

The Days of Genesis 1

Genesis 1:3–31 describes how God shaped the earth in six ‘days’ of activity. It is not mythology. Creation is taken seriously by the New Testament ^{☞1} and it was taken seriously by Jesus ^{☞2}. It is not poetry. It does not have in it many characteristics of poetry. There is some ‘parallelism’ in Genesis 1:26, but there is no rhyme in Genesis 1, and no metre.

^{☞1}
Hebrews 11:3
2 Peter 3:5
2 Corinthians 4:6
Acts 17:24

^{☞2} Matthew 19:4

• Not literal 24 hour periods

Days 1 to 3 are prior to the sun, which defines what a ‘day’ is. John 5:17 and Hebrews 4:10–11 imply that day 7 is still continuing, so day 7 has certainly lasted more than 24 hours! And then Genesis 2 tells the story of the creation of man and woman in fuller detail, and it tells the story in a way that shows Genesis 1 is non-literal. The events of the sixth day as described in Genesis 2 take more than a day. Genesis 1:30 gives impression of ‘nature’ in ordinary non-miraculous activity. All of this implies that the days were not meant to be taken as literal 24-hour periods.

Other unconvincing ways of understanding ‘days’

Some, like the great ‘Saint Augustine’, have thought the ‘days’ of Genesis are ages. Some have believed that the days are literal but there are gaps in between. Some have believed that the ‘days’ are days of revelation, not days in which creation took place but days in which God spoke to Moses about what happened (but there is no hint of anything like this in the text, and Exodus 20:11 is against it).

I am more interested in the teaching of Genesis than in getting over-anxious about how Genesis fits with science. I agree with John Calvin who said ‘Let him who would learn astronomy and other obscure arts go somewhere else!’

• Facts in picture language

Genesis is describing facts but it is using picture language. It is written so simply a child could enjoy it – and many have. It depicts God as a workman, the model for the way we should work ^{☞1}. It seems God created the world in six creative periods and this is put to us in terms of a picture of God as a workman.

^{☞1} note
Exodus 20:11

• Six creative periods

• But not a scientific description

It is not 100% in chronological order. Almost certainly the writer puts things in groups more than in strict chronology. The stars are mentioned at an appropriate point, but the date of their origin cannot be deduced from Genesis. One need not worry about clashes with a scientific account. It is not intended as a scientific description at all.

The structure of Genesis 1:1-31

Notice that Genesis 1:1–31 has a beautiful structure to it.

The Whole 1:1–2					
Day 1	Light	1:3–5	Day 4	Light bearers	1: 14–19
Day 2	Dividing waters	1:6–8	Day 5	Birds and sea creatures	1:20–23
Day 3	Land and water	1:9–10	Day 6	Land animals and reptiles	1:24–25
	Vegetation	1:11–13		Man	1:26–31
Rest 2:1–4					

• *Not missing the point*

We are surely not meant to press the details of Genesis into harmony with science. Genesis 1 is like a vision. Maybe – but we do not know for sure – someone received it as vision. We miss the point if we treat it like an astronomical textbook. Certainly the minute details of the chronology are not meant to be taken scientifically.

The Glory of God

Genesis 1:3–31 is a wonderful description of the glory of God. Let me try to bring out some of its highlights

1. The Only God

1. **Our creator-God is the only God.** Everything else is created by Him. God created the heaven and the earth. Many things mentioned in this chapter were treated as gods by the people of the ancient world. In some places the Creator and ‘the deep’ were rival gods. In other places light and darkness were gods. In some places the sea is a god. Yet it was God who created the seas, and separated them from the land. There were many fertility gods in the ancient world, but God is the source of fertility ^{☞1}. Some ancient peoples worshipped the sun or the moon or the stars. Astrologers still worship the stars as a source of knowledge! But these things were all made by God. They are not gods; they are ‘things’ made by God. Many nations have viewed animals as gods. Some have worshipped the cow or the bull or other animals ^{☞2}. Genesis 1 sets itself against all idolatry.

^{☞1} note 1:22

^{☞2} see Rom. 1:22, 23

2. The Only Creator

2. **God is the only creator.** The phrases in the Hebrew express totality: light and darkness; earth and sea; water above and below the sky; sun and moon; herbs and trees. Nothing in creation creates itself. Everything is from God. He is the only one who is eternal. The creator is the only God; only God is the creator.

3. Creation is good

3. **Creation is good.** The chapter tells us of the goodness of creation. It is emphasized again and again ^{☞1}. Wherever evil comes from, it was not built into the original creation. It must be a good thing gone wrong. Some philosophers have said that ‘matter’ is evil; that the physical fabric of the world is somehow an evil thing and only non-material ‘spirit’ is good. Even the church was tempted to follow this pagan thinking at times. It led to things like clerical celibacy and similar asceticism^{☞2}. But sin is not in matter; it is not built into creation as its essence.

^{☞1} 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31

^{☞2} see 1 Timothy 4

4. Creation reveals the wisdom and purposefulness of God

4. **Creation reveals the wisdom and purposefulness of God.** Creation is designed for men and women. Light is required by human beings. Men and women need to tell the times and the seasons. The sun and the moon were put there to help him. Man needs rain, land, food. All were designed for him.

Reliable & orderly

Because creation came into being from God, the world is basically reliable. Day and night continue steadily. There is regularity in nature. The seasons show order. This is the basis of science. Plants and animals bear offspring after their kinds. This is the basis of agriculture and animal husbandry. Imagine what life would be like if animals did not bear offspring after their kind.

Variety & complexity

Creation shows great variety. Among the animals, in vegetable-life, among men and women, in each case there is great variety. No human being is identical to another human being. No tree is identical to another tree. In each case there are small and large. There are fish for the sea, and birds for the air, and other types of animals for the land. What variety and complexity is there.

Beauty

There is beauty in creation. God is a great artist. God Himself enjoys the goodness of creation ^{☞1}.

5. Creation reveals the personality & graciousness of God

5. Creation reveals the personality and the graciousness of God. It implies that God is a person; God is 'he', not 'it'. It shows God's love for man. Everything was designed for humankind, not for angels, It all shows God's grace. He did not have to do any of this. He does not need us in the way that we need Him ^{☞1}. It all shows God exercising His loving power. It all happened according to His will. He said 'Let there be... ' and there was. The words 'It was so' come throughout the chapter ^{☞2}.

The Christian and creation

What then does creation mean to us? Every Christian should love creation and enjoy it. If pagans worship nature in idolatry we should worship God for it. It is of the essence of wisdom to know about creation. Solomon's wisdom involved a study of creation ^{☞1}. Solomon grew steadily in his knowledge of creation ^{☞2}. He learned lessons about life from even the ants ^{☞3}. We are to glory in the God of creation. The heavens declare the glory of God.

^{☞1} see Psalm 104
Proverbs 3:19;
8:22

^{☞1} Acts 17:24, 25
^{☞2} 1:3,7,9,11,15,
24,30

^{☞1} 1 Kings 4:33

^{☞2} see Proverbs
1:27; 5:19; 6:5, 6-
11

^{☞3} Proverbs 7:22,
23; 25:13; 26:1-3,
9, 11; 27:8; 28:1,
15; 30:15, 19, 31



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