

In the Beginning

Message 2

The Beginning of the Universe II: Fact or Fiction

Genesis 1:1-2:3; Psalm 19:1-14

Crackpots Ancient and Modern

It's been a long day in a long month. Yes, it's been a month since you embarked from Memphis, that wonderful city on the Nile, to return home to Ur in Mesopotamia. As your thoughts turn to Ur you remember the familiar bustle of your ancestral city, with its palaces, temples, and markets. You long to relax with your family and friends, to share your adventures and bask in the comforts of home. But first you must finish your business in the land of Canaan, recently settled by the Hebrews. What a strange people! It's such a backward country. There aren't any fine cities, and imagine – they don't have any temples! Strange people; but you will make a handsome profit by trading with them, then it's home to Ur!

You are grateful that Jethro has invited you to stay at his house for the night. He's a good man – he bought a sizable quantity of Egyptian cotton from you, and you anticipate a pleasant evening with his family. Dinner is crude, but good. You are used to it, having traveled through Canaan before. Then after dinner the men tell stories, as men do everywhere. But midway through the evening you are shocked, stunned, to hear them recounting their creation story. It's the most incredible thing you've ever heard – nothing at all like your own Enuma Enish or the creation story of the Egyptians. Those stories are rich in vivid detail and poetically tell the prolonged battle between the gods for supremacy which eventually resulted in the earth as it is now. This Hebrew story is a crude as their meals! It's ugly, for one thing. There is no music, no intrigue, no poetry. It's ridiculously short. It doesn't give any details. It's boring, so maybe it's a good thing it's short. But here is the clincher. Are you ready for this? You try heroically to suppress a laugh, and manage to keep your self to a snicker. Here is proof that this story is impossible. There is no battle! Can you imagine it! These crazy Hebrew think there is only one god! And they think it's their own puny god! What a joke! This is so rich, you snicker again just picturing how amusing it will be to tell this story to your friends back home. Only one god, who made the whole universe all by himself. What a joke! You laugh yourself to sleep that night.

Now fast forward 3,500 years. You're having a leisurely meal with your friends after a long day of classes. Someone at your table brings up the *Brown and White* article by Becky Straw which describes the theory of Professor Michael Behe that evolution is impossible. It's really incredible. He's a respected biochemist, but he is going around teaching this position which contradicts all we know about science. Then you are totally stunned when Sam brings up that he even believes the Biblical creation story. You knew there were crackpots who took the Genesis story literally, but you thought they all lived in Kentucky and drank moonshine. You briefly reflect that moonshine would definitely help you accept such fables. Then you ask Sam if he is serious. Maybe he just means that he believes in God. You don't, but lots of people do, and it doesn't seem to hurt them much. Again, there are the fanatics who actually try to follow all the rules in the Bible, but thankfully you don't know any. But then you can't believe your ears! Sam not only believes in God, he not only thinks God created the universe – he even thinks God did it in six days! You are speechless. Such lunacy! And this guy got into Lehigh! People like him will spoil your own credibility! You try desperately to convince him that no one with any intelligence believes such nonsense, but he is unmovable. He says the evidence points his direction! Help! Then – I know you won't believe me, but I swear I'm telling the truth – Sam says that belief in evolution is just as much a faith commitment as belief in creation. Ahhh! In desperation you excuse yourself and rush out to write a letter to the *Brown and White*. Someone has to warn the public about people like this.

What is the single point of greatest embarrassment for 21st century people in the Genesis account of creation? It is the six day period in which it all happened. We all know that the universe has been

evolving for billions of years, and anything which departs from that dogma is viewed as foolish nonsense. The six days alone turn off millions of intelligent people from taking Genesis seriously. This was not the case when this text was first written. Then, as we said last week, the most outlandish part of this whole account was the absence of other gods and a cosmic battle for control. This story was a frontal attack on all the other religions of the ancient world. It appeared as silly as a Super Bowl with only one team, and it implicitly condemned all the other religions. There can be no doubt that the primary purpose of chapter one of Genesis is to establish that there is only one God – a God who created everything from nothing. He has no rivals, and does whatever He wishes because His power is infinite.

This is still the main point of the creation story in Genesis. There is a divine being who preceded everything else, made everything else, and rules the universe as He pleases. If you don't believe this you are not a Christian in any meaningful use of the word. Hebrews 11:6b says, "for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." All through the Bible there is testimony to God's creative activity. To deny this is to deny the whole Bible. But we are not wrong to wonder how God made the universe, and the six days are worth pondering.

Creation Theories

But what is an intelligent Christian to do? He has come to believe in God, to trust Jesus as His Lord and Savior, and now we are saying that He must also accept the biblical account of creation. If God is who He says He is – if God loved us enough to send Jesus to die for us, if God is infinitely powerful, if God is good and speaks the truth, we absolutely cannot dismiss His own version of the origin of the universe. But the plain evidence of evolutionary origins won't go away when you become a Christian. This puts sincere Christians in a painful dilemma. Shall we deny our God for the sake of intellectual integrity, or shall we blind ourselves to the world around us to preserve our faith? Christians have struggled mightily with this problem for thousands of years and have proposed many theories to resolve the dilemma.

One approach to the problem of origins is to accept the Bible as the account of *who* created the universe, and *why* He did it – but to look to science to explain *how* God did it. Galileo said it this way: "The Bible tells us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go." One modern version of this theory is called *theistic evolution*. This theory accepts the God of the Bible and accepts Him as the power behind creation, but accepts evolution as the mechanism by which God did His work. This is a sincere attempt to resolve the tension between science and the Bible, but it tends to dismiss the details of chapter one. In particular, it ignores the problem of the six days.

Another theory of origins attempts to overcome this flaw by taking the bulk of Genesis one as is – after the first verse. A gap is proposed between verses one and two – hence the name the *Gap Theory*. The idea is that God created the universe and entrusted it to Lucifer and the angels. This universe existed for billions of years, and the geologic records were laid down in this period. Then Lucifer rebelled against God and the earth became "formless and empty". Then God created it again as described in the succeeding verses. This theory is somewhat of an improvement over theistic evolution because it takes the text of Genesis more seriously without disturbing our understanding of science. Nevertheless, the more one is immersed in science, the more uncomfortable it is to accept this account of creation. It entails light preceding the sun and stars, and birds emerging at the same time as fish. And theologians are uneasy with it because the posited break between verses one and two seems forced.

In the 20th century many Christian scientists and theologians began to formulate another way of thinking about origins. They affirmed that God sovereignly created by His word, in the manner described by Genesis one, but over long periods of time. This is called *Progressive Creationism* or the *Day-Age Theory*. This theory takes the days of Genesis to be long periods of time and the age of the earth to be billions of years. They find so much overlap between the geologic record and the Genesis account, they

think they are telling essentially the same story. Of all the theories, this seems most satisfying scientifically and theologically, but it requires seeing the days of Genesis as long ages.

Very recently another theory has emerged, the *Framework Hypothesis*. This view recognizes the poetic symmetry of the passage, especially the parallels between the first three days and the second. It suggests that this chapter was never intended to be a real account of the *order* of creation, but only to provide a “framework” for origins. It emphasizes the sovereignty of God and dismisses the question of mechanism. Each day is seen as a perspective on creation, not a step in the process. The focus on God’s sovereignty is welcome, but that point can be made without dismissing the question of *how* He sovereignly created. Although currently popular in some circles, I doubt this theory has much staying power.

Finally, of course, there is the obvious theory that it all happened just as the text says. This theory, often called *Creationism*, has the strength of being the easiest biblically, but suffers being the most difficult scientifically.

Revelation

These are the major theories attempting to reconcile the biblical account of creation with the scientific evidence of origins. These are often passionately defended, but how are we to decide what is the truth? Many people just give up and stop caring. They essentially ignore science and Genesis and get on with the more “practical” matters in life. This sort of escapist attitude is not commendable in anyone, but it is unacceptable for you who are at the university to learn science and literature. We need to make some sense of all this.

The first thing we need to think about is how to think about this whole matter. Let’s back up and ask, “Assuming there is a God, how can mere man know anything about Him with any accuracy?” This is an important question which philosophers and theologians have debated for centuries. It’s a good point. If God is infinite, how can finite man be sure he has understood God? If you think about this for a while you will conclude that, on his own, man cannot possibly be sure He has any reliable understanding of God. Thankfully, we aren’t left on our own – for God Himself has given us reliable information about Him. We call this divine information “revelation”.

God’s self-revelation comes in two forms. John Calvin explained it by saying that God has written two books – the book of nature and the book of the Bible. Each book tells the same story, but with different emphases. Nature tells us there is a God who is powerful, beautiful, and creative. We see creativity in the lavish diversity of plants and animals that populate the earth. We see His power and beauty in storms and volcanoes, mountains and rivers, and especially in men and women. But although nature is adequate to reveal the nature of God, it tells us nothing about His personality and, especially, it tells us nothing about how to communicate with Him. That is where the Bible comes in. The Bible tells us who God is, how to know Him, and how we can be reconciled from Him when we offend Him. Theologians call nature “general revelation” because the universe shows general characteristics of God. We call the Bible “special revelation” because it gives us special information about relating to God. Now here is a vital point. Both forms of revelation come from God. Both are true. Both accurately show who God is. Therefore any theory of origins must give due credit to both nature and the Bible. Any theory which seems to give too little weight to one or the other should be viewed with suspicion.

But that is not to say that nature and the Bible are equally useful in understanding origins. Since they both come from God they are equally *reliable*, but since they provide different information, they must be used correctly. The point is that the Bible is God’s *interpretation* of nature. Calvin called the Bible the spectacles through which we see the universe. Without the Bible we will see nature, but our vision is faulty. This is due to our finiteness, and is aggravated by our sin. Sin causes us to distort what we see, especially

when it implies that we are guilty before God and subject to His judgment. Romans 1:18-20 summarizes this principle.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...

Evolution Exposed

Romans chapter one is vital for helping us understand our current problems with the origins of the universe. As the introductory dialogue showed, evolution is accepted as truth by the scientific establishment and our whole culture. But although our imaginary narrator did not know this – and he represents our whole culture – there are serious challenges to evolution in the scientific community. When men like Michael Behe – and there are hundreds like him – are willing to take a professionally suicidal position against evolutionary theory, you have to take notice. And scientists are not ignoring Dr. Behe. Scientists ignore crackpots, but Dr. Behe is the object of a powerful and sustained attack by other scientists. Why should they waste their time on him? Because he isn't a crackpot. He is telling the truth, and it frightens the scientific community.

I was trained as a scientist – a biologist. I studied molecular genetics – you know, DNA, gene splicing and all that. I love science and respect the knowledge science has given us. I object to theologians or anyone else who minimizes the importance of scientific discoveries. In other words, I'm no crackpot either. But folks, it's time to face reality. Evolution is a hoax. Michael Behe and hundreds of other scientists are waking us up to the fact that the emperor has no clothes. Just because everyone believes evolution, including important people, doesn't make it true. My point here is not that the Bible disproves evolution – science disproves evolution. The Theory of Evolution simply doesn't account for the evidence that science has provided us.

Why then do so many people, including most scientists, accept evolution as the best explanation for the origin of life? Romans tells us. They suppress the truth because they cannot face the judgment of God. If the universe was created by God, then He has the right to judge us – and that thought is too terrifying to tolerate. Modern man is not unique in this. The ancient creation myths were ancient man's attempt to protect himself from the knowledge that the one eternal God who created him will someday judge him. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and other religions were created for the same reason. Western man considers himself too sophisticated to believe such nonsense, so he made a creation myth more to his liking. He invented the story of evolution.

Evolution is the issue which energizes people on all sides of this issue because it is the front-line in the conflict between two religions – Christianity and materialism. But the important question is what we make of the data which is used to prop up evolution. What do the fossil record, the geologic strata, and the astronomical signals mean? Most people are quite sure they indicate an old earth. So how does that square with a creation account which features six days? This is the question of real importance.

Integrity

As Christians we are unafraid of God's judgment. Surely "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men", but for us, that wrath was exhausted on Jesus Christ as He hung on the cross. God's anger against our sin is gone forever, and we can confidently and joyfully face God. Of all people, Christians alone are free from the pressure to suppress the truth. That means that we can face the facts of origins with honesty and integrity. However, being free from fear of God, we must also be free of the fear of man. In order to understand the truth about origins we must, like professor Behe,

be willing to follow the truth wherever it will lead us – even if it means we stand alone against the current establishment.

So where does the truth lead us? Devout and honest theologians and scientists do not agree, and I do not wish to make this a point of contention among us. I urge you to face God and man unafraid and come to your own conclusions. But I will present some guidelines for us as we consider this question.

First, as we already said, accept both nature and the Bible as God's revelation. Both tell the truth about God – who He is and what He has done. Don't give science a meager hearing, and don't short-change the biblical testimony. Study both intensely.

Second, use the Bible to interpret nature. While some pastors don't give science enough credit, many Christians fall into the trap of assuming that scientists are equipped to give an infallible interpretation of their data. No. We all need to be involved in this, theologians and scientists alike. But all of us need to look to the Bible for the interpretive last word. If the scientific evidence implied that man evolved from monkeys (which it doesn't), we would conclude that we have misunderstood the evidence since it contradicts the clear teaching of the Bible.

Third, give God the credit for sovereign creation. If God is truly all-powerful, He can create a whole universe in an intuitively illogical order in six days. He can create light on day one and the sun and stars on day four. Maybe He didn't, but don't act as if He couldn't.

Many of you are wondering where I stand on this issue. For what it's worth, I think the best accounting of all the data is a young earth, six day creation. There are many aspects to this position and arguments pro and con – but for me, the deciding factor is that the text says God created in six days. The Hebrew word, *yom*, can mean a period of time, and elsewhere in the Old Testament it cannot possibly mean a 24 hour day. But when it is used in a numerical list, *yom* always means one period of night and day. The biggest problem with this position is the scientific data. Here, I suggest that if God created man, Adam, an adult man with the appearance of age, why should he not have created the whole universe with the appearance of age? There is no doubt He *could* have. I think it's more reasonable to think He did than to interpret *yom* in an unusual manner. But many of my colleagues see it differently.

Conclusion

What is the application of this study? Whatever you do, don't go out and beat up on people who hold a different view of creation than you do. Don't go around saying that anyone who holds to the Theory of Evolution is an idiot. Especially don't treat your professors that way. But neither should you ignore this question. Remember that at root, this is a faith issue. People believe what they do because of their faith in Jesus Christ – or lack thereof. Creation is not the issue in life – Jesus is. But creation can give us an opening to talk with people about Jesus. Seize those opportunities! Discuss creation with your friends, but do so in a manner that will lead them to place their faith in the God who not only created them, but also died in love for them. In so doing you will welcome them into the new creation, which far outshines the old.

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- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God; *
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
- 2 Day unto day utters speech, *
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
- 3 There is no speech nor language *
Where their voice is not heard.
- 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world. *
In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,
- 5 Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, *
And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.
- 6 Its rising is from one end of heaven,
And its circuit to the other end; *
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.
- 7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; *
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
- 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; *
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
- 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; *
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
- 10 More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; *
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
- 11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, *
And in keeping them there is great reward.
- 12 Who can understand his errors? *
Cleanse me from secret faults.
- 13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; *
Let them not have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless, *
And I shall be innocent of great transgression.
- 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight, *
O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.