



Lesson 7 – Creation and Evolution

Can people who believe in a young earth do good science? Bill Nye (the science guy) says no. In the opening statement of his debate with Ken Ham, Bill Nye made the following comments:

“What keeps the United States ahead, what makes the United States a world leader is our technology, our new ideas, our innovations. If we continue to eschew [avoid] science, eschew the process... we are not going to move forward; we will not embrace natural laws; we will not make discoveries; we will not invent and innovate and stay head. So if you ask me if [the] creation model is viable? I would say no. It is absolutely not viable.”¹

The message is clear: if you don't believe in evolution it's because you're an idiot and will hold us back. So how should and how have Christians responded?

Why do you think evolutionists would argue that people need to believe in evolution to do science?

What's wrong with this line of thinking?

The question of where we came from is an issue where we disagree with the world but also one in which we disagree with other believers. Many unbelievers will deny there is a God and so argue that evolution is how we got here. We would argue that God is how we got here. Many Christians try to find a compromising position, however, and

¹ Bill Nye, “Bill Nye Debates Ken Ham”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6kgvhG3AkI>

argue that God *used* evolution. In this lesson, we are going to focus on what the Bible actually says, and why it can't be made to fit with billions of years.

What we believe on this topic matters because it reflects how we understand of God's Word. While someone can still be saved and believe God used evolution, the lengths they need to go to in order to argue that the Bible is compatible with evolution does damage to the Bible in the process. We could talk about how to engage with unbelievers on the issue of the age of the earth, but since what we say needs to be founded on Scripture's record, we will focus in this lesson on what Genesis actually says. We will begin by talking about Genesis 1-2, then we will look at some problems we come across in other parts of Scripture if Genesis 1-2 are seen as figurative.

Why are some believers strongly motivated to make the Bible and evolution fit?

Is Genesis Literal?

For many years those who wanted to slip the billions of years necessary for evolution into Genesis 1-2 did so through either the gap theory or the day-age theory. The gap theory argued that there was an initial creation that was destroyed and that everything went back to being empty, and that all this happened in a "gap" between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. The day age theory argued that the word "day" can also mean "era" (e.g. "back in my father's day") and that these days were long periods of time. Both theories have for the most part been abandoned.² So how do those who want to slip evolution into Genesis

² Both theories had major exegetical problems. The gap theory tried to argue that "the earth was without form and void" should have been translated "the earth *became* without form and void," but this is based on a misunderstanding of the Hebrew. The day age theory tried to argue that "with the Lord a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day,"

do it now? By arguing that Genesis 1 doesn't want you to take it literally.³

What kind of story is Genesis 1?

Should we always take the Bible literally?

Your gut reaction might be, "Of course!" But what about the Psalms? Did David really cry so much his bed started floating? (Psalm 6:6) Did the earth actually swallow the Egyptian army? (Exodus 15:12). No, because both of these phrases are part of poems and are obviously figures of speech. This might seem so obvious it doesn't need to be said, but it raises the question, "What kind of literature is Genesis 1?"

- **Is Genesis poetry?**

Some would argue that Genesis is poetry, or at the very least poetic. The Hebrew of Genesis is not poetry,⁴ but some still stress that there are some features that are at the very least poetic. For example, there is a regular rhythm to Genesis 1, with many phrases repeated over and over like a refrain. Some phrases that are used are argued to be poetic, such as "beasts of the earth" or

but Genesis is pretty clear that these days have "morning and evening" and are numbered ("first," "second," etc.), and neither description fits with an interpretation of "era" for the word day.

³ For a good example of this type of argument, see the article by Tim Keller at Biologos, "Creation, Evolution, and the Christian Layperson," <https://biologos.org/articles/creation-evolution-and-christian-laypeople#does-evolution-diminish-human-uniqueness>

⁴ The main characteristic of Hebrew poetry is parallelism, where the author will make a statement and then either repeat the statement, contrast the statement, or build on it in some way. The main characteristics of Hebrew narrative is a unique verb form called *wayyiqtol* and a special word that is used to point out the direct object of the sentence. Genesis 1 has no parallelism and it has lots of *wayyiqtol*'s and direct object markers, meaning it is narrative, not poetry.

“greater light” and “lesser light.” One of the biggest reasons, however, is a supposed contradiction between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. We will look at this in greater detail below.

- **Is Genesis myth?**

But what if Genesis is a myth, a story that wasn't supposed to be taken literally, but instead was written to make profound observations about God and the world. It's not “wrong” or an “error” to say that Genesis 1 didn't happen if the author of Genesis didn't expect you to take him literally. For example, if someone shared the classic story of “The Boy who Cried Wolf” it would be wrong to ask “What was his name?” “Where did he live?” “At what point in history did this take place?” The point of the story is that you shouldn't lie, it doesn't need to be factually accurate to make that point. How would we know that ancient people's thought this way? Well, we've found a lot of examples of “creation myths” from surrounding cultures, so some people will argue you must know them to really get Genesis 1. We'll look at this argument later.

- **Is Genesis history?**

If Genesis is not poetry, and if it's not myth, then it must be history. People can doubt or deny the account, but they must acknowledge that's what the Bible is claiming. We will look at two of the biggest arguments for not taking Genesis 1 literally, and argue that since they don't hold up the only option left is take Genesis 1 as history.

Are there two different accounts of creation?

One reason that people will argue Genesis 1 should be taken figuratively is because it sounds so different from Genesis 2. Genesis 1 tells us God created in 7 days. Genesis 2 doesn't give us a timeline. Genesis 1 has God speaking and things come into being. Genesis 2 has

God scooping up dirt and performing surgery. Genesis 1 lumps Adam, Eve, and the animals all into one day. Genesis 2 sounds like there might be some time between those three acts. Genesis 1 puts the creation of plants before man. Genesis 2 seems to put the creation of man before plants. Do Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 present two different accounts of the creation?

For many years scholars said “yes” and some argued this was proof that Genesis wasn’t written by Moses but was a much later document of random traditions that had simply been thrown together (and some poor fool didn’t realize that the two creation accounts he included were incompatible!). Today, some Christians will point out these differences and argue that Genesis 1 is a poetic, mythic, or “exalted prose narrative.”⁵ Since Genesis 1 and 2 seem to disagree in their eyes, these Christians will argue that one is not to be taken literally, and they choose Genesis 1 since Genesis 2 seems to be a more “normal” progression.

What do you think about this argument?

To answer this dilemma, we need to ask 2 questions: (1) How does Hebrew literature work? And (2) What is being created in Genesis 2?

In answer to the first question, it’s important to realize that Hebrew uses a lot of repetition intentionally. One Hebrew scholar explained it this way: “The fundamental principle of Hebrew literature is to repeat yourself. It’s actually a brilliant concept... It’s like listening to a stereo with a left speaker and a right speaker. So in one sense the music coming out of the speakers is the same but each one is slightly different and the difference is what allows you to have a stereo music. So instead of ... [linear] logic you actually have stereo ideas or

⁵ Tim Keller, “Creation, Evolution, and the Christian Layperson.”

holographic ideas. It's a different approach to communication."⁶ Genesis 1 and 2 are complement one another, they don't contradict.

What is the focus of Genesis 1 versus Genesis 2?

Genesis 1 is big picture; it describes God as "God." Genesis 2 is personal; it describes God as "the Lord (Yahweh) God." Genesis 1 is about the beginning of the world; Genesis 2 is about the beginning of humanity. Genesis 1 is cosmic; Genesis 2 is relational. The two stories together give a fuller picture of the beginning of history than either one of them could individually.

But we also have to ask if Genesis 2 is describing the creation of the entire world, or the creation of Eden. Genesis 2:5 is challenging verse, but it appears to give the background to the creation of man. At this time, we read, there was no plant because it hadn't rained. But was this globally? Or locally? The word "earth" could also be translated as "land." In other words, this could be a reference to the whole world or to a more limited area. The focus of chapter 2 is not on the entire world, but on Eden and the surrounding area, so this verse should be limited to that area.

This section would then be an enlargement of the creation account of day six. While the events of chapter could have taken longer than one day, they didn't necessarily need to. We don't know how specific Adam got in naming the animals or how many animals he named. It's certainly possible that Adam completed his task in half a day, went to sleep, and had an evening wedding. Some might argue that this is a stretch, or an unnecessary harmonization. But the Holy Spirit is the one who put the two chapters side by side. If the two accounts *can* be made to work together, why would that not be our first option? The details of chapter two can certainly be made to fit with Genesis one's

⁶ Peter Gentry, "The Putative Citation of Enoch in Jude," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 2J0j3RcBMQ>

explanation of day six, so why wouldn't we assume that's what Moses (and the Holy Spirit) intended for this passage?

Is Genesis written as an attack on pagan beliefs?

The ancient Hebrews aren't the only ones with stories of how we got here. Other Mesopotamian cultures had their stories of "creation," such as the famous Babylonian tale *Enuma Elish*. In this story the primordial salt waters (named Tiamat) and the primordial fresh waters (named Apsu) met up and the result was the first batch of gods. These gods began dancing and that angered Tiamat and Apsu so they planned to take out the new gods, but instead Apsu was killed. Tiamat decided to get revenge and made an army, which was defeated by Marduk, who became the chief of the gods (and conveniently was the patron god of Babylon). Marduk then splits the corpse of Tiamat to create the world. Finally, humans are made to do the menial tasks the gods don't feel like doing so they can rest.⁷

Scholars have noted that sounds similar in some ways to the Bible's account, but also very different. Perhaps, they argue, that is the point. Maybe Genesis 1 is designed to contradict the Babylonian story (and other related spin-offs⁸). There are waters in the beginning, but God created them. He splits them, but nobody dies in the process. Creation isn't the result of a dramatic fight, instead God only has to speak. And humans aren't made as slaves to do the work God doesn't want to do, they're created as co-regents to rule over the world with Him. God's rest is the result of a partnership with humanity; Marduk's rest is the

⁷ John Dunne, "Enuma Elish," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

⁸ Assyria seems to have a story that's essentially the same, but with different characters. Although we don't have a Canaanite story, there are a number of parallels between Baal and Marduk.

result of making humans to be his slaves. Maybe Genesis 1 was written to push back on the way cultures around Israel thought.⁹

Do you think Genesis 1 was written to contradict the creation stories of the nations around Israel?

There are two observations to be made in response to this. First, this view assumes that Babylon came first and then Israel's came after. This is because Babylon is bigger, and we have older copies of the *Enuma Elish* than we do of the Old Testament. But if God really did create the world, and if He gave that record to His people, isn't it reasonable that the story would get distorted over time? So yes, this story does contradict the stories around it, because the Genesis account is true and the truth contradict the lies that spun off from it.

But secondly, ancient peoples actually believed their creation myths! Moderns like to throw around the word "myth" and act as if that was an ancient custom, that people went around telling stories they didn't believe to make sense of the world. To say this was written as an attack against Babylonian stories is to say that someone knowingly deceived his peers, and they bought it. It's hard to see how such a story could be the truth of God.

Problems with a Figurative Interpretation

We've sought to respond to the arguments brought against a literal reading of Genesis 1-3. Now we'll look and see why it is necessary to hold to such a view and what happens if we don't.

⁹ Many who argue this believe that Genesis was finally composed during the Babylonian exile, not during the time of Moses. Regardless, Babylon did have a huge impact on the Ancient Near East for centuries. For example, in Genesis 11 "Babel" is the Hebrew word for "Babylon," and Abraham himself came from Ur, a city in Babylon.

What are some of the major problems one would have if they held that the events of Genesis 1-3 did not happen as Genesis describes them?

Where did sin and death come from?

When we discussed the problem of evil, part of our answer was that evil came from man's rebellion against God. According to Scripture, that included death and suffering, what we often call "natural evil." God cursed the earth because of man's sin, which puts the blame for current state of affairs on man, and not on God.

What would happen if Genesis 1-3 were figurative and not literal?

Part of the problem of evolution is that disease, suffering, and death would have existed long before the fall. Natural selection only works if things are dying. It doesn't work so well in paradise if there isn't survival of the fittest. Holding to evolution and downplaying the literal nature of Genesis 3 in particular will ultimately undermine part of the Bible's answer as to why there is so much wrong with the world.¹⁰

Did Paul get it wrong?

Paul really seems to believe in a literal Adam,¹¹ and his argument in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 doesn't work with Adam as a general symbol for all humanity. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 teaches that "in Adam

¹⁰ Not all who believe in evolution deny that Adam was historical or that things happened in the garden as described in Genesis 3. However, they still cannot answer the question of why there would be death and suffering before sin, other than to say that the death and suffering of humans would have been prevented by God if man had not sinned.

¹¹ This is particularly aimed at those who hold to evolution and don't hold to a literal Adam. As stated above, some who believe in a literal Adam also believe in evolution.

all die” and draws the comparison with Christ “even so in Christ shall be made alive.” In Romans 5, we are told that “by one man sin entered the world” and that the gift of God is “by one man, Jesus Christ.” In both places, Paul is arguing specifically that Jesus’ work is the parallel and opposite work of Adam. Some respond to this by saying that Paul is a child of his times and he is wrong, although what he teaches about Jesus is good stuff and we should listen to him like we would listen to anyone who gets some stuff right and some stuff wrong. Others think Paul is simply using a story he knows is a metaphor but he’s building on that metaphor. But Paul seems pretty clearly to be contrasting Adam and Christ, and in doing so he’s discussing our salvation! To knock Adam out of this argument does great damage, not just to Paul’s argument, but to the doctrine of salvation!

God’s Word Is Written for All People in All Times

This lesson has probably been confusing. We’ve talked about Hebrew poetry and literature, studied the creation myths of ancient peoples, and dug deeper than we normally dig. We’ve done so to answer sophisticated arguments from genuine believers who want to make the Bible fit with evolution. But there should be a perplexing question floating in the back of your mind: “If these new ideas are all correct, what about those poor idiots who died before the last 100 years when we supposedly figured all this out?” Did God’s people get it wrong for so long because they didn’t understand science or didn’t have access to the *Enuma Elish*? Are people in the pew really unable to understand their Bibles unless a biblical scholar comes along and explains it them? What about missions? How do we help tribal natives understand the gospel if the Bible’s story needs evolution to be fully understood? How do we tell them, “This is what the Bible says, but it doesn’t actually mean that”?

While studying Hebrew poetry and literature can be a helpful tool, you don’t need Hebrew to understand your Bible. While it is interesting to

see the way ancient peoples twisted God's truth into their own creation stories, you don't need to know them to get the point. God's Word is designed to be understood by everyone, and you can get what it is saying by sitting down and reading, without the help of a specialist.

What would it look like if God's people needed specialists in theology, history, and exegesis to explain to them even the most basic passages of Scripture?

What role does the specialist have in helping believers understand their Bible?

We live in a culture where the ideas of the Bible are out of step with our culture, but they always have been. God's people have always disagreed with the culture around them about how we got here all throughout history. Small little ancient Israel contradicted bigger, more powerful nations around them that taught we are here because the gods were killing each other and needed slaves. Jews and Christians in the Greek and Roman empires continued to hold onto the account of Genesis when dualism was all the rage and the idea of a good God creating matter seemed ridiculous. After Darwin, billions of years and molecules to man have become the dogma of our scientific age.

But there have always been those who caved. Some Israelites worshipped idols, too, just to make sure their bases were covered. Philo, Origen, and Augustine explained Genesis away as beautiful allegory so they didn't have look ridiculous to the Greeks. And Biologos argues that evolution and Genesis 1 are compatible. We as believers need to charitably, but firmly hold on to the truth of God. The Bible teaches that God made the earth in six days. At the end of the day, we must decide if we are willing to look ridiculous and stand with God, or try and bend what God says to match what man is saying.

What are some other ways people try to bend what God says to match what man is saying?