author obviously means *earlier* chapters to be considered as non-historical. A tight genealogical continuity is given from Adam through his sons and the succeeding generations right up to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. No point can be specified where “myth” ends and “history” begins. (Interestingly, Charles Darwin himself accepted the historical validity of at least one aspect of Genesis 30, as evidenced in his discussion of selective breeding in the first chapter of *Origin of Species*. Darwin states: “From passages in Genesis, it is clear that the colour of domestic animals was at that early period attended to.”)

Within the disputed first eleven chapters of Genesis, mention is made of 64 geographical terms, 88 personal names, and some 20 identifiable cultural items (e.g., gold, onyx, brass, iron, mortar, musical instruments, cities). In the first two chapters, such “real world” categories are found notably in Genesis 2:8-14. (Such specificity is not expected in a “myth.”)

There is no substantial *literary* indication in Genesis 1-2 that these early chapters are intended to be taken as allegory, legend, parable, poetry, or any other sort of “non-historical material.” Despite the exalted tone of this section, the genre is plainly narrative prose, not poetry, as indicated by: (a) lack of parallelism, (b) use of the direct object marker, and (c) use of the *waw* consecutive with verbs to describe sequential acts. (See below.)

(a) Lack of parallelism

Hebrew poetry generally uses a “parallel” structure, in which the second line either *restates* or *enhances* the first line. (This is sometimes referred to as the rhyming of thoughts rather than of word sounds.) If the second line involves a *restatement*, this can be either *positive*, repeating the same idea in different words (synonymous parallelism), as in Psalm 35:4; or *negative*, giving a comparable thought but from an opposite perspective (antithetical parallelism), as in Proverbs 10:1. No parallel structure is found in the first two chapters of Genesis except possibly in 1:27 and 2:23 (the NIV indents these verses differently from the rest of Genesis 1-2; the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, does *not* format them as poetry).

(b) Use of the direct object marker

The “direct object” in a sentence is the person or thing receiving the action of the verb. In the sentence, “Tom kicked the ball,” the direct object is “the ball,” which receives the action of the verb “kicked.” In Hebrew narrative, the particle *eth* is often written just before the direct object in a sentence, because Hebrew word order is flexible and does not always clearly indicate the direct object. Hebrew poetry often (not always) omits this particle, but in Genesis 1-2 it is found 40 times, including those instances in which the particle is incorporated as part of a personal pronoun.

Genesis 1	Genesis 2
1 [2x]	3 [2x]
4	5
7	6
16 [4x]	7
17	8
21 [3x]	10

22 [2x]	11
25 [3x]	13
27 [3x]	15
28 [2x]	19
29 [2x]	22
30	24 [2x]
31	

(c) Use of the waw consecutive with verbs to describe sequential acts

In Hebrew, the letter *waw* (pronounced “vuv” [rhymes with “love”], and transliterated as either “v” or “w”) is often prefixed to a verb. This letter carries the meaning “and,” but when prefixed to a verb, it also has the effect of changing a verb in the past tense to the future tense, or vice versa. For example, *yo’mar* means “he will say,” but *vayyo’mer*, with a prefixed *waw*, means “and he said.” This interesting feature is often found in Hebrew prose, but is typically less used in poetry. (A notable exception is found in poetic material that is clearly intended as *historically-based*, such as Psalms 105 and 106.) The *waw* consecutive appears 75 times in Genesis 1-2.

Genesis 1		Genesis 2
3	18	1
[2x]	19	2 [2x]
4	[2x]	3 [2x]
[2x]	20	7 [3x]
5	21	8 [2x]
[3x]	[2x]	9
6	22	15 [2x]
7	23	16
[3x]	[2x]	18
8	24	19 [2x]
[3x]	[2x]	20
9	25	21 [4x]
[2x]	[2x]	22 [2x]
10	26	23
[2x]	27	
11	28	
[2x]	[2x]	
12	29	
[2x]	30	
13	31	
[2x]	[3x]	
14		
15		
16		
17		

From Siegbert Becker, Exegesis Of Genesis One And Two

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Whenever this whole question is discussed, it usually does not take long before someone says, "After all, what difference does it make? We are not saved by believing that God created the world in a certain way but by believing that Jesus died for our sins. Why could God not have created the world in millions of years if He wanted to?" We will gladly grant that God could have done it this way if it had pleased Him to do so, but it is not a question of what God can do or can't do, but rather a question of what He did and of whether we should now believe that He did what He told us He did.

And it is also a question of how we are going to read our Bible. If men are to be free to say that the story of creation is a myth, then what will prevent them from saying that the story of the virgin birth is a myth, that the account of the resurrection of Christ is a myth, that the story of the ascension is myth, that the prophecy concerning the second coming of Christ is a myth. All of these things are being said in the Christian Church and also in the Lutheran Church, today. Find a church that will tolerate theologians who deny the historical accuracy of Genesis One and Two, and you will also usually find a church which will tolerate men who question the historical correctness of the accounts of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

In the Middle Ages it was fashionable in theological circles to treat the histories of the Bible as allegories. Everything stood for something else. Eve was a symbol of the lower nature of man. Adam stood for man's reason, the stars of Genesis One really meant the angels, and the seven nations that Israel drove out of Canaan were the seven deadly sins. It was no wonder that they came to the conclusion that the Bible was an obscure book. If the words did not mean what they said, then what did they mean? The answer was anybody's guess.

Into this exegetical climate came Martin Luther with his assertion that "the natural speech shall be the Kaiser's wife," that is, that the meaning of the Bible was to be found in the words of the Bible, or that the Bible just meant what it said. In his commentary on Genesis he said that Moses' "purpose is to teach us, not about allegorical creatures and an allegorical world, but about real creatures and a visible world apprehended by the senses...He employs the terms 'day' and 'evening' without allegory." (LW, I, 5) Commenting on Origen's view that the trees in the garden of Eden were angels and the rivers were a symbol for wisdom, Luther said, "Such twaddle is unworthy of theologians. . . Origen does not take into consideration that Moses is writing a history." (LW, I, 9) In his comments on the fall of man he wrote, "I adhere simply to the historical and literal meaning, which is in harmony with the text. In accordance with this meaning, the serpent remain a serpent.... the woman remains a woman; Adam remains Adam." Only if we approach the Bible in the same way can we know with certainty what the Lord wishes to say to us in this book.

We are often told that if we insist on reading the Bible in this way, taking the words at face value, we will only make ourselves and our message ridiculous in the eyes of modern educated people, and that if we want to win them for the church we shall have to adjust our teaching to conform to the cultural patterns of the day and to the assured results of modern science. But such arguments always assume that if there is a conflict between the opinions of men and the teachings of the Bible, it is the teaching of the Bible that stands in the need of revision, whereas we ought to remember that it is the evil, unbelieving heart of man that needs to be renewed and the corrupt and blinded reason of man that needs to be enlightened.

Therefore let us continue to teach the Word in all its simplicity and purity, and the same Spirit who taught the holy writers which words to use in conveying this message to men will be with those words also in our time to help men to know and to understand the world in which they live, the God to whom they are accountable, the sin of which they are guilty, and the salvation that they have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1 According to Otto Sohn in his column, *What's the Answer* in the *Lutheran Witness*, Oct. 17, 1961, p. 15, "The word *mo'y* (Hebrew for day) is used 1,152 times by the Old Testament writers. Moses uses it 344 times in his five books (the Pentateuch) and five times in Psalm 90. In the Book of Genesis, which begins with the creation story, he employs it 65 times. Thirty-four times in Genesis *mo'y* occurs in such phrases as 'the day, this day, on this day, today, day of death, day of distress'; 17 times it occurs with numbers: one day, the first day, the second day, etc.; nine times the term signifies the daytime in contrast with the night; in five cases it appears to be used in the more general sense of time. In no case does Moses use *mo'y* to denote a longer period."