

Something from nothing in six days. Genesis 1:1-31, Psalm 100.

In the beginning when God created the heavens & the earth. Immediately He was faced a cease & desist order for not submitting an Environmental Impact Statement. But Officials eventually granted God a temporary permit for primary construction work, so He went on with the creation of the heavens.

And God said, "Let there be light!" But then officials demanded to know how that light would be made. Would there be strip mining? Thermal pollution? How did God plan to offset this light's carbon footprint? God explained, "light would come from a large ball of nuclear fire." So in spite of the NIMBY protestors surrounding His headquarters, officials granted God provisional permission to make light, assuming no smoke would come from the ball of fire.

And they also informed Him that before beginning on the Earth God would need to obtain a building permit. And, to conserve energy, He was to have the light out ½ the time. God agreed & said He'd call the light "Day" & the darkness "Night." They responded that the use of the words "darkness" and "night" might be heard as a form of micro-aggression by nocturnal creatures so He would have to use other terms. .

And when God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, & fruit trees bearing fruit," the EPA insisted the He prove He was only using seed native to its region. Then God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, & let birds fly above the earth," the Officials replied, for that "*You'll need coordinated approvals from the Department of Game, the Wildlife Federation, & the Audubon Society.*"

Still, everything at least seemed to be going forward until God mentioned He'd complete the project in 6 days. Officials countered that, "*It'll take at least 200 days to review your applications & EIS. After that, there'll be a public hearing. So it'll be at least 10-12 months before...*" That's when God created Hell...

The six days of creation was one of the first Bible stories you ever learned in Sunday School. But do you remember what it taught you about the nature God and humanity? Since we've all grown a bit older, why don't we review that story once again while also dealing with the adult controversies surrounding its telling, something you wouldn't have learned in Sunday School.

The story of God's creating our universe and world in six days is beautiful, it reads on the level of poetry with mornings following evenings and God's repeated pronouncements of everything as "good" and "very good." **But was this story as told by Moses to the people of Israel intended to be a factual record of how God did it? Or was there some other reason behind this telling of the six days of creation?**

While there are a large number of Christians who still insist that this first chapter of Genesis was meant to be a literal accounting of how God built our planet and who go to great lengths to reconcile or refute archeological discoveries that indicate otherwise, I have to say that they are mistaken in doing so; and by doing so they open the Bible up to unjust ridicule for attempting to make it say what it never meant to say.

Because the story of creation as recounted in Genesis, like Aesop's Fables, Pilgrim's Progress, or Plato's illustration of the cave dwellers, is an allegory, *a work in which the characters and events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper spiritual or moral meaning.*

It is self evident from both the creation story and other Biblical references that God accommodates the spiritual truths He wishes to communicate to humanity's current level of scientific or unscientific understandings of their world.

For instance when the Psalmist declared that he had hid God's word in his heart, it was because he actually believed that was where he kept his thoughts (Psalm 119:11). It wasn't until fairly modern times that the brain was finally recognized as the center of reasoning and memory. While around the 4th century BC Hippocrates was beginning to describe the brain as a thinking organ, his near contemporary Aristotle still thought of it only as a heat radiator. And in the embalming process while ancient Egyptian surgeons carefully removed and preserved the body's vital organs, they simply pulled the brain out through the nose cavity with a hooked stick.

It is because of such biblical writing that we still refer to the heart as the seat of our emotions and thought, even though we now know better; and this doesn't in any way diminish our understanding of what Jesus meant by describing evil as flowing out of the human heart (Matthew 15:18).

Neither did God bother to correct king David's perception that the Sun rose from its own bed chambers to circle the earth before returning home at night. Even though we now we know that it is the sun that remains motionless in relation to the planets while it is the earth that rotates in such a way as to make the sun appear to rise and set.

So just to list a few of the not so scientific declarations of Genesis 1, note that it is recorded that...

1. God created light on day one but didn't create sun, moon or stars until day four.
2. And while the Bible speaks of there being an "evening and a morning" marking the first and subsequent days, realize that evening and morning are a variable local phenomena only experienced by a person standing in one specific location on the revolving earth – again in relation to the apparent rising and setting of the sun in that location. For the entire earth and in space or from beyond space where we assume God was working, there is no such thing as evening or morning.

3. And how can there be liquid water and growing plants made on days two and three before there was a sun to thaw that water and nurture those plants.

Do such unscientific declarations make the invalidate the Genesis account? Only if you misunderstand the story's original intent and insist on harmonizing it with modern understandings of how God's creation actually works. But if you read the Genesis account as it was intended to be, an understandable explanation to both those ancient Hebrews and to us, as to the nature of God and what are the purposes and value of both the planet and humans he created to care for it, then you can learn a lot from the six days of creation.

Does this position on Genesis that I am taking make me less than a conservative, Biblical believing and honoring evangelical? No it does not. Instead, it places me alongside such Biblically honoring theologians as Origen, Augustine, John Wesley, and F.F. Bruce, and all the poets down through history who understood that sometimes an inspired story can convey more meaning than an actual recounting of historic events.

In fact here is the concluding advice offered by Augustine who before his death in 430a.d. had written no less than 4 different commentaries specifically on the Genesis creation accounts.

In matters that are so obscure and far beyond our vision, we find in Holy Scripture passages which can be interpreted in very different ways without prejudice to the faith we have received. In such cases, we should not rush in headlong and so firmly take our stand on one side that, if further progress in the search of truth justly undermines this position, we too fall with it. That would be to battle not for the teaching of Holy Scripture but for our own, wishing its teaching to conform to ours, whereas we ought to wish ours to conform to that of Sacred Scripture. (Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 41.).

So if you are willing to go forward with this understanding of Genesis chapter one as an allegory, where the thing described symbolically refers to something else, then there is a lot we can learn both about the nature of God and us humans as the Creation story was intended to teach.

So first note this,

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Hebrews 11:3

While both the Bible and modern scientific understanding actually agree that everything in our world was built up out of

matter/energy particles still too small to be observed by the human eye, note that in the Creation story we have God and the Spirit of God contemplating not nothingness but some already existent water-world version of the earth as a *formless void with darkness covering the face of the deep waters*. As I said last week, the reason God – in this story - didn't start with "nothing" was because of that concept being beyond comprehension by those ancient Hebrews. Rather He started with that which they thought was the reality of their ancient world: a purposeless, meaningless chaos; something to be feared as represented by the darkness of night and the vastness of the stormy seas.

Interestingly, that chaotic meaningless world which ancient people so feared is becoming the world that we in western civilization are once again learning to fear. **Because without God in our world, then life is and always will be chaotic and meaningless**; which perhaps is the main inspiration behind these mass random shootings that dominate the evening news. Because, if you truly believe that yours and other's lives have no direction, no meaning, no purpose, then why not choose your own time and means of departure by grabbing a gun for one last very real, very violent, play of your favorite game.

That is why, according to this story, into the chaos of ancient earth, the first thing God brought was Himself, filling our world with His spirit as symbolized by the "**light**" that He caused to shine on that very first day. Thus physical light – the absence of which is physical darkness – becomes a metaphor for the presence or absence of God's spirit. And God's presence completely filled that ancient world until humanity's act of disobedience once again allowed spiritual darkness to creep back in. This is why John's gospel describes God's solution for restoring the light to his lost creation as Jesus' entrance into our world; he being the life and light of all people; the light shining in darkness which the darkness can never overcome (John 1:4,5)

And while where God dwells it is always light so that evening and morning have little meaning to Him, by declaring His creative work as functioning within the period of an evening and a morning, realize that the second thing God created that first day was **TIME!** (1 Timothy 6:16, Revelation 21:23, 22:5). Scientists think of the entire universe as moving forward from one event to the next in a time bounded existence from the first day of the big bang until the day when it all collapses once again into a single cosmic egg. So everything in our world can only function at the level of **today**, a passage of time that most of us still measure from sunrise to sunset (or the Hebrews from sunset to sunrise) as it was begun that first day.

But know that just as God lives outside our world, he also lives outside of time. So in some humanly unexplainable way we understand God as being simultaneously present in our past, our current, and our not yet future life; **Tomorrow is that place where God already is**. Which is why in the book of Revelation, a glorified Jesus described himself as *the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the God who is, who was, and who is to come* (Revelation 1:8).

So let's move on to the second day, where in separating the waters to above and beneath the heavens realize that God created **weather**. And if weather is something also created by and under control of God, it can still be beneficial or destructive and it can be something about which we express our awe or concerns to God, but it is not a demi-god to be feared or placated by sacrifice.

On the third day with the creation of dry land and seed bearing plants realize that God also created **agriculture** as an honorable human endeavor. So with Adam's blessing and job description being to *work in and care for the garden*, the lowly farmer has been elevated to being a co-creator with God, their status and labor having as much godly value and purpose as the holiest of priests.

Day four next has God then arranging the lights in the sky within the firmament of heaven giving us markers by which to gauge the passing of time and remember our history. While our 12 month calendar is based on the annual Lunar cycle, ancient cultures had several different ways for dividing up the days of a year. Early Romans preferred 30 ten-day weeks with an added five day festival in the middle of winter. And while historians want to credit the Babylonians, around 500b.c., with the invention of the seven day week, that was about the time when they first came in close contact with their captured Hebrew population who had been counting a seven day week since the recording of such in the book of Genesis around 2000b.c. Thus you can say with great confidence that it was actually God who designated the seven day week – which adds even more weight to His command to always remember and honor the Sabbath.

Day five has God creating all the creatures of sea and air. And with his later giving to humans dominion over such, thus gives the same level of value and purpose to fishermen and fowlers as he had earlier given to farmers and will next give to shepherds. Of all the early trades only craftsmen and merchants cannot find an acknowledgement of their worth within the creation story.

Then on day six, beginning with livestock – thus honoring shepherds - God created all the animals of the land; declaring everything that He has made "GOOD."

But in the middle of this day, God then pauses to have a conversation with himself about how to make humans. Deciding that humans both male and female were to be created in His image, God did so, declaring that this particular part of His creation was VERY GOOD. And then God does something that He did not do with the rest of creation, **He not only blesses his human creation, telling them to multiply and thrive, but he also gifts them with responsibility for the care of all the rest of His creation;** God tells these humans to hold dominion – the authority to rule and control – over everything previously created. Thus humans become co-creators with God – just a little lower than the angels – with the permission, ability, and responsibility to wisely manage and benefit from all the rest of God's creation.

Interestingly these first humans and animals were originally strict vegetarians – something PETA would like you to consider. Whether or not they were already doing so beforehand, it wasn't until after the flood that Noah was officially allowed by God to add meat to his diet; but that is a story for another day.

So what does this Creation story tell you, as it told those early Hebrews, about the nature of God in Heaven and you own value and purpose here on the earth.

1. That the world and everything in it was not controlled by chaos, ready at any moment to dissolve into oblivion from the warring of a multitude of self-serving demi-gods. Instead that everything had been carefully created and is being lovingly cared for by a singular God according to an orderly plan.
2. And thus, having created it all - even us humans - God fully owns everything and can do with it and us as he wishes (an ultimate right that He has never given up)
3. But the personality of this singular God, as opposed to the mythological god's who they had been taught to fear, was that He was a loving, blessing, parentally minded God who, instead of taking from the humans, wants to give.
4. Thus God has acknowledged humanity's worth and the worth of their labors; and that He wants them to be happy, to thrive, multiply and share His rule over that which He has created.
5. So that from the lowliest farmer to the holiest of priests we can each and all of us live in a personal relationship with God, while doing godly purposeful work, confident of God's ever watchful care.
6. In other words contrary to what the world often shows today, God loves you and has always had a wonderful purpose for your life. And since God values you, you should similarly value yourself.

the german philosopher Immanuel Kant, used to take long walks on a summer evening, meditating and thinking. On one occasion he was seated in a park when a suspicious policeman noticed he had been there for several hours. The policeman came up to him and said, "What are you doing?" Kant replied, "I'm thinking" the policeman asked "who are you?" Kant replied, "that precisely the problem I've been thinking about. Who am I."

Perhaps Kant should have spent more time reading his Bible than trying to imagine a world with God. Because that is what the Genesis Creation Story was meant to communicate both to the those ancient Hebrews and us. That we have been created in God's image and blessed by Him to live in this world that everywhere reflects His creative purpose and gives our life meaning and value.

Of course the next stories of Genesis go on to relate how that perfect world got broken and how God's image in us got marred. So that while much in our world still contains within it a reflection of God's original creating purpose and still reflects God's image, God's light, there is now also that which is broken, not of God, where spiritual darkness

has been allowed to creep back in, which makes life difficult and causes us to yearn for an eventual return to the Garden that was.

That is where the rest of the Bible's stories take us, from the fall, to that first promise of eventual restoration given to Eve, to its final realization at the end of time when God once again replants the Garden and walks with us in the cool of the evening.

But how we get from this beginning to that end, and the price that must be paid both by God and us to get us there All those stories are yet to come.

For now it is enough for you to take home these thoughts from the creation story to guide and guard your days.

1. That our universe and our broken world still exists under the care and the permeating presence of God and we who know God can still live in God's light
2. That having been created in the image of God, and blessed, and given a task, we can be sure that ours – and everyone else's life – has purpose and value.
3. And that we humans have been given the specific god-like task of continuing the care and dominion over the planet, until such time as he takes this duty back to Himself. So we had better pay attention to what we are doing to the world around us, because as later Bible stories assure us, we will one day be asked to give an accounting of our stewardship.

Let's pray about this.