

Genesis 1 & 2 – A summary of some points

I may have disturbed a few people last time. It's always hard in a finite space of time to cover every view, every piece of evidence and to define every term. Sometimes I express things badly, and sometimes people hear things differently to the way you hope. So here are a few statements to clarify and expand a little what I said last time.

1. Every Christian believes in Creation. No God, no Creation. The Universe cannot create or organise itself. There is no question that God's creative genius and design is the primary cause of everything we see. The debate is about the methods, timeframe and secondary causes that God may have used. We should not therefore identify the Doctrine of Creation with any particular view of *how* God actually brought things into being.
2. I do not believe that Genesis is written to teach us about the methods and processes God has used. Genesis 1-2 is best viewed as a literary vehicle for theological truth. I do not expect to find chronological or scientific information in those chapters. If we interrogate the text for answers it was not written to provide, then we will end up with a great many problems. Genesis 1 & 2 is a polemical and theological work, attacking Babylonian polytheism and setting out the theological foundations of the Judeo-Christian worldview that we now largely take for granted.
3. I cannot take seriously any view that argues for a young earth (1000s of years old rather than billions) created in a literal 6-day period. Personally, I feel that such views fall in flat earth territory. Forgive me if that sounds offensive, but it's how I feel after an enormous amount of reading and research.
4. The trickier question is how life itself, the great diversity of species, and human beings in particular, came into existence. Last time I argued strongly that I am happy to use the word "*evolution*" to describe that whole process, including the origin of our own human bodies. The scientific evidence for this process having occurred is very, very good and should not be quickly dismissed. However, I should add some caveats to that:
5. By "*evolution*" I do not mean the blind-chance, purposeless evolution which is exalted by the atheist as a replacement for God. The "*evolution*" I speak of has been termed "*theistic evolution*", by which is meant the gradual advance of life forms according to biological processes and laws which God created, towards ends which God fore-ordained, initiated by God's creative command and overseen in whatever way God deems necessary by his providence.
6. It should equally be admitted, and I did not make this sufficiently clear, that the theory of evolution (at the macro level) is NOT on the same scientific level as the theory of relativity or the laws of electricity and magnetism. It is a good theory with plenty of evidence, but it is NOT proven and in one sense it never could be proven. Neither does it pass Karl Popper's test of being falsifiable (a philosophy of science issue that there wasn't time to explore). Moreover, there are some serious scientists out there, both atheist and Christian, who have scientific doubts about some aspects of evolutionary theory in its current form. I do fear that this admission allows lay Christians to dismiss evolution too quickly, but the admission must be made.
7. There are possible alternatives to "*theistic evolution*", a range of views broadly covered by the term "*old age creationism*". I did not give this view the exposure it deserves, but it is held by some serious Christian thinkers in some form or other. On this view, the physical universe and the earth retain their great age as put forward by standard cosmology and geology, BUT the origin of life itself, the origin of human beings and the origin of the major taxonomic ranks within the animal kingdom all required direct divine intervention in some form or other. In other words, God has intermittently intervened from time to time across the great ages of time with acts of creativity, the last of these being the creation of mankind.

8. Whilst I personally do have some scientific, philosophical and theological difficulties with “*old earth creationism*”, it was an omission on my part to not present it as a possible view that a Christian might settle on with integrity. If we do take this view however, I believe it should be the science, not Genesis, that drives us there. Genesis itself is not given to settle these debates – it is a theological not a scientific text. However, if the current science of evolution is found to be insufficient to explain the living world that we observe (and even some atheists would currently argue this) then we might have to consider the possibility that the observational evidence is best explained by a model involving at least some direct intervention from God creating ready-made creatures – or at the very least some kind of creative activity or input of information that goes beyond the normal evolutionary process of random mutation and natural selection.
9. The odds against life itself beginning by chance are staggeringly high. On a level with a monkey sitting at a keyboard and randomly typing Shakespeare. **Life requires God.** But whether this is direct and miraculous divine intervention at about 1 billion years into the Earth’s history, or whether it is implicit in whatever commands and laws God gave at the very beginning of Creation, I find hard to decide. Either way, it is not blind chance.
10. We must distinguish between different categories of answer, and understand that they can be complementary. If we asked you to explain your presence here tonight, you could answer that you wanted to go to Bible Extra. You could also answer that you were transported here by a petrol burning vehicle moving along a tarmac surface. Both answers are correct, and they are complementary, not contradictory. They are different categories of answer. If we are asked to explain why we exist, we could answer that God created us in his image, or we could answer in evolutionary terms. Those answers belong in different categories, and they need not be placed in opposition. The Bible yields one category of answer. Science yields the other. The scientist who thinks he can dispense with God is making a category error. The theologian who thinks he can ignore the results of scientific study is doing just the same.
11. Nothing that I have I said about the Big Bang or evolution displaces or demotes God one iota – at least not in my mind. For me, it makes him even more amazing and wonderful that he might be able to design the processes and laws of the physical and biological universe in such a manner that they are able to bring forth the diversity of life that we observe from just a few elementary building blocks. To my mind that is way smarter than just making stuff whole in an instant. God could, or course, have used whatever methods and timescales he liked. We believe that ALL of creation is his making by his genius and that none of it could self-exist. That is the clear teaching of the Bible. At the same time, we must relentlessly pursue the most vigorous and careful scientific study if we are to improve our chances of working out exactly how he did it.
12. Science could never disprove God. Scientists like Dawkins, who make theological statements, have stepped way beyond the boundaries of reliable science. Ironically, they have started to make statements which cannot be scientifically verified. They are breaking their own principles. Dawkins speaks religious dogma. Humble scientists will speak of a beauty in the equations that point to a higher intelligence. Paul Davies, a non-Christian physicist of international repute, wrote many years ago, after studying all the amazing basic laws and constants of physics, “*It looks as if we were meant to be here!*”