

Genesis 1:3-2:3 The Days of Creation

Having looked at the beginning of God's creative process, and determined that God created everything, from nothing, many thousands (not millions or billions) of years ago, we can now look in some detail and the events of that time. Much has been made of numbers and patterns in these first days of creation. And while there are some patterns to note, it is important to recognize the big picture of what is happening. This week of creation was not performed by God to give secret meanings into His divine plan or the course of future history. Rather, the narrative simply and elegantly points to a sovereign Creator, Who ordered His creation as He saw fit for the purposes He planned.

Some general points can be made before we look in detail at each of the days of creation. First, the narrative is broken into six days, each of which contains a command. In some cases a reason is given for the command given. Also, we can see that the six days alternate between time and space. For example, time is central to days one, four and seven, whereas spatial aspects of creation are the focus of days two, three, five, and six. In addition, day four completes what was begun on day one, and days five and six complete on what was begun on days two (sea and air) and three (dry land).

Another broad statement we can make is that there is an overall pattern that flows throughout the creation narrative. First we see the famous words "God said." This was *the* crucial element of creation. God created everything by speaking it into being. This concept permeated Israel's thinking. It was a commonplace understanding of cosmology. For example,

"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
And by the breath of His mouth all their host . . .
For He spoke, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast (Psalm 33:6, 9).

When God spoke, a command was given. This command was followed by the fact of creation. Then, the Creator offered an evaluation of the product He had created. Boundaries were then established for what had been created, and finally the element of creation was named by the Creator.

In the creation narrative, there are eight independent acts of creation over the six days. There is one creative act each day and there are two acts on days three and six. One way (though certainly not the only way) to organize our thinking about these days is as follows.

Unproductive becomes Productive	Uninhabited becomes Inhabited
Day 1 - Light and Darkness	Day 4 - Luminaries
Day 2 - Sky and Water	Day 5 - Fish and Fowl
Day 3 - Land and Seas	Day 6 - Beasts
Vegetation	Humans: male and female

This allows us to see the relationship between the several days of creation and the overall, consciously designed plan of creation in the mind of the Creator.

Day One

The beginning of creation was to bring forth light to cast away the darkness. Scripture records that “God said, ‘let there be light’; and there was light” (v. 3). No reason is stated for God’s decision to create light, but we can assume that God created light to limit the darkness, to provide the means by which time would be eventually be measured (days), and to illuminate the source of natural energy required to support life as God would create it.

The means by which God created light, as we have noted, was by His word. God’s word became fundamental to Israel. To the Hebrews, God’s creative word and His authoritative word were one and the same. That is, they believed that their prophets spoke “the word of the Lord.” Moses was, perhaps, the archetype of this.

“¹⁵The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. ¹⁶This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’ ¹⁷The Lord said to me, ‘they have spoken well. ¹⁸I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him”
(Deuteronomy 18:15-18).

Ultimately, of course, the Word of God would come forth in the person of Jesus Christ.

“¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . ¹⁴And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1, 14).

“God saw that the light was good” (v. 4). That God declared the light ‘good’ indicated that He was not only Creator, but Judge. It was His creation, and only He could evaluate it. The word describes more than simply satisfaction at the result of what was created. It means that what was created functioned precisely as intended by the Creator. It means that what was created had aesthetic value. It means that what was created added value to the creation itself. And it means that what was created had moral value, since it ought to motivate the beholder of creation to worship the Creator. There is no place in Hebrew thought for the material world being evil. All of creation, as we can see, was declared by its Creator to be good. The idea of an ascetic lifestyle renouncing the world, or a gnostic understanding of an evil material world are alien to biblical thinking.

After “God separated the light from the darkness” (v. 4), He “called the light day, and the darkness He called night” (v. 5). This naming was an indication of authority, as we will see when man is given that same authority and responsibility. The biblical writer concludes that “there was evening and there was morning, one day” (v. 5). The source of this light must have been God, Himself, as no other source was available. Some are concerned that ‘day’ cannot be taken literally since there was no sun. We will look at this later. For now, we will simply take for granted that the Bible means what it says, and consider the time period for each day to be a twenty-four hour day.

Day Two

The next day, God separated the water into two parts. Again using the power of His creative word, “God said, ‘let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters’” (v. 6). God chose to separate the waters above from those below, and as the biblical writer simply states, “and it was so” (v. 7). The lower part of these waters fed the oceans lakes and rivers of the world; the upper part of the division was the dwelling place of God. The ancients believed that above the dome of the sky was a great reservoir which housed the waters that fell as rain and snow. The sun and other celestial bodies moved across this dome.

God thus formed an expanse, that is the atmosphere. The Hebrew word means something spread out like a covering. This description is phenomenological, that is it is described as it would appear to someone on the earth. The heavens are the part of the sky that are visible to the naked eye. The dwelling place of God is beyond that, inaccessible to mere mortal vision. God named the expanse, again demonstrating His power and authority over it, “God called the expanse heaven” (v. 8). Again, we see the emphasis that the celestial bodies are merely created things made to serve the Creator.

Day Three

On the third day God performed two distinct acts of creation. First, “God said, ‘let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear’” (v. 9). God commanded the dry ground to appear as the waters below the dome of the heavens gathered into one place. The importance of water cannot be overemphasized to ancient peoples. Every known early civilization developed around rivers (Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China). Only rivers could provide the water needed for vegetation, cultivation, and indeed life itself.

The organization by God of the “waters below” into productive rivers, lakes, and oceans made possible the creative acts that were to follow. Again “it was so” (v. 9), and again God named His creation, “God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas” (v. 10). And again we see that God passed judgment on His creation, “God saw that it was good” (v. 10). Notice that God’s approval of the work of the second day was not given until the third day. Perhaps this was because only then was the final separation of the waters achieved.

The second creative act of the third day was that God commanded this land to bring forth plants and their vegetation. Let us mark carefully the words of Scripture,

“¹¹God said, ‘let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them’; and it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good” (v. 11-12).

This text can, at first glance, appear to present some problems. Though the land is commanded to bring forth vegetation, it is not a living thing in and of itself. It is neither a mother goddess nor fertility deity, as in so many other ANE cultures. Having this generative power did not make the earth itself a deity. The dry land was simply responding to a command of the Creator, and as an inanimate object subject to Him, it had no choice but to obey. The dry land was a part of the natural world, like clouds, comets, and wind.

It obeyed its creator without possessing the volition of us rational creatures to disobey. There is nothing more implied in the text. These plants, by the way, would be necessary to provide food for all the animals, since there was no death before the fall.

Thus was the climax of the first grouping of days, as finally the earth had, at last, become productive. Interestingly, vegetation was not considered alive in the same sense as animal life, to the ancients. It was not a living creature. We also see the inauguration of the importance of 'seed', a phrase, as well as 'generations' which will have great significance throughout the book of Genesis.

One final comment. The ord 'kind' does not necessarily mean species, as in the Hebrew it is a much broader term. It is, rather, a mark of distinction, and it is not used with reference to humanity. So we can conclude that God did not create every single species of plant (or later animal) in this original act of creation. But humankind is distinctive; there is only one 'kind' of human.

Day Four

This begins the second of the groups of days. The stars and other celestial objects were created. On the fourth day God created and clearly defined the extent of the heavenly bodies. “¹⁴God said, ‘let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; ¹⁵and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth’” (v. 14-15).

Again, we must remember that these are not independent deities in and of themselves. This was especially important to Israel as they had connections with Egypt, which worshipped the sun god Ra, among others. Also, many early Sumerian cultures, who controlled that area from which Abram came, worshipped the moon. But Scripture makes it clear that these heavenly bodies have no volition. They function at the command of the Creator. These stars merely give light at the command of the Creator. They serve His purposes and have no will of their own. Their very existence was intended to magnify the Creator.

“Lift up your eyes on high
And see who has created these stars,
The One who leads forth their host by number,
He calls them all by name;
Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power,
Not one of them is missing. (Isaiah 40:26).

They were not even given the names by which they became known. Scripture simply states that God made “the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night” (v. 16). Thus they were simply the 'greater' and 'lesser' lights. Again, this may have been because heavenly bodies were almost universally considered deities among ANE, and other, peoples.

Their purpose for their having been created is also stated, and in so doing, Scripture again marks out that the Creator established what He would and set its boundaries as He determined. “¹⁷God placed them in

the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness” (v. 17-18).

Day Five

On the fifth day God filled with life the spheres He had created on the second day. “God said, ‘let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens’” (v. 20). The seas brought forth fish and the sky birds. However, instead of the usual “and it was so” there is a more detailed description of the creation. “God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind” (v. 21).

On this day God filled the seas and sky. This also marked the first recorded blessing in Scripture. “God blessed them, saying, ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth’” (v. 22). God’s blessing was, in part, the ability to procreate. ‘Blessing’ was frequently associated with progeny in the Old Testament (Genesis 12:2-3 for example). It carried with it the understanding of an abundant life. Though many ANE cultures worshipped, or feared, such beasts as the Leviathan, again we see that such animals are merely created beings serving the purposes of the Creator.

Also, let us remark that there was no distinction between ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ animals at this time. Only after the fall was there a need for distinguishing of the people of God by, among other things, certain dietary restrictions.

Day Six

This final day was the most important of the six days of creation. It was the culmination of the entire creative process. On the sixth day, as on the third, there were two acts of creation. First, the land produced living creatures, divided into domestic and wild animals. “God said, ‘let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind’” (v. 24). Again, as with the fish of the seas and birds of the sky, more detail is given, “God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind” (v. 25). And again we must see that the dry ground that brings forth life was under the same conditions as were the sea and sky. That is, the earth did not bring forth animal life on its own volition but simply at the command of the Creator.

The final creative act of the creation of humankind. But before creating humankind, God took counsel. This illustrated both the significance and the uniqueness of this creative act. “God said, ‘let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’” (v. 26).

The word ‘image’ refers to a copy of an original. Often in the OT it is used in reference to an idol of a deity. The word ‘likeness’ emphasizes comparative qualities between two things. We will look at these two words in more detail next time.

For now, let us appreciate that this as the great work of creation. Scripture reveals that in many ways. First, there was an ascending order to creation. Second, only this creative act was preceded by deliberation on the part of the Creator. Third, there was a personal emphasis in the act of creation. It was no longer “let there be” but rather “let us make”. Fourth, human life was created in the image of God and given dominion over God’s creation.

So, “²⁷God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (v. 27-28). We will look in more detail at the creation of humankind next time, but for now we can note that this dominion implied that humankind were God’s representatives on earth. They had been given authority over God’s creation. And, being fruitful was linked to subjugating the earth. To ‘rule’ meant that humankind was to promote the well-being of the animal kingdom. To ‘subjugate’ was an even stronger term, indeed it implied ownership. Both suggested that humankind were created to be stewards of God’s creation.

Day Seven

“¹Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. ²By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (v. 1-3). God rested since His creation was complete. It was finished. There was nothing more to add. Creation was precisely as God had intended it. There was no room for improvement.

Interestingly, early Jewish and Christian authors were concerned that God took so long to create. It is only in the modern world that the act of creation seems to have happened so quickly.

A Word about Days

Genesis 1 describes the time period that God used to create all things. Scripture states that God created everything in six days. We must begin by agreeing that since God is all-powerful, He could have created everything in a moment. He could have also created everything over billions of years. Yet He is described as creating everything in six days.

Many understand these six days as ages of time rather than actual twenty-four hour periods. It is certainly possible to understand the word ‘day’ (*yom* in Hebrew) as being longer than twenty-four hours. In fact, Genesis 2:4 uses the word ‘day’ to refer to the six-day creation, and not a twenty-four hour period of time. However, while it is possible to understand these six days as being ages rather than a twenty-four hour period, there are several significant problems with this as we look at the text itself.

The biggest problem is the phrase “and there was morning and there was evening.” This occurs at the conclusion of each one of the six days of Genesis 1. This appears to eliminate the possibility of each day as a long period of time. Indeed, Scripture even defines what is meant by a ‘day’ in Genesis 1:5 “and God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one

day.” The reference to evening and morning clarifies that each day was a normal, literal day and, importantly, would have been understood as such by the readers of Genesis.

Another problem with considering the word for ‘days’ to mean ages comes from Genesis 1:14, “let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for *days* and years.” If the ‘days’ here are really ‘ages,’ then what are the years? And what is the ‘night?’ The passage becomes difficult to make sense of, if an attempt is made to define the word ‘day’ to be a long period of time.

Therefore, the word for ‘day’ should be understood as a normal literal day because of how it is used in the context of each day in Genesis 1. In addition, whenever the same word, *yom*, is used in the Old Testament and modified by a number (that is, the first day, the second day, etc.), it always means a twenty-four hour period of time.

Furthermore, other passages that refer back to the Genesis account indicate that God created the world in six days.

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:11).

“It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:17).

God’s six days of creation and one day of rest served as the basis for establishing the Sabbath day. These passages show that the word day is used literally. If the word means something else, than Israel’s understanding of the Sabbath is confused.

One final thought. Since Adam was created on the sixth day and lived past the seventh day, he would be a very old person if ‘day’ meant a very long period of time. Yet the Bible records Adam’s age at his death to be 930 years (Genesis 5:5), which is consistent with the lifespan of others before the flood.

Takeaways

God’s work of creation is magnificent. Attention ought to be given less to the details of creation itself, and more to the Creator. His design, His plan, His purposes are manifest in the works of His hand. Creation brings glory to Him and manifests His being to all humankind.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).