

“And God Said (and Left Unsaid)” – Genesis 1:1-31

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in Genesis 1...

We have a lot of ground to cover this morning, so let's make haste to the text. That shouldn't be too hard, since you can find our passage on page one. As we begin, I would actually like to read the entire first chapter. As I do that, bear in mind that this is God's Word, our highest authority. Listen attentively then. And perhaps you can take note of the repeated theme of God's speech, a point I will return to at the end of our time. Follow along as I read...

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 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, the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

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 sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on 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, the third day.

¹⁴ And God 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, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” ²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and

over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

*²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.

³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Genesis 1:1-31)

We have a lot of ground to cover today, so let’s get going. Our goal this morning is not to turn over every stone of controversy in this chapter. This is not the time or place for that, and the weeks it would take for that would vastly exceed the attention spans of most of us.¹

Therefore, what I would like to do this morning is threefold. First, I want us to grasp some of the rhythm of how this chapter unfolds, its structure, its patterns. Then, second, I will acknowledge some of the debates associated this chapter. And, finally, we will consider a few things that I hope all Christians, regardless of where they land on some of the tertiary debates, can agree on. This will be something of a setup for what is coming. To that ends, let’s give some thought now to...

The Rhythm and Structure of Genesis 1

We have already noted in a previous sermon that there is much repetition in the way the six days of creation are presented to us. The account, which technically stretches into Genesis 2, begins and ends in a similar fashion (we call that an *inclusio*), where we see an acknowledgement that God made “*the heavens and the earth*” (we call that a *merism*), which is a way of asserting that He created everything in existence. We also see repeated words and phrases throughout the days of creation—“*And God said...and it was so...and God saw that it was good...and God separated...and there was evening and there was morning, the [x] day.*” The cumulative effect of all of this is something beautiful, at times poetic, and clearly intentional. It’s not the typical narrative we find in the Old Testament. Even comparing it with the next chapter, which is still part of the creation account, makes that plain.

In previous weeks I’ve mentioned that there is much debate on how verse 1 relates to the verses that follow. Some take it as a summary statement of the entire creation account, which concerns how “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” Others take it as a description of the first creational act of God. Among those, there is a divide between those who believe that this first creational act should be considered part of “*the first day*” or set apart. These are not easy conversations to settle, and we need not get into those weeds today.

In any case, when we arrive at verse 2 God has clearly already made something. We are told, in verse 2,

“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1:2)

What follows is God setting things to order, bringing more things into existence, and delighting in what He has made, like an artist delights in a beautiful painting as it comes together. And verse 2, it seems to me, helps us understand how the account of creation is structured. We are told in this verse that “*the earth was without form and void.*” It was formless and empty. The six days of creation address that state. How so? It’s long been

recognized that the six days of creation can be understood as two cycles of three days. Consider the following chart:²

The Domains [Forming]	The Occupants [Filling]
Day 1 (Gen. 1:3-5) God separates light from darkness.	Day 4 (Gen. 1:14-19) God creates the sun, moon, and stars.
Day 2 (Gen. 1:6-8) God separates the sky from the sea.	Day 5 (Gen. 1:20-23) God creates birds and fish.
Day 3 (Gen. 1:9-13) God separates dry ground from water and creates plants.	Day 6 (Gen. 1:24-31) God creates livestock, wild animals, and people.

When considered in this fashion, we can see that there is a clear structure to these six days. The first corresponds to the fourth, the second to the fifth, and the third to the sixth. In the first cycle (days one through three), God forms the domains for life as we know it. And in the second cycle, God inhabits those domains with occupants. By this forming and filling, the Lord removes the original state described in verse 2, where the earth was “without form and void.” No longer is the earth formless, since the first three days remedied that. And no longer is it empty or void, given the last three days. All along the way, God describes the outcome of His forming and filling as “good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Indeed, at the end of day six, when His work of creation draws to a close, this is stated more emphatically:

“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” (Genesis 1:31)

When I look at this, I am reminded that the creation “reveals to us a God of order and beauty.”³ Amid all these debates, we sometime fail to do the far more important task, namely, as my friend Jamie likes to say, “Behold, the handiwork of God.” When we read Genesis 1, we’re not doing it right if we are not stepping back and marveling at God and His orderly creation. What we read of in Genesis 1 is truly “very good” (1:31). “It was only when humans, acting on their own volition and tempted by the serpent, tried to usurp the Lord of creation and thus were thrust from the garden (more on that later)” that the world we occupy become “one of less order and less beauty.”⁴ That is the tragedy of sin. It messes everything up. It messed us up. And it’s one of the reasons, frankly, why Christians sometimes don’t “play nice” when they converse about difficult passages like Genesis 1...

Acknowledging the Difficulties of Genesis 1

This is the longest section today, and, to be quite honest with you, I wrestled with whether or not to include it because in it we are addressing debates that I don’t think are the author’s point. The author’s point should be the sermon’s point, right? Yet part my calling as pastor is to equip the saints, and in our setting even the mere mention of Genesis 1 seems to conjure up these types of discussions. Therefore, I left it in, hoping that it might help us navigate these internal conversations with more charity and external conversations with more nuance. The fact is that this seems to be all people ever want to talk about in Genesis 1—these debates—which is one of the reasons I spent the last three sermons ignoring them entirely, focusing on the main thing. And what is the main thing? God. Don’t forget that. Seriously. Don’t.

Most people have. When most people think of Genesis 1, they tend to think of it in reference to modern scientific inquiry on the origins of the universe and life in general. This is because it is commonly alleged that the scientific consensus on such things is in conflict with the content of this chapter. Therefore, people want to make the study of Genesis 1 a conversation about faith and science, either in terms of highlighting the conflict or proposing some harmonization.

It shouldn't surprise you that I do not agree. I don't believe the Bible and science are truly incompatible, but I also don't think that Genesis was written with the same objectives as a scientific textbook. The questions that pique our curiosity today are not necessarily the same questions that were circulating among the recently delivered Hebrew people who first received this revelation. They knew nothing of Charles Darwin or the findings of the James Webb telescope. They had never heard of DNA or carbon dating. They were much more fixated, at this stage of their experience, with questions of identity and theology than they were of cosmology and the origins of matter (i.e., material ontology).

Thus, we must probably begin by simply confessing that Genesis 1 is not a twenty-first century scientific treatise. It was not written to address modern question, but those relevant in an ancient Near Eastern context. Yet just because Genesis is not a science textbook, doesn't mean it is incompatible with true scientific findings. It's not. And just because it wasn't written in response to modern scientific inquiries, doesn't mean it has no implications for our reading of scientific findings in the present day. It does.

But having said that, I also believe there is much more that is left unsaid in Genesis 1 than some people have acknowledged. This is not exhaustive. What about the creation of the angels? Fall of Satan? Etc. There are details left unsaid. Because of that, I am one of those who believes there is some room for different conclusions among genuine believers when it comes to the debates that are all the rage today, like the meaning of "*day*" and the age of earth or how to read the more poetic elements of Genesis 1. I tend to agree with the measured stance of D. A. Carson, who writes:

“I hold that the Genesis account is a mixed genre that feels like history and really does give us some historical particulars. At the same time, however, it is full of demonstrable symbolism. Sorting out what is symbolic and what is not is very difficult.”⁵

Because of this I am far less dogmatic (and much more agnostic) on how to “negotiate this tension,” as Carson puts it, than many people are. I think there is room in the tent for different conclusions on certain aspects of the *how* and *when* of God's creative activity. There are some non-negotiables (which we will get to in a bit), but that list is much shorter for me than it is for many. And, just to be clear, that's not because I don't have opinions on how to best resolve various interpretive difficulties. I have opinions. But that's not what this time is for. And I am not convinced that author of Genesis intended this text to sort the curiosities of modern man, nor am I convinced that sorting out those curiosities is all that essential. There are interesting conversations to be had. And they are worth having. But I don't want our time to exhausted on these debates. I want us to land, in the end, on something more concrete that the text itself if clearly emphasizing.

Before we do, however, let me at least acknowledge, in passing, where certain camps have formed concerning the age of the earth in light of Genesis 1. But notice I said at the beginning that I will be “acknowledging” the difficulties, not “solving” them today. So calibrate your expectations accordingly.

Essentially there are Christians who lean toward “young earth” theories of creation and other who lean toward “old earth” theories. At the risk of generalization, the former would be more natural conclusion if reading Genesis 1 as a linear narrative, and the latter is often judged more compatible with the majority of scientific findings. I hesitate to speak of scientific “consensus,” because there's no such thing when it comes to matters like dating the origins of the universe. In fact, the range of proposals is quite comical. But it is safe to say that even within that broad range of suggestions, there is a “consensus” that the more straightforward reading of what is empirically observable would suggest an “old” earth.

Of course, words like “old” and “young” are a bit relative. But most who hold to a “young earth” theory believe that the earth was created less than ten thousand years ago. That's what is meant by “young,” and that conclusion is driven, first, by the conclusion that everything in Genesis 1 was accomplished in seven, twenty-four-hour days and, second, by calculations drawn from biblical genealogies. It is sometimes suggested that those who advocate for an “old earth” are driven exclusively by scientific observations, instead of by textual

ones. However, I don't believe that is always the case. Wayne Grudem provides a few examples that are worth mentioning (and are not necessarily mutually exclusive, meaning some people hold to various hybrid positions).⁶ Let me start with some of the old earth theories and then end with some young earth arguments. The point of this is not to settle the matter, but help some of us gain an appreciation that there are *textual* reasons for various proposals.

Old Earth Theory 1: The Day-Age View

This is sometimes referred to as the “concordist” view because it is one of the early attempts to seek “agreement or ‘concord’ between the Bible and scientific conclusions about dating.”⁷ But it is more commonly called the “day-age view” because of how it attempts to accomplish that concord. It hinges on taking the word translated “*day*” (*yom*) in Genesis 1 as signifying, not a solar day (twenty-four hours), but some extended and indefinite period of time, an “age” if you will. This would mean that it would be impossible to diagnose just how long the events of Genesis 1 took in reality, making the view compatible with an “old earth” theory (or a “young earth” theory for that matter).

Is there evidence in the Old Testament for this Hebrew word being used for some undefined period of time? Yes. In fact, it is used to refer to at least a week in the very next chapter, where we read:

“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.” (Genesis 2:4)

Here is an instance where the word “day” doesn't refer to a solar day (24 hours), but to the creational “week” just described (however long that took). Another instance would be in Genesis 1:5, where the term “day” is used to describe the period of light (i.e., approximately 12-hours). And these are not the only examples of this word meaning something other than 24 hour day in the Old Testament.

Yet there are challenges for this view. For starters, while it's true this word for “day” can convey different temporal connotations (depending on the context in which it is found), it is also true that when it's used with a number elsewhere in the Old Testament they context suggests a solar day is in view.⁸ And the context of Genesis 1, arguably, may convey this with its repetition of the phrase, “and there was evening and there was morning” at the conclusion of each of the first six days.

Old Earth Theory 2: A “Gap” Theory

I say “a” gap theory, instead of “the” gap theory to hint at the fact that there are actually several gap theories that have been suggested over the years. Essentially, this theory argues that even if one takes each “*day*” of creation as a twenty-four-hour period of time, there could be an unspecified gap of time between a certain day, several days, all the days, before the days are described, or some combination of these.⁹

John Lennox, the famed mathematician and Oxford professor, has written cogently on what I would argue is the most compelling version of this theory, which places the gap before verse 3.¹⁰ He argues that each “*day*” in the structure of Genesis 1 begins with statement, “*And God said,*” which first occurs in verse 3. And, as we have already noted, by the time you get to verse 3, God has already made something (cf. 1:2). That leaves the door open for a “gap” of time that seems less forced than trying to read one between any or all of the “days” of creation. Even if he is wrong, it is at least an intelligible interpretation adopted by many who take seriously the authority of the Scriptures.

Old Earth Theory 3: The “Analogical Day” View

This is just a fancy way of saying that “Genesis 1 is using the ordinary workweek of a Hebrew laborer as an analogy to teach ancient Israelite readers that God (in a way similar to an Israelite laborer) worked to bring about creation.”¹¹ This is a view that was advocated by Herman Bavinck, William G. T. Shedd, Franz Delitzch, and more recently by C. John Collins.¹² So the point of Genesis 1, in this way of understanding it, is not to provide a timeline of material origins, but to communicate to the Hebrews in a relatable way that “God carried out his work in a reasonable, orderly way, much like a skilled craftsman.”¹³ And this, of course, would serve as the basis for their understanding of a weekly Sabbath rest.

Old Earth Theory 4: The “Literary Framework” View

This view is often closely related to the previous one and builds off the chart I showed earlier, which divides the days into two cycles—days of forming and days of filling. One advocate of this view, Mark Ross, describes it as “a view of Genesis 1:1-2:3 which claims that the Bible’s use of the seven-day week in its narration of the creation is a literary (theological) framework and is not intended to indicate the chronology or duration of the acts of creation.”¹⁴ There are advantages and disadvantages to this view as well, which we don’t have time for today.¹⁵

These are just a sampling of “old earth” theories that have been proposed from *literary* features of the text. Trust me there are more.¹⁶ But there are also, as I mentioned from the start, a great many who reasonably conclude, based on a straight-forward reading of the text, that the earth must be much younger than the proposals offered by most scientists today. And this brings us to...

The Young Earth Theory

This is the view that asserts that God created everything that exists in six, twenty-four-hour days. Again, I think this view is a reasonable interpretation of the text. Most who hold this view will concede that there view does conflict with the majority of scientific theory today. But that doesn’t make the view wrong. The text of God’s Word is the Christian’s highest authority.

Typically, advocates have tried to address this discrepancy with much of the science in one of three ways. First, there are those who acknowledge that there are some things in existence that do give the impression of a much older “age” (e.g., fossil records, astronomical features, etc.). But this is just the appearance of age. The obvious analogy would be to Adam and Eve, who were created as full-grown adults. If that could be true of them, then why not the universe? By this accounting, we might surmise that when Adam and Eve peered up at the stars their first night on earth, God created those stars with existing beams of light extending to earth, since ordinarily that would have taken, by conservative estimates, thousands of years to travel to earth under “normal” circumstances. This is certainly possible, but such explanations are simultaneously concessions that the young earth view does *apparently* conflict with certain scientific findings (e.g., the speed of light). And Vern Poythress, who himself appears pretty sympathetic to this view, notes that “the biggest complaint from critics is that it feels as though God is deceiving us by producing an apparent age.” But the most common reply given is “that the fault is with human beings who assume that, even during the exceptional period at the beginning of the world, maturity implies a gradual process in the past.”¹⁷

Another way that some of these tensions are resolved is by factoring the global flood that is described later in Genesis. Grudem calls this “flood geology.” He writes,

“This is the view that the tremendous natural forces unleashed by the flood at the time of Noah (Gen. 6-9) significantly altered the face of the earth, causing the creation of coal and diamonds, for example, within the space of a year rather than hundreds of millions of years, because of the extremely high

pressure exerted by the water of the earth. This view also claims that the flood deposited fossils in layers of incredibly thick sediment all over the earth...[And so] these advocates attribute most of the present geological status of the earth to the immense catastrophe of the flood.”¹⁸

Again, this view is certainly possible. The flood was a unique event, without analogy. But I’m not a specialist in the field of geology, so it is admittedly a position that is hard for me to assess.

A third way that young earth advocates deal with the tension between their view and that of most of the scientists of our day is to say that the science has not quite caught up to the theologians yet. Again, this is possible. I gave an example of how for many years the scientific consensus favored the idea of an eternal universe, which contradicted the teaching of the Bible. Today the scientific consensus favors a finite universe (i.e., one that came into being at some point), which Jews and Christians have affirmed all along. Perhaps the age of the earth is another one of those matters. We may not know exactly how it all works out in the end, but we can probably all agree that when the dust settles the Scriptures and science will be shown to not be in true tension.

So what is my own view? It doesn’t really matter. You’re not accountable to me on your reading of the Bible, but to God. And I can give you examples of godly men and women—who believe what we do about the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and the particulars of the Gospel—who land in every single one of these camps. That’s the point of this exercise. This is clearly not one of those decisions that determines who is in or out of the God’s Kingdom. That’s not to say it’s not important. But I wouldn’t classify it as “core” doctrine that all Christians must embrace. And, to be honest, I myself have trouble ruling out any of these views with absolute certainty on textual grounds (though, in my estimation, certain interpretations seem more likely than others).¹⁹

Science and Scripture are sources of truth. I tend to agree with the adage that all truth is God’s truth. However, Scripture is the ultimate source of truth for the Christian. It should always win out in our convictions. But when it does not explicitly address or solve a matter (by argument or related principle)—as I think is the case when it comes to age of the earth since that is not the concern of the author of Genesis—then I tend to feel compelled to reserve judgment. This is not, as I’m sure some would accuse, about elevating science over Scripture. Instead, this approach is fostered by what we know from history. Sometimes science has helped Christians go back to the text and ask, “Am I really reading this correctly?” This is a good thing, because sometimes the answer is no.

I once saw an interview with John Lennox, in which he was asked about his understanding of what Genesis 1 says definitively about the age of the earth. He responded,

“If you’d asked me that question five hundred years ago, it wouldn’t have been that question. What it would have been is, ‘Professor Lennox, what do you think of this upstart Galileo who thinks the earth moves when the Bible says it doesn’t? God has set the earth up on its pillars that it should not be moved [Ps. 104:5].’ But how many people in this room believe the earth is fixed relative to the stars and doesn’t move? So you don’t believe the Bible, any of you. The Bible says it doesn’t move! You see for 1,700 years there was a controversy about this. It started off with everyone being a fixed-earthier. You ever met fixed-earthiers? No. There is no one here. And then there were a couple of moving-earthiers. And then the group of moving-earthiers got bigger, and bigger, and bigger until the fixed-earthier have all disappeared. One thousand and seven hundred years for that to happen. What people discovered, ladies and gentlemen, is this—that although you *could* interpret the Bible in terms of a fixed-earth, you didn’t have to, without losing its authority.”²⁰

He then goes on to suggest that this may be analogous to the present debate. It may or may not. But the point is well taken. It’s not elevating science above Scripture to allow science to encourage us to take a second look at Scripture to determine whether or not our convictions are in fact biblically-informed or biblically-necessary. They may or may not be. But it is at least worth a look. “The lesson of Galileo, who was forced to recant his

teaching and had to live under house arrest for the last few years of his life, should remind us that careful observation of the natural world can cause us to go back to Scripture and reexamine whether Scripture actually teaches what we think it teaches.”²¹ And it’s okay to say, “I don’t know.”

Regardless of what we conclude on this particular issue, let’s not abandon the Christian virtue of charity. As the saying goes, we should pursue unity on the essentials, maintain liberty on the non-essentials, and embrace charity in all things. I appreciate what Grudem writes about this:

“We must say very clearly that the age of the earth is a matter that is not directly taught in Scripture but is something we can think about only by drawing inferences from Scripture....Given this situation, it would seem best (1) to admit that God may not allow us to find a definitive solution to this question before Christ returns and (2) to encourage evangelical scientists and theologians who fall in both the young earth and old earth camps to work together with a sense of cooperation in a common purpose, remembering that the wisdom from above is ‘first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere,’ and full of the recognition that ‘a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace’ (James 3:17-18).”²²

And this will be easier to apply, when we recognize that these disagreements are often in-house debates, that is, those among genuine brothers and sisters.

“It is not a question of *believing* the Bible or not believing the Bible, nor is it a question of believing biblical authority versus believing scientific authority. It is simply a question of *interpreting* the Bible that both sides firmly believe to be entirely true.”²³

Therefore, we can spar about interpretations, but let’s do so with open arms.

But surely there is something in Genesis 1 that all Christians should be able to agree on, right? I think so. Let me give you a few examples as we close.

The Heart of the Matter in Genesis 1

I agree with what Ligon Duncan once said, when asked about the essential beliefs that Christians should affirm from Genesis 1. He mentioned three things:

- 1) God Is the Creator of All Things
- 2) The Goodness of Creation
- 3) The Special Creation of Adam and Eve²⁴

The first of these we have spent several sermons on. We have seen that Genesis 1 that God is the one, eternal, transcendent, personal Creator of all. And this distinction between the Creator and His creation is essential, for reasons we have explored. The second of these—the goodness of creation—is what I want to explore with you in my next sermon, which I have found is often misunderstood in the present day. And the third of these truths—the special creation of Adam and Eve—has a variety of significant implications that, Lord willing, we will unpack in the weeks ahead.

But let me add just one final thought that would fall under the first of these points: Our Creator God is a speaking God. Remember how I asked you to take note of that when we read the text at the beginning? One of the points that every single day of creation underscores from the start is that “God said” something. He created by Word. Some suggest that this is mere metaphor. But as we keep reading we see that God begins to give instructions to the first humans. He speaks to them. He tasks them. He defines life and marriage for them. So, as D. A. Carson writes,

“[T]he God of the Bible in the very first chapter is not come abstract ‘unmoved mover,’ some spirit impossible to define, some ground of all beings, some mystical experience. He has personality and dares to disclose himself in words that human beings understand. Right through the whole Bible, that picture of God constantly recurs. However great or transcendent he is, he is a talking God.”²⁵

This makes me think of a couple of my favorite verses in the Bible. They are found at the beginning of the epistle to the Hebrews.

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...” (Hebrews 1:1-2a).

These verses, like the opening verses of the Bible, remind us that God is a speaking God. He has graciously disclosed Himself to us. But these verses also show that the climactic revelation has come in the Word incarnate. He has spoken decisively in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In these last days, the author of Hebrews says, God has spoken to us by His Son. And what has He said by His Son? That is where the author goes next...

“...in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...” (Hebrews 1:2-3).

One of the things God communicates by the Son according to these verses—in addition to His divine glory as Creator and Inheritor of all—is that He alone can offer us purification from all our sins. We can’t do that. The sacrifices of the Old Covenant were without end until the arrival of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, which is why there were no seats in the temple for the priest. Their works was unceasing because our sins were unrelenting. But when Jesus came and offered Himself up on the cross in the place of sinners like us, He made atonement for our sins. And having made atonement—or purification—for our sins, He sits. Why? Because the works is done.

Just like in the Creation story, God does His good work and then rests to signify its completion, so also when Jesus accomplished His saving work for His people He sat down (rests) to signify that the work is completed. We too can enter into God’s rest because the Savior’s work on the cross was sufficient. If we would turn from our sin and self-sufficiency and trust in Him to save us, we would know purification from sin. The One through whom we were created and redeemed, lives today and is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high because the work needed for our cleansing has been finished. This is the message of God in Christ today. And it’s good news for those who believe. I hope you will believe on Him today, if you have not already.

This speaking God would have us know the Savior. That’s far more at the heart of what He communicates in His Word than the age of the world. Let God’s people agree on that. And let us never let our debates on non-essentials grow so uncharitable and divisive that we risk obscuring the beauty of the Savior and His work in the eyes of the lost and dying world around us.

Let’s pray...

¹ If you are interested in that sort of thing, you should consider plugging into some of our SOIL classes, in partnership with Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, which are essentially seminary classes for free that can even be counted toward a degree (if you so choose). But as we gather in corporate worship, our goals are different.

² Drawn from J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Living God's Word: Discovering Our Place in the Great Story of Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 4.

³ Daniel Darling, *The Characters of Creation: The Men, Women, Creatures, and Serpent Present at the Beginning of the World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2022), 20.

⁴ Darling, *The Characters of Creation*, 21.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 15.

⁶ Though I have titled them differently, unless otherwise noted, the progression of thought and general content for these “old earth” theories is adopted and adapted from Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 173-175.

⁷ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 174.

⁸ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996, 1998), 109.

⁹ For some, the advantage to this view is it allows for a person to maintain that the “days” of Genesis 1 are twenty-four-hour periods of time, while still allowing for an old earth. The challenge with the traditional iteration of this view—which places a gap between each day—is that it’s difficult to imagine that the original readers would have come to that conclusion by merely hearing the text of Genesis 1. The progression from day to day doesn’t give the obvious impression of any gaps. So it’s possible, given the form of the text, but this is the hurdle for advocates to overcome.

¹⁰ See John C. Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

¹¹ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 174.

¹² See *Ibid.*, n. 48; C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1-11* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

¹³ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 174. He also quotes Collins, who says that “the sequence serves the literary presentation, which, being analogical, may or may not carry implications about what we might call the ‘referential sequence’” (Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 165).

¹⁴ Mark Ross, “The Framework Hypothesis: An Interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:3,” in *Did God Create in Six Days?* Ed. Joseph A. Pipa Jr. and David W. Hall (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999), 113.

¹⁵ One strength of this view, for example, is that it appreciates the literary structure that is so clearly embedded in the text. It also (along with the “analogical” view) avoids some of the challenges with reading the text in a strictly linear fashion—like the existence of morning and evening before the creation of the sun and moon on day four or some of the challenges introduced when we come to Genesis 2, like imagining Adam being created from the dust of the earth, having all the animals in existence paraded before him and names by him, getting knocked out and revived when the Divine Surgeon created Eve, composing poetry, and so on, all within a twenty-four-hour period. The weakness of this view, however, is that it undersells the sense of progression that seems apparent in Genesis 1 or assumes that structure of the text could not correspond to the unfolding of events in time and space. In other words, as Vern Poythress puts it, “The presence of literary features does not negate the presence of features involving the passing of time” (Vern Poythress, “Evangelical Interpretations of Genesis 1-2,” accessed online at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/evangelical-interpretations-genesis-1-2/>).

¹⁶ I’ve said nothing of the theory that Genesis 1 is crafted in language that would have been common in the context of a temple inauguration, or that the “days” could signify the days of Genesis 1 are merely six days of Moses’ life over which time Moses was shown various acts of creation, or the proposal that the most of the chapter is detailing God’s preparation of the “Land” (i.e., the Promised Land) for His people since the word for “earth” is the same word commonly used for that Land, etc.

¹⁷ Poythress, “Evangelical Interpretations of Genesis 1-2.”

¹⁸ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 176.

¹⁹ Generally, when that is the case, I don’t feel the need to go against the specific scientific evidence that I find compelling, assuming that these findings must be wrong. Therefore, at the present time, I lean more to certain understandings within the old earth camp (but young humanity), though I am sympathetic to all of the views I’ve mentioned. And I hold my opinions on such things loosely. When the Bible is clear and I can rule out other views, then I would be happy to rest in “mystery” and trust that the scientific evidence will be clarified in the future. But I’m not there at present.

²⁰ This portion of the interview can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/S26Dq3Uu6nM>.

²¹ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 176.

²² *Ibid.*, 177.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ This was drawn from a roundtable with Ligon Duncan, Russell Moore, and Timothy Keller. The clip can be found online at: <https://youtu.be/HfKBCXAOarY>.

²⁵ Carson, *The God Who Is There*, 20.