

Creation of the World and Man

***“Thy word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path”***

(Psalm 119:105)

***“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for
teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in
righteousness, that the man of God may be complete,
equipped for every good work”***

(2 Timothy 3: 16-17)

I. WHY GENESIS 1-11?

In the preface to his book *‘In the Beginning . . .’* Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger [now Pope Benedict XVI] stated that, “. . . the creation account [in Genesis] is noticeably and nearly completely absent from catechesis, preaching, and even theology. The creation narratives go unmentioned; is it asking too much to expect anyone to speak of them?”

Cardinal Ratzinger went on to say that the practical abandonment of the doctrine of creation [or the way it is sometimes presented in modern theology] has led to “a huge [if not total] loss of the reality of the faith, whose God no longer has anything to do with matter.”

This Bible study will attempt to address, in a small way, the lament of Pope Benedict regarding the lack of catechesis on the creation narratives and “the practical abandonment of the doctrine of creation” in modern theology.

II. HISTORY OR MYTH

Today, many believe that Genesis, especially the first eleven chapters, containing the well-known stories of creation and the Garden of Eden, Noah and the flood, has been relegated by modern science to the realm of myth.

Is Genesis, Chapters 1-11, history or myth? Some commentators claim that the creation narratives are myth, without explaining what “myth” means; others that they contain real history. So which is it, history or myth, and what is myth anyway?

A. Myth

One on-line dictionary defines the word *myth* as follows:

- A traditional or **legendary story**, usually concerning some being or hero or event, **with or without a determinable basis of fact** or a natural explanation, especially one that is concerned with deities or demigods and explains some practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature.
- Any invented story, idea, or concept
- An imaginary or fictitious thing or person.
- An unproved or false collective belief that is used to justify a social institution.

Some synonyms for myth are:

- Fable, legend, tradition.
- Invention, allegory, parable, fiction, fabulous story.
- Falsehood, lie, untruth.

Does Genesis fit this category? Our first step is to try to determine the literary genre [category] of Genesis. Here we clearly must distinguish between chapters 1-11 and the rest of Genesis. These first chapters of Genesis fall into the category of pre-history or primitive history, but they contain *religious*, not scientific history.

If we approach Genesis 1 as though it is God’s revelation of scientific truth, we stumble immediately upon difficulties: How was there **"evening and . . . morning, one day"** (vs. 5) when the sun had yet to be created? How did the fruit trees grow and bear fruit before there were days and nights or seasons? And how do we reconcile creation in six literal, 24-hour days with modern geological science?

The author is not attempting to provide a *scientific* account of reality or of history. His focus is *religious*. This needs to be borne in mind if we are to understand the book properly.

- We must remember that the Bible gives us history from God’s perspective.

However, to reveal the religious truths in Genesis, the sacred author uses the kind of symbolic language and imagery in general use in ancient times.

B. The Popes on Genesis

Pope Pius XII stated that Genesis 1-11 is in a genre that pertains to history in some way, although it does not follow the same pattern used by Greek and Roman or modern historians.

Pope John Paul II called the genre "myth", but explained he did not mean a mere fairy tale, but meant an ancient story devised to bring out some things that really happened.

So according to the above Popes, Genesis is not myth in the popular and generally accepted understanding of the word, such as the ancient Egyptian and Babylonian myths.

In the New Testament, our first Pope, Peter, says the same thing about the Gospel:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty [2 Peter 1:16].

III. HISTORICAL FACTS

The first eleven chapters of Genesis present truths based on the following historical facts.

- There was a creation by God in the beginning of time;
- God intervened in a special way in the creation of man;
- The first man and woman existed in a condition of friendship with God;
- There was a fall from that condition;
- An increasing separation occurred between man and God brought about by man’s sins;
- Man suffered a series of natural catastrophes brought about by the consequences of his sins.

To say that the first eleven chapters of Genesis is myth, without any further explanation of what “myth” means, such as given by Pope John Paul II, is to present a false and misleading interpretation of Genesis.

A. Science and Genesis

Pope Benedict explains in his book *“In the Beginning . . .”* [pg.4] that “the Bible is not a natural science text book, nor does it intend to be such. It is a religious

book, and consequently one cannot obtain information about the natural sciences from it.”

“One cannot get from it a scientific explanation of how the world arose; one can only glean religious experience from it. Anything else is an image and a way of describing things whose aim is to make profound realities graspable to human beings.”

“One must distinguish between the form of portrayal and the content that is portrayed.”

IV. CONTENT

Genesis is first of five books that form the Pentateuch, otherwise known as the Law of Moses, or the *Torah*. The version we use dates from the time of Israel’s return from Babylonian exile, around the 5th century BC. But Jewish and Christian tradition both attribute authorship or compilation of the original draft to Moses around 1500-1400 BC.

Its first 11 chapters deal with the origins of the world and mankind; the rest of the book records the action of God to create the nation of Israel. It ends with the people of Israel living in Egypt, where they sought refuge from a famine in their homeland, Canaan.

Thus Genesis covers the longest time span of any book in the Bible.

A. Revelation about God and Man

The book of Genesis does not merely tell quaint stories about people who lived at the dawn of time. The roots of all that Christians believe are found here. Read properly;

- Genesis reveals the essence of the nature of God, of creation and of man.
- It shows how man fell from grace and God’s friendship.
- It reveals the nature of sin.

In it we see the first hints of God’s plan of redemption, and the promises He makes that lay out the blueprint for the rest of salvation history. It is also the beginning of a very important family history: that of the family of God.

Our study of Genesis will focus on:

- the dramatic story of God’s creation of the universe,
- His design and purpose for everything in it, and

- His response to the work of an enemy, Satan, and
- His plan to restore to Himself the family that was plunged into chaos as a result of disobedience in the Garden of Eden.

Yet it won’t simply be history that we learn. Through the historical details, we will encounter the infinitely tender love of God for human creatures. We will see His relentless initiative to do whatever it takes for men to know and love Him as He originally intended, and our study of Genesis will convince us that nothing will impede God’s plan for His creation.

V. TYPOLOGY

In addition, the Catholic Church has recognized that "God, the inspirer of both [Old and New] Testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and the Old be made manifest in the New." (Dei Verbum, 16).

Therefore, our study of Genesis will introduce us to typology. "Types" in the Old Testament are real people, places, or events that prefigure in some way the coming of Christ and the redemption of the world.

We will understand Jesus and the gospel better because of our study of Genesis. We will also see how the Church has taken seriously every word of truth in this book, and, by her teaching and her liturgical life, has enabled us to remain connected to the purposes of God for His creation.

VI. TEACHING OF GENESIS

- There is only one God who is the creator of everything that exists [1:1]. Later on Scripture will make it plain that God creates out of nothing [*ex nihilo*].
- Man surpasses all other created beings by reason of his special relationship to God [1:26-30].
- By divine decree, woman is man’s proper companion, sharing his dignity [1:27; 2:18-23], and united to him in the indissoluble bond of marriage [2:24].
- Man’s original state was one of innocence [2:25] and friendship with God [3:8a].
- Tempted to achieve a state beyond his created nature, man sinned [3:1-6].

The effects of this first [or original] sin were inherited by all his descendants. They included:

- The loss of divine friendship; [3:23-24];
- a lack of mutual love and respect between man and woman, between husband and wife [3:17],
- physical evils in accord with the nature of man [3:17-19], and of woman [3:16], and
- a constant struggle against the power of evil [3:15a].

But God promises ultimate victory in the struggle against evil [3:15b]. This promise is the first message of the good news of salvation

Outline of Genesis 1-11

- I. CREATION OF THE WORLD AND MAN [1:1-2:4A]
- II. CREATION OF MAN AND WOMAN [2:4B-25]
- III. THE FALL [3:1-24]
- IV. CAIN AND ABEL [4:1-16]
- V. GENEALOGY OF CAIN [4:17-26]
- VI. GENEALOGY OF ADAM TO NOAH [5:1-32]
- VII. PROLOGUE TO THE FLOOD [6:1-22]
- VIII. THE FLOOD [7:1-8; 22]
- IX. THE COVENANT WITH NOAH [9:1-17]
- X. THE SONS OF NOAH [9:18-27]
- XI. THE PEOPLING OF THE EARTH [10:1-32]
- XII. THE TOWER OF BABEL [11:1-9]
- XIII. CONCLUDING GENEALOGIES [11:10-32].

Creation: Days 1-3

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Beginning of Salvation History

Creation is the beginning of salvation history and the foundation on which are built God’s salvific [saving] plans for the human race that reach their climax in Jesus Christ.

The Biblical accounts of creation focus on the action of God; it is He who sets the scene. He is also the creator of those who will act out the drama and with whom He will enter into dialogue.

The first chapter of the first book of the Bible is a poetic narrative that tells us what we need to know to understand why God created. It shows how God brought an orderly universe out of chaos. When we outline it, we can see how carefully constructed it is.

B. Ancient Traditions

The sacred text incorporates ancient traditions, including some elements of the great Babylonian and Egyptian creation stories [but purified of their mythology], about the origin of the world.

C. Two Creation Accounts

There are two separate creation accounts. The first account of creation is found in Chapter 1; the second in chapter 2.

D. Divine Names

The Bible uses many different divine names and titles for God. The Hebrew word **ELOHIM** is the most basic. Chapter one uses only this word to refer to God. Therefore, this account of creation is called “*the Elohist.*”

In Chapter 2 the terminology changes and God begins to be called by His proper name **YAHWEH**; therefore the human author of this chapter is called “the Yahwist.”

The first account of creation in Genesis 1 narrates creation entirely from God’s perspective. The Hebrew speaks of God as Elohim, God the Creator.

In the second account in chapter 2, the narrative begins to call God Yahweh, and becomes more personal. The second creation account is seen increasingly from a human viewpoint.

In chapter 1 we see God in all His power, creating the universe.

In chapter 2, the focus is on the creation of man and God’s relationship with him. We also see God establish a covenant relationship between Himself and His creation.

Hence His name changes from Elohim to Yahweh.

- God is not just Master but Father.
- The universe is His household and
- The people He creates are not mere creatures or slaves but God’s children.

These separate creation accounts are complementary, not contradictory.

II. GOD PREPARES A HOME

In the beginning was God – simply, totally, magnificently, stupendously. He needed and wanted nothing.

He was eternally full and complete, living, loving, knowing, and being, with a majesty, perfection, and glory beyond the languages of men.

Out of the fullness of life and love, God the Father brought forth the universe through, with, and in his only begotten Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

God decided that there would be something rather than nothing; so he created the universe, giving it a structure and life that in some dim but real way reflected his own [Ralph Martin: Is Jesus Coming Soon?]

A. The Universe: A Formless Void

Read: Genesis 1:1-2

[1] In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

[2] The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

“In the beginning,” Genesis tells us, “God created the heavens and the earth.” This means that everything that exists was created by God.

God created two realms of existence: the heavens and the earth. He created spirit and matter out of nothing, and then formed the matter as He wanted.

- The Hebrew for create, *berah*, means literally "to create out of nothing." It is only ever applied to God.
- The Bible later confirms this in 2 Mac. 7:28: *"I beseech you, my child, to look at the heavens and the earth and see everything that is in them, and to recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed."*

“In the beginning” means that creation marks the start of time and the course of history. Time and history have a beginning and they are headed toward a final goal, which the Bible will tell us more about, especially in its last book, Revelation. At the end of Revelation we are told:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more [Rev 21:1].

Genesis tells us that in the beginning:

- the universe was formless, that is, it had no structure or shape;
- that it was void or empty, and
- there was no light.

God will now proceed to create a structure [home] and then to fill it. For this He will need light, as any workman would. And the “Breath” or “Spirit of God” is present and participates in creation.

One way of looking at the first creation account is to see that it comprises two sets of three days.

- In the first three days God creates the structure of the earth, giving it form.
- In the second three days God creates the inhabitants to fill the empty void or structure.

And then when creation is complete, God rests on the seventh [Sabbath] day.

B. Day One: TIME [Day and Night]

Read: Genesis 1:3-5

[3] And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

[4] And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

[5] God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

At this point strictly speaking, the description of creation begins. According to the literary plan of the narrative, creation is going to take place over six days. These

six days are meant to indicate the orderliness with which God went about his work, and to show a rhythm of work and rest.

In the narrative God creates the standard work week of six days and rests on the seventh.

C. Time

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” and on the first day [Sunday] God created time.

What was God doing before he created? It’s a hard question. St. Augustine had a simple answer: ***“Nothing. He didn’t have the time.”***

What St. Augustine meant was that space and time are things that exist for creatures, but not for the Creator. God fills all of time.

“If the sacred and utterly truthful Scriptures say that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, so that nothing is to be understood as having been created prior thereto, then beyond any doubt the world was not created in time but along with time.”

St. Augustine of Hippo [354-430 AD].

In the beginning the eternal God created TIME [Day and Night] for us. God is eternal and exists outside of time, but the physical world exists only in time. Therefore before God created the spatial dimensions of height, width, depth, He had to create the fourth dimension of time.

D. The Power of God’s Word

The first thing to note about this text is that God creates by the power of his Word [*“And God said . . .”*]. He simply speaks the world into being.

- That same Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us.

The New Testament reveals that Jesus was the "Word" that God spoke "in the beginning." He was present as the Creative Word of God. In other words, His role was to create and to sustain the universe and life. As Scripture says:

“Through him all things were made” (John 1:3); “by him all things were created, all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1:16-17).

- From the very first words of Scripture, we are introduced to the Word of God Who will, throughout all the rest of its pages, slowly but magnificently be revealed.
- He will be fully manifested when He takes on human flesh in the womb of Mary, becoming the Incarnate Son of God.
- Jesus is the Word of God by which the world was created.

Pope Benedict notes: *“The words ‘**God said**’ appear ten times in the creation account. In this way the creation narrative anticipates the Ten Commandments. This makes us realize that these Ten Commandments are, as it were, an echo of the creation . . .”*

E. How Long Was Day One?

How long was Day One? See page 14 of *Come and See: Genesis*. The author has a very interesting explanation regarding the length of Day One and the age of the universe. At the end he says:

“There is no reason why Day One had to go on to Day Two. God could have made Day One into an eternal day, and enjoyed the created light which was good, forever. God made the first day end so that the second could begin, and only at the end of the first day does time begin to pass.”

F. Creation is Good!

In Genesis 1:4 we meet for the first time a phrase which is going to be used seven times in the narrative: ***“And God saw that it was good.”***

This means that everything that God creates is good for it has come from divine goodness. God cannot create anything that is evil and is never the source of material or moral evil.

In the past some Christians have heretically taught that matter is evil and only spirit is good. The soul, they say, is good, but the body is only a necessary evil we need to get through this earthly life.

The first chapter of Genesis contradicts that idea. Every time God creates something, Genesis tells us that, ***“God saw that it was good.”***

And in the end, ***“God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”***

Matter as well as spirit, body as well as soul – both are positive goods that are created by God for good. They are ultimately the instruments God uses to redeem us.

The goodness of matter is one of the foundations of the seven sacraments, all of which make use of material things for spiritual ends, e.g. water in Baptism to bring about eternal life; bread in the Eucharist to nourish that new life.

G. Day Two: SPACE [Sky and Sea]

Read: Genesis 1:6-8

[6] And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."

[7] And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so.

[8] And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

On the second day [Monday] God created the sky and sea [space].

According to the culture of their time, the early Hebrews thought of the firmament [the sky, the heavens] as a huge inverted metal bowl or dome that retained the waters above it. When sluice gates in this dome were opened, rain poured down.

H. Day Three: LIFE [Land and Vegetation]

Read: Genesis 1:9-13

[9] And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so.

[10] God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

[11] And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so.

[12] The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

[13] And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

On the third day [Tuesday] God creates the land and vegetation – the first living things; seed bearing plants and fruit trees, that is, life.

In the first three days God creates the environment [the home] in which His creatures will live. The universe is no longer formless.

In those first three days, God created a world fit to live in. He has provided the threefold form of earthly life.

- Day and night give us time;
- Sea and sky give us space;
- Land and vegetation give us a place to live.

In the first three days God created TIME; SPACE; LIFE.

Summary

Genesis 1 is far more than an account of our beginnings. It is the introduction to God’s written revelation of Himself, and as such it introduces us to God, the awesome, powerful creator of the universe.

- It illustrates the power of His Word, the goodness of all of His works, and the deliberate, orderly intent behind His creative work.
- It shows Him to be the only, eternal, omnipresent source of life and of all that is needed to sustain it.
- Together with His Word and Spirit He creates and sustains all by His will and by His love.

Questions

1. What happened in Genesis when God spoke? Genesis 1:3
2. How did God evaluate His creation? Genesis 1:31
3. What is the first command God gives in the Bible? Genesis 1:28

Preparation for Week #2

Read:

4. Genesis: Chapters 1 and 2 - RSV Catholic Edition;
5. *Come and see Catholic Bible Study – Genesis*: Chapters 1 and 2
6. The Navarre Bible: Genesis – Chapters 1 and 2