
The Doctrine of Creation

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"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). The Bible begins with creation, and the fact that God is Creator is always in view from Genesis to Revelation.

Even though the Bible is not primarily a book of science, it is as trustworthy in the area of science as when it speaks to any other subject. We can have confidence in what it says concerning the origin of all things because "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine" (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is not the changing word of man, but the unchanging Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Scripture focuses our attention not so much on the act of creation as on God himself as the Creator. In Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 God is the subject of most of the sentences. We read that God created, God said, God saw, God divided, God called or named, God made, God set or appointed, God blessed, God rested, and God sanctified.

Creation is the revelation of an intelligent, loving, personal God. In contrast to pantheism He is distinct from His creation (Psalm 90:2). In contrast to deism He continues to be personally interested in His handiwork; for He upholds, sustains, and preserves it (Nehemiah 9:6).

The rest of the Bible continues this emphasis on God as the Creator, bringing it into many facets of our relationship to Him. We are to worship and serve Him as the Creator (Isaiah 40:26, 28, 31). We are warned not to strive against our Maker (Isaiah 45:9). We are to commit the keeping of our souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19). We also recognize that our help comes from the One who made the heavens and the earth (Psalms 146:5, 6; 121:2; 124:8), and there is nothing too hard for Him (Jeremiah 32:17).

The Bible further emphasizes the fact that God is the Creator of all things. Repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments this is brought to our attention (Exodus 20:11; Psalm 146:6; Nehemiah 9:6; Acts 14:17; Revelation 4:11; 10:6).

This is one of the distinctive elements of the Biblical revelation. In contrast to ancient heathenism and modern materialism, the Bible teaches a genuine beginning. Most heathenism was dualistic, teaching that the universe in some form existed eternally alongside the gods. In the heathen myths the gods are seen as having created something, but always from preexisting materials. The very declaration that God is the Creator sets Him apart from the idols (Psalm 96:5).

Materialists teach that matter and its laws are eternal and are the sum total of all existence, thus ruling out the idea of God altogether. But the Bible declares that God is the Creator of all things and that He existed before all things (Psalm 90:2). Thus we have a genuine beginning when God brought the universe into existence out of nothing.

Another important fact of Biblical revelation is that creation was the cooperative work of the Trinity.

The Old Testament shows that the Spirit of God had a part (Genesis 1:2).

The New Testament further reveals that Jesus, who is the one Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5) in our redemption, was also the Mediator in Creation. Christ, who is called "the firstborn" because He has first place, the place of the heir (Colossians 1:15), was the active Agent in creation. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). The Greek word translated "by" (dia) is a word of secondary agency used, for example, where God spoke by the prophets.

So God created by or through Jesus. Jesus was the living Word through whom God spoke the worlds into existence. He was the One who made man from the dust of the earth. He is before all things and is the Creator of the invisible angelic world as well (Colossians 1:16).

Several other facts are also clear:

1. The Biblical account of creation reveals progress and climax. Progress can be seen in the increase of personal attention God gave in His creative work. Of the vegetation we read that God said, "Let the earth bring forth . . . and the earth brought forth" (vv. 11, 12). Of the animals we read that God said, "Let the earth bring forth . . . and God made" (vv. 24, 25). But of man God said, "Let us make man . . . so God created man" (vv. 26, 27). Man is thus a special and distinctive creation, the climax, and to man is given dominion.

All this evidence of sequence, balance, correspondence, progress, and climax shows careful, intelligent planning. That God created by plan absolutely rules out any idea that part of creation came into being by mere chance. God exercised His wisdom and control at all times (Psalms 136:5; 148:5; Isaiah 45:12; 48:12, 13) and brought it all to a complete and well-designed end (Genesis 1:31).

2. It is evident that God carried out His plan in distinct steps. This is indicated by the mention of succeeding days in Creation and by the mention of the evening and morning. That is, here is an evening, this part is over; here is a morning, a new beginning.

Genesis 2, instead of being another creation record as some claim, is an amplification of activity not mentioned in Genesis 1. That is, the first chapter simply states that God created man, male and female created He them. The second chapter gives further details about part of the sixth creation day. There we see that God took the dust of the earth and formed man. Then He breathed into man the breath of life. This act indicates that man is distinct from animal life and that God did not form him from some previously existing animal (1 Corinthians 15:39). The creation of animal life from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:19) only indicates that God used the same source of material for both.

After creating Adam, God put him in the Garden and gave him work to do. Then "God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam . . . and he took one of his ribs" and made a woman.

This Bible record of creation thus rules out the evolutionary philosophy which states that all forms of life have come into being by gradual, progressive evolution carried on by resident forces. It also rules out any evolutionary origin for man, since no theory of evolution, including theistic evolution, can explain the origin of the male before the female, nor can it explain how a man could evolve into a woman.

3. It is also evident that no part of God's creation, whether man, angel, or devil, is creative in the sense God is. The Hebrew word for create (bara') always has God as the subject of the verb. This word is used for God's work of creation and is also used to indicate that God would do something unusual and unprecedented. When the earth opened up to swallow the rebellious Korah, the phrase "make a new thing" is literally "create a creation" (Numbers 16:30). It is used when God said to Israel at Sinai: "I will do marvels, such as have not been done [bara', created] in all the earth" (Exodus 34:10).

Of miracles and the fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah's day, when events showed the foolishness

and weakness of the people's trust in idols, God said, "I have showed thee new things . . . They are created now, and not from the beginning" (Isaiah 48:6, 7). Thus even in the first chapter of Genesis, the word create is used only of completely new and unprecedented acts of God; that is, of the creation of the heavens and the earth in the beginning, of the creation of the first animal life in the sea (1:21), and of man in God's own image (1:27). Other times the word made (Hebrew, 'asah) is used. The word create (bara') thus emphasizes that God alone is the Creator, and His acts of creation are unique and unprecedented.

4. God had purpose in creation. He created "for himself" or for His own pleasure (Proverbs 16:4; Revelation 4:11) and for His glory (Isaiah 43:7). He wanted the earth to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18). All creation is thus an expression of His will and His power.

Man is a being who is in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27): free, rational, capable of self-appreciation and self-expression, capable of moral and spiritual understanding, created for fellowship with God. He will find his proper place in creation only as he is in right relation to God through the redemption accomplished in Jesus.

5. The account of creation is intended to be taken as factual and historical. Our understanding of God as Creator is rooted in a revelation that is historical in nature, just as our understanding of God as Redeemer is rooted in the revelation of God's dealings with Israel in history and in the historical events of the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. All the New Testament accepts it this way. The first man Adam, for example, is recognized as a historical person (Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Timothy 2:13, 14).

Some have contended that the first two chapters of Genesis are poetical and are to be taken as parables. But a comparison of poetical references to Creation (Deuteronomy 32 and 33; Job 38:4-11; Psalms 90, 104:5-9) shows that the Genesis account is not poetry but prose. It should be noted, however, that poetry in the Bible often describes actual, historical events, so the use of poetry does not make an event a parable or myth.

It is significant that although creation events are not stated in modern scientific terminology, they are given in unusually acceptable statements, thus providing solid record for all men in all times (Ephesians 1:18).

In summary then, we see that the Bible points us to God as the Creator in every step of creation. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Hebrews 11:3). "For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:9).