

Genesis

Creation, Covenants, All Grace – study 3



The GOD of PURPOSE (1:3-13)

1:3-13 Note first the patterns recurrent throughout the days of creation.

The pattern for each of the days of Creation is established here. There is (a) the creative word, (b) the report of its effect, (c) God's evaluation of it as "good," (d) at times the sovereign naming, and (e) the numbering of each day. -- **Allen P. Ross**, *Bible Knowledge Commentary* p. 28

To the previous statements about creation (essential distinction from God, belonging to God) must now be added as the third a declaration of value: the creature brought into existence is *tob* ("good"). The word contains less an aesthetic judgment than the designation of purpose and correspondence. (It corresponds, therefore, though with much more restraint, to the content of Ps. 104:31; Ps. 104 tells not so much of the beauty as of the marvelous purpose and order of creation.) ... But in the ancient Oriental view the act of giving a name meant, above all, the exercise of a sovereign right (cf. II Kings 23:34; 24:17). Thus the **naming** of this and all subsequent creative works once more expresses graphically God's claim of lordship over the creatures. -- **Gerhard von Rad**, *Genesis* p. 50,51 (emphasis added)

Literalism involves a fundamental misconception of the mental processes of biblical man and ignorance of his modes of self-expression. ...



NAHUM SARNA
Literalism – "a fundamental misconception of the mental processes of biblical man .."

Biblical man, despite his undoubtedly intellectual and spiritual endowments, did not base his views of the universe and its laws on the critical use of empirical data. He had not, as yet, discovered the principles and methods of disciplined inquiry, critical observation or analytical experimentation. Rather, his thinking was imaginative, and his expressions of thought were concrete, pictorial, emotional, and poetic. Hence, it is a naive and futile exercise to attempt to reconcile the biblical accounts of creation with the findings of modern science. Any correspondence which can be discovered or ingeniously established between the two must surely be nothing more than mere coincidence. Even more serious than the inherent fundamental misconception of the psychology of biblical man is the unwholesome effect upon the understanding of the Bible itself. For the net result is self-defeating. The literalistic approach serves to direct attention to those aspects of the narrative that reflect the time and place of its composition, while it tends to obscure the elements that are meaningful and enduring, thus distorting the biblical message and destroying its relevancy.
-- **Nahum M. Sarna**, *Understanding Genesis* p. xxiii,2

What theories are there in regard the length of the creation days?

The length and nature of the days of Genesis has occupied no small place in current discussions of biblical cosmology. To initiate the liveliest of debates one need only raise this issue, but far too often the discussion will produce more heat than light. This issue is so highly contested because of its multitude of ramifications -- scientific, theological, and philosophical. Without considering these, one cannot arrive at an adequate conclusion. Apart from the use of the Hebrew word *yom*, "day", in verses 5,8,13,19,23, and 31, where it describes the days of creation, it is used in at least four ways in the first two chapters of Genesis: the twelve-hour period of daylight as opposed to night (vv. 14,16,18); a solar day of twenty-four hours (v. 14); the period of light that began with the creation of light on the first creative day (v. 5); and the entire, six-day creative period (2:4).

How long were the days of creation? Advocates of the literal day theory argue that they were approximately twenty-four hours long; advocates for the day-age theory, that they were long periods of indefinite duration; advocates of the literal-day-with-gaps theory, that they were twenty-four hours long but were separated by long periods of indefinite duration; and advocates of the revelatory day theory, that they were not days of creation at all but days of revelation. -- **John J. Davis**, *Paradise to Prison* p. 51

How long did this day last, and how long did the first day and the third day last? I must simply answer you that I cannot tell, I do not know. No human being knows. There were then no great lights to divide and measure the days. We only know that these days were periods of time, and most probably very long periods, ... -- **L. Gausser**, *The World's Birthday* p. 94

The Bible does not state how old the earth is, and the question of the age of the earth is not the heart of the issue. What is the heart of the issue is whether God truly created or whether we, merely upon the basis of our observations of the universe, can place limits upon the manner in which God worked. -- **Edward J. Young**, *Studies in Genesis One* p. 102

The SOVEREIGN, GOD ALMIGHTY (1:14-25)

1:14-19 Is there significance in the centrality of the fourth day? (Isa. 47-48)

The most obvious reason for the detail in the fourth day's description is the importance of the astral bodies in ancient Near Eastern thought. In neighboring cultures, the sun and the moon were some of the most important gods in the pantheon, and the stars were often credited with controlling human destiny ... So there is probably a polemic thrust behind Genesis' treatment of the theme. This comes out in several ways. First, the sun, moon, and stars are created by God: they are creatures, not gods. And with creatureliness goes transience; unlike the Hittite sun-god, they are not "from eternity." Second, the sun and moon are not given their usual Hebrew names ... here, which might suggest an identification with Shamash the sun god or Yarih the moon god. Instead they are simply called "the larger" and "the smaller light." Third, the sun and moon are simply assigned the role of lighting the earth and ruling the day and night, as surrogates of God. This is quite a lowly function by ancient Near Eastern standards, though Marduk does something similar in appointing stations for the great gods in EE [*Enuma Elish*] 5.1-22. Finally, the stars, widely worshiped and often regarded as controllers of human destiny, are mentioned almost as an afterthought: they too are merely creatures. -- **Gordon J. Wenham**, *Word Biblical Commentary Genesis 1 - 15* p. 21

The word "Elohim", here translated "God," and occurring at least five-and-thirty times in this particular section, suggests the embodiment of all might, ... -- **G. Campbell Morgan**, *The Analysed Bible: Old Testament - Genesis* p. 5

1:20-25 Compared to pagan "gods", what does Genesis claim for ELOHIM? (Isa. 43:1-13; 44:6,8; 45:12,18,21-23; 46:5,9; 48:12,13)

Strictly speaking, [elohim] is an appellative, that is, it can be used of any deity. It is not a personal name, such as Yahweh, El Shaddai, Marduk, or Chemosh. Nevertheless, as with the English word "God", it often acts almost as a proper name. Certainly in this chapter [elohim] is a more appropriate word to use than Yahweh (the LORD): it implies that God is the sovereign creator of the whole universe, not just Israel's personal God (H. Ringgren, *TDOT* 1:267-84; W.H. Schmidt, *THWAT* 1:153-67). -- **Gordon J. Wenham**, *op.cit.*, p. 15

It is scarcely possible to imagine a greater contrast than between the heathen accounts of the origin of all things and the scriptural narrative. The former are so full of the grossly absurd that no one could regard them as other than fables; while the latter is so simple, and yet so full of majesty, as almost to force us to "worship and bow down," and to "kneel before the Lord our Maker." And as this was indeed the object in view, and not scientific instruction, far less the gratification of our curiosity, we must expect to find in the first chapter of Genesis simply the grand outlines of what took place, and not any details connected with creation. -- **Alfred Edersheim**, *The Bible History Old Testament* p. 17

... while the doctrine of biblical inspiration does not rule out the possibility of the dependence of the Genesis account, it renders such dependence wholly unnecessary. It seems inconceivable that the Holy Spirit would have used an epic so contaminated with heathen philosophy as a source of spiritual truth. **Merrill F. Unger** in **John J. Davis**, *op.cit.*, p. 72

In fact, modern scientific cosmogonies show such a disconcerting tendency to be short lived that it may be seriously doubted whether science has yet caught up with the Biblical story. -- **William F. Albright** in **Edward J. Young**, *op.cit.*, p. 102

NEXT: The NAME above all names

WILLIAM FOXWELL ALBRIGHT

Dean of American archaeologists

On the ever-evolving theories of cosmology:

"... it may be seriously doubted whether science has yet caught up with the Biblical story."

