

3. GENESIS SERIES: The First Day

'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: And God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day (Genesis 1:1-5)'

As has already been discussed in a previous study, Genesis is a book about origins. Upon the commencement of our studies in the Book of Genesis we are immediately faced with a question of origin - that of the absolute beginning. It is not a question of the beginning of God for the book assumes His eternal existence, but of the origin of the world and of the universe.

What is clear from a reading of the first verse of Genesis and the Bible is that God existed before the creation of the world (cf Jn 17:5, 24). The first verse comes across as a statement to this effect. God has always been there and at the beginning of the world it was He who made the heaven and the earth.

'When this work was produced: In the beginning, that is, in the beginning of time, when that clock was first set a going: time began with the production of those beings that are measured by time. Before the beginning of time there was none but that Infinite Being that inhabits eternity'

Matthew Henry

Verse 1: This first verse of Genesis is something of a summary statement concerning the origin of the world. The beginning of the universe was brought about by the purpose and power of God and by no other means. This is the simple meaning, if you like, of this verse. God is the original cause of the universe. Yet the verse may also point to the beginning of God's creation out of nothing, rather than being a summary of the whole work of creation (which is what verse two seems to suggest).

By using the term 'created (bara),' the Bible is asserting that what was made by God was in fact made out of nothing (Heb 11:3). This term clearly eliminates the pre-existence of any form of matter previous to the creative activity of God. This verse is a record not only of God's creative work, but also of the beginning of His creative work.

QUESTION: Does the use of the term 'created' have any implications for the big bang theory as regards the origin of the earth? Explain.

Though not enough to prove the Trinity, it is interesting to note the usage of a plural name for God used in this very first verse of Genesis. The word used is that of 'Elohim,' which is a plural form of God, yet in this context is clearly used in the singular. He is One, yet more than one. So what we find in this very first verse of the Bible is the beginning of Biblical evidence for a plurality in the Godhead. It does not point to a triunity, but does point to a plurality in the Godhead.

QUESTION: What sort of evidence for the Trinity is gained by the use of the plural 'Elohim' in this verse?

Verse 2: Verse 2 goes on to explain that the original work of creation left the universe in something of a chaotic or unorganised state when contrasted to what we have today, for it was without form (tohu) and void (bohu). The point in this verse seems to be that at this stage of creation the world was yet empty and not what it was meant to become. It was but an initial work of creation, with the six days ahead to bring form, order and stability to the creation of God. The deep is the yet empty ocean, mixed with all the other created matter to this point, which was also shrouded in total darkness.

Though the appearance of the world was a somewhat chaotic mass in contrast to what it would yet become, it was still necessary that God sustained what He had thus far created. This appears to be the significance of the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters in this verse (cf Deut 32:11). Yet it might also point to the creative activity of the Spirit of God (that is the Third Person of the Trinity).

Verse 3: In this verse we are introduced to the means whereby God created the world and all that is in it. The means was His Word, for He spoke and it appeared (Ps 33:9; Heb 11:3). The Biblical account points to God as the First Cause of creation, to the exclusion of all secondary causes. There is no mention of processes of creation, just a simple statement that God spoke and it happened.

It is interesting to note at this point that light existed prior to the creation of the sun, for the sun was not created until day four. As to where exactly this light came from we are not told, except that God called it into being. It can be speculated that God Himself was the source of this early light (consider Rev 21:23; 22:5).

Verses 4 and 5: In this verse we have the formation by God of what would appear to be the first day, as we know them in the history of the world. God divided the light from the darkness, calling the period of light day and the period of darkness night. As has already been noted in a previous study, it would seem most likely, according to the context of this chapter, Genesis and the Bible, that the period that was called the first day was in actual

fact a literal 24-hour day (day four was most certainly that). By using such terms as day, night, evening and morning, the passage is fairly clear in describing the day-period as being that of a normal 24-hour period.

On the period of time that God took to create the universe it is interesting to note the comments of Calvin, commenting on why God created everything within six days and not in an instant:

'let us rather conclude that God himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men.'

God pronounced His work on this first day good, which means that this original work of God was morally perfect and free of any fault whatsoever. This same refrain is repeated throughout the chapter after each day of creative activity and at the very end of His creative activity the entire creation is pronounced very good. It answered exactly to what God had planned and purposed.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Are verses 11, 12, 20 and 24 evidence of God using an evolutionary process in creation? Explain your answer.

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