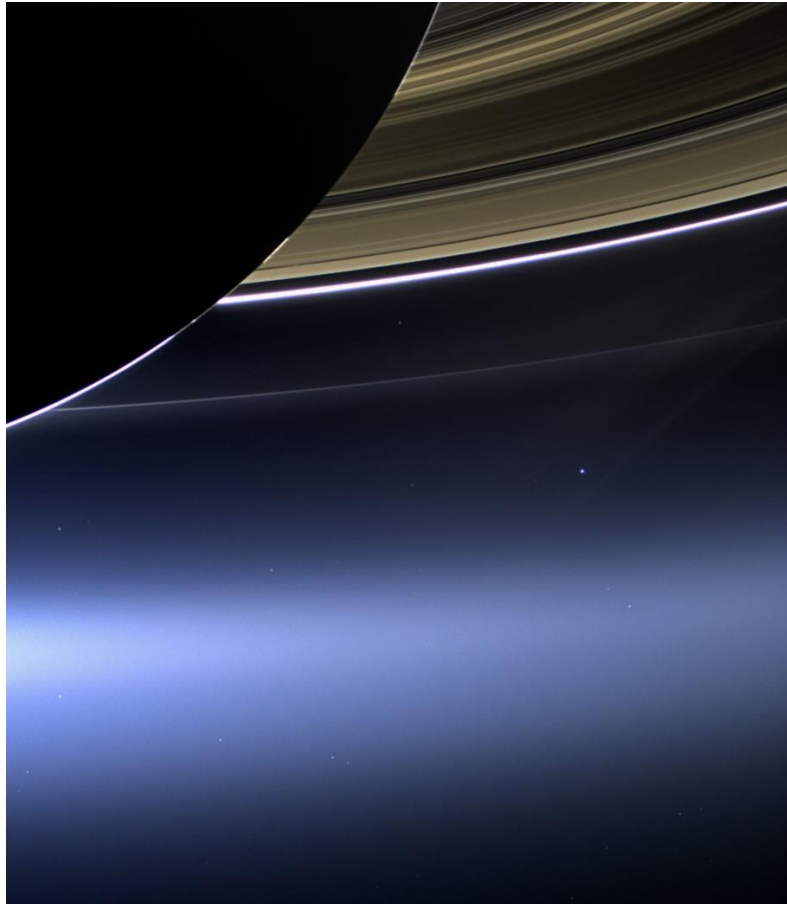


Week 2

“History’s First Breath”

Key Text: Genesis 1:1 - 2:3



Cassini's Pale Blue Dot
Cassini spacecraft, July 19, 2013

[SERMON VIDEO](#)

“How exceedingly fine is the divine work of the Best and Greatest Artist!”

Nicolaus Copernicus, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*

Science vs. Faith?

In the opening sequence of his 1980 television series, *Cosmos*, world-renowned astrophysicist Carl Sagan declared: “The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will

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be.” Many believe that this creed of materialism is a conclusion supported by modern science, but this is far from the truth. As Oxford scholar John Lennox cautions: “Statements made by scientists are not always statements of science.” Virtually all instances of so-called conflict between science and Christianity are philosophical rather than scientific (materialism vs. theism). While there are a few tensions between some interpretations of the Genesis text and some scientific models of geological and biological history, this does not mean that there is unresolvable contradiction. As Christian theologians have recognized for centuries, when God’s book of Scripture is properly understood, it will always beautifully harmonize with God’s book of nature, properly understood.

The Principle of Mediocrity

Consider Psalm 8:4

What is man that You think of him, and a son of man that You are concerned about him?

Contemporary materialists sometimes point to Earth’s smallness in relation to the unfathomable vastness of space (recall Sagan’s “pale blue dot”) and the fact that it orbits a common type of star in a peripheral region of the Milky Way galaxy (which is merely one of billions) to support the philosophical claim that humankind is insignificant in the grand scheme of things. As Bill Nye the Science Guy puts it, “I’m a speck on a speck orbiting a speck among other specks among still other specks in the middle of specklessness!” Moreover, if Earth is a common type of planet and yet hosts advanced life, then we must be merely one of countless other intelligent species in the universe—we’re not special. This claim is known as the Principle of Mediocrity.

There are several powerful challenges to this principle: 1) the complete lack of grounding for the idea that significance is relative to size or the number in a collection, 2) the many required physical parameters that have aligned to make advanced intelligent life on Earth possible, and 3) the astounding degree to which Earth’s habitability coincides with discoverability—the conditions that make scientific investigation possible. Far from being mediocre creatures on a mediocre planet, we are highly privileged!

How Did God Create?

There is a broad spectrum of views on how to best understand natural history and its relationship to the Genesis creation narrative. Numerous books and articles have been

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written (and many debates held) to analyze, defend, or critique the various positions. To call it complicated is an understatement. Thankfully, there are some general categories¹ we can use to help us better understand and discuss this topic:

- **Naturalistic Evolution-** Nature is the product of blind, undirected processes; there is no inherent design or purpose (*telos*). While there are Christians who endorse this view (a tiny minority, it is widely regarded as theologically unorthodox).
- **Non-teleological Theistic/Deistic Evolution-** God initiated creation but then allowed it to develop autonomously according to the laws of nature. He did not guide it or miraculously intervene at any point.
- **Teleological Theistic Evolution-** God designed natural processes so that all things would develop according to his plan. This could have been through a “front-loaded” creation that had precisely the right initial conditions and laws or through direct guidance of nature’s gradual development.
- **Old Earth Creationism-** God miraculously and directly created all things successively over a very long period of time (this is sometimes referred to as progressive creationism). There has been evolutionary change to a very limited extent (micro-evolution), but macro-evolution (Darwinian common descent) has not occurred.
- **Young Earth Creationism-** God miraculously and directly created all things over the course of six literal, 24-hour days in the order described in Genesis 1, sometime between 6,000 and 8,000 years ago (some would stretch this time span a little longer, but only by a few thousand years).

The parallel concern is how the creation “week” in Genesis 1 should be understood:

- **Literal Days View-** Six 24-hour creation days
- **Day-age View-** “days” of creation were indeterminate amounts of time
- **Intermittent Day Theory-** eons of elapsed time between each literal 24-hour day
- **Gap Theory-** a long period of time between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2
- **Framework View-** Genesis offers a literary framework in which to understand the purpose and function of creation, rather than the “when” or “how.”
- **Cosmic Temple View** (John Walton)- Genesis gives us a theological and functional (rather than historical) narrative that teaches us the goodness, order, and significance of creation.
- **“Promised Land” View** (John Sailhamer)- Genesis 1:1 teaches that God created all things. The remainder of the chapter speaks of God’s preparation of a special place, a *certain land*, for his chosen people—the Promised Land.

¹ Note that not all sources use the same terminology for these general categories. This can be confusing.

What About Adam and Eve?

There is also a range of views on Adam and Eve:

- **Non-historical View-** The figures the Bible refers to as Adam and Eve were not actual people who really lived at a certain time in the past, and the Genesis narrative was not intended to communicate otherwise.
- **Chosen Adam View-** After a race of advanced hominids evolved, God selected one (the historical Adam) and placed him in the Garden of Eden.
- **Archetype View-** Adam and Eve and their story is a symbolic illustration of all of humanity. This view is compatible with both a non-historical and historical understanding of the first pair of human beings.
- **Literal Adam and Eve-** God specially created Adam and then Eve, and they were the headwaters of humanity—the original ancestors of all people. The question of how long ago they lived is debated.

Read

Genesis 1:1 through 2:3

Goal: We should read in a manner that leads to discovery (insights about God) rather than mere information; this discovery should lead us to a worship-inspiring faith.

Notes on the Text

The Genesis creation narrative is true history, but it is also an unparalleled work of art. Its poetic language and literary structure are incredibly beautiful in English translation, but even more so in the original Hebrew.

1:1 Perhaps a title for the remainder of the chapter, or perhaps a description of the first moment of creation (the *singularity*, as it's called in standard model cosmology). In either case, Genesis begins with a creation out of nothing, *creatio ex nihilo*.

1:2 The earth exists but is formless and void—not yet prepared for life.

1:3-27 Days 1, 2 and 3 describe the creation of domains and then days 4, 5, and 6 describe the filling of each domain:

Day 1: day and night

Day 4: the celestial bodies of the day and night skies

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Day 2: waters below, waters above², and the open expanse of the heavens
Day 5: birds of the air, fish of the sea

Day 3: dry land and vegetation
Day 6: land creatures, including humankind

1:26 “Let us...” Interpretive options: the Persons of the Trinity, God addressing the angels, using the plural of majesty, or speaking to the Divine Council (Michael Heiser’s view).

The creation of the original pair of humans, male and female, image bearers who are granted ruling authority over the rest of creation, demonstrates God’s design for gender, marriage, sex, and family.

2:2-3 God sanctifies Day 7; He rests, but not because of weariness. His creative activity ceases and he contemplates and enjoys the goodness of his completed work.

The Stars Proclaim

In *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the fifth book of C.S. Lewis’s Narnia series, there is a scene near the end in which Edmund, Lucy, Eustace, Caspian, and Reepicheep encounter an Old Man. While speaking with him, they discover that he is no ordinary person; he is a star at rest, waiting for the time at which he will be fully renewed and “once more tread the great dance.” Eustace, who was an arrogant and unscrupulous rationalist at the beginning of the story, says, “In our world, a star is a huge ball of flaming gas.” The Old Man responds, “Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of.”

Passages such as Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:20 reveal that the creation is far more than the sum of its material parts—there is a message in the medium. The order, harmony, and exquisite beauty of nature are signals of a transcendent Creator of marvelous wisdom and power. To paraphrase English theologian and novelist Dorothy Sayers (a dear friend of Lewis’s), when we behold the work of an artist, an avenue of communication is opened between his mind and ours.

² Many scholars interpret this as referring to the hydrologic cycle; “waters above” would be the atmospheric water that returns to the earth as precipitation.

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Can you think of other passages of Scripture that suggest how the natural world teaches us theological truths?

Cross-references

Consider Revelation 5:9-10 and 21:1-5 in light of Genesis 1:26-28.

What are your observations concerning God's original plan for humankind and his plan for us in the new creation?

As we learned in Week 1, Genesis serves as a theological framework that distinguishes the truth about the ultimate, transcendent Creator God from the false ideas found in pagan creation myths. Read the account of the Apostle Paul reasoning with the pagan philosophers at the Areopagus (Mars Hill) in Acts 17:22-28.

What points does Paul offer as a corrective to the pagan worldview? How are they related to the theological truths taught in Genesis 1?

Final Thoughts

Remember, one important purpose of the Torah was to teach God's people their proper identity after their departure from a life of Egyptian slavery. The description of each of the six creation days ends with the phrase, "and there was evening and there was morning" followed by the numerical designation of each day. Observe that God's days begin at night, when no human work could be done. Interestingly, this contradicts the pagan idea of humans being created for their utility to the deities. God did not create humankind to do his work for him, he made us to be rulers over his creation. God didn't *need* humans; he wanted and loved them.

The institution of a weekly rest day would have been a foreign concept and remarkable blessing to the original audience of emancipated slaves. We can only imagine what it was like, before the Fall, when Adam and Eve tended the garden without tiresome toil. Perhaps their seventh days were spent reflecting upon the fruits of their creativity and stewardship with delight, wonder, and praise to their Creator.

Further Study

The science and faith relationship; scientific evidence for design:

John Lennox, *Can Science Explain Everything?* (Good Book Company, 2019)

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Stephen C. Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis* (HarperOne, 2021)

The remarkable habitability and discoverability of nature:

Jay Richards and Guillermo Gonzalez, *The Privileged Planet* (updated 20th anniversary edition forthcoming in 2024)

Michael Denton's Privileged Species series: *Children of Light*, *The Wonder of Water*, and *Fire-Maker* (Discovery Institute Press)

[Melissa Cain Travis, "A Grand Cosmic Resonance: How the Structure and Comprehensibility of the Universe Reveal a Mindful Maker" \(Christian Research Institute, 2019\)](#)

Exploring views on Biblical Creation:

J.B. Stump, editor, *Four Views on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design* (Zondervan, 2017)

John Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the World* (Zondervan, 2011)

Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday, editors, *Four Views on the Historical Adam* (Zondervan, 2013)

[The Unseen Realm documentary with Dr. Michael Heiser](#) (Divine Council view)