

Session 1

Creation According to Genesis: Literally or Literary?

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Synopsis

Genesis is obviously the starting point for Christians to understand how to proclaim creation. Fortunately, it is far easier to understand than most people think. A normal reading of the creation story and genealogies shows the earth is about 6000 years old. Unfortunately, biblical scholars are among the first to discount a literal (or normal) reading of Genesis. Recently, many have instead argued that Genesis 1 contains literary features that make dates impossible. Therefore, people feel they must choose to take Genesis at face value (literally) *or* take it as only theological literature without historical notations (literary). We should counter this by accepting it as theological history!

Summary

The Importance of Genesis

All people must answer the key issues of their origin, purpose, morality and destiny. This is why the Bible begins with creation (origin), man's rule (purpose), man's fall (morality), and God's rescue plan for sinful humanity (destiny). Genesis shows man as the pinnacle of creation, made to rule with God. However, he chose to rebel against God and ruined a perfect creation into the chaos we know today.

How to Read Genesis 1 on Creation

The average person reading Genesis 1 will conclude that it says God created the world in six days. But *should* we read Genesis 1 in this literal (normal) sense? Six 24-hour days of creation are clear:

1. The Genesis account describes God's creative work as instantaneous. He spoke, and it came into being, excluding long, drawn-out processes necessary for creation to occur over centuries.
2. Psalm 33:6, 9 also show an instantaneous creation: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth." "There is certainly no thought here of delay, or a trial-and-error process, or a gradual, step-by-step fulfilment. In fact, it is quite impossible to imagine a time interval in the transition from nonexistence to existence!" (John Whitcomb, *The Early Earth*, 24-25). The "evening" and "morning" are "one day" (Gen. 1:3).
3. The formula "there was evening, and there was morning—the second [etc.] day" (Gen. 1:8, 13, 19, 23, 31) also has a literal time element, as morning requires sunrise and evening requires sunset. This phrase is in Daniel 8:26 (cf. 8:14) for 2300 days, and the words "evening" and "morning" never refer to long periods of time in the OT (H. C. Leupold, *Genesis*, 1:56).
4. While "day" is sometimes used in a non-literal sense (Gen. 1:5, 14, 16, 18; 2:4), the use of a numerical adjective ("second," "third," etc.) with the word "day" (*yom*) elsewhere limits this "day" to a literal 24-hour period (cf. Num. 7:11-12, 18, 24, 30, etc.).
5. The creation week set a pattern for man's work cycle in the fourth commandment (Exod. 20:11). God worked in the daytime of literal 24-hour days, so man works in the day and rests at night.
6. The sun and moon were not created until day 4, arguing for the literal view (1:14-19). If each "morning" and "evening" were 1000 years, how could plants live for centuries without light? Yet such is possible in 24 hours. These "lights" govern "days" in the normal sense (1:14, 16, 18).
7. Non-24-hour theories advocate theistic evolution to some degree. This has huge theological problems, including death *before* the fall in Genesis 3 when the world was "very good" (1:31).

How to Read the Genesis 5 & 11 Genealogies

Similarly, the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 should be read in the normal sense. This literal approach reveals that Adam lived about 2000 years before Abraham, who himself lived at 2000 BC. Thus, with six normal 24-hour days preceding Adam, the world was created around 4000 BC. There are several reasons to believe these genealogies have no gaps:

1. These records *state lengths of time*, unlike other genealogies with gaps (e.g., Matt. 1:1-17) that only show bloodlines. Genesis 5 and 11 give each father's age when a son is born—useless data apart from a strict chronology. Also, Methuselah's death in the Flood year fits perfectly.
2. The Genesis genealogies *have shorter lengths of time* (creation to Noah, or Noah to Abraham) while Abraham to Jesus is 2000 years (Matt. 1) or Adam to Jesus is 4000 years (Luke 3).
3. A no-gaps sequence is the *most natural*, straightforward, objective method of interpretation.
4. The Genesis genealogies *indicate a direct father-son relationship*. This is the natural usage of the term "begot" or "was the father of," especially when the Hebrew Hiphil (causative) tense is used as it is here. Supporting this is that no one questions that Adam had a son named Seth who had Enosh (Gen. 4:25-26), or that Noah had Shem, or that Terah had Abraham.
5. Jude 14 says that Enoch was the 7th generation from Adam, showing no gaps between these two men. Since the subsequent names have the same structure, it is likely that they too lack gaps.
6. Ancient extra-biblical records support a strict chronology. The earliest European and Middle East records verify the Table of Nations (Gen. 10–11) and an early creation date (5200-4000 BC).

This "no gap" strict chronology actually provides exact dates for many primeval events. Dates are first determined by starting at the zero year AH (Latin *anno Homo sapiens*) for "in the year of man's beginning." AH dates are then reckoned up to the substantiated date of 1845 BC, and then BC dates are counted backwards to creation. The result is that God created the world in 4143 BC.

Why Theologians Disagree

The key issue is if one must argue for *either* a literal or a literary approach to Genesis. Certainly God, as the world's best Author, would write Genesis as the most amazing literature possible—but, as Truth, will record this accurately. We force ourselves into an unnecessarily false dichotomy. Scholars of an evolution bias often twist the clarity of Genesis behind the guise of so-called literary approaches, but we can believe in these accounts as history that is both literal and literary.

Books and Articles on Genesis

Ham, Ken. *The New Answers Book*. 2 vols. Green Forest, AZ: Master Books, 2006, 2008.

Mortenson, Terry, and Thane H. Ury, eds. *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*. Green Forest, AZ: Master Books, 2008. 486 pp. US\$16.99.

Tanner, J. Paul. "Old Testament Chronology and Its Implications for the Creation and Flood Accounts." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172 (January-March 2015): 24-44.

Scientific Journals (Young Earth peer-reviewed by PhDs from secular universities)

Answers Journal (Answers in Genesis, answersingenesis.org)

Creation Research Society Quarterly (Creation Research Society, creationresearch.org)

Journal of Creation (Creation Ministries International, creation.com)

Free PowerPoint Downloads

BibleStudyDownloads.org has 34 PPT files (3000 slides) and 200 pages of notes on creation