

The early chapters of Genesis are significant and foundational to the rest of the Bible. Yet their historicity is challenged by many. This message will focus on the question of interpretation. Two areas largely influence one's interpretation of this chapter: a person's perception of science and their apprehension of Scripture. The major theories of interpretation are introduced within the first five verses.

I. The Creation of the universe (Genesis 1:1)

There are many who reject creation entirely. Such a rejection is based upon a belief, a presupposition, that all the forces and laws operating in the universe are "natural" rather than supernatural. It is not a debate of science versus religion or faith versus facts. Science deals with observable, repeatable phenomena. Man can only conjecture about origins ... or accept God's revelation.

Genesis 1:1 summarizes God's work in bringing into existence all that exists outside himself. Man, whether he wants to or not, must reckon with this powerful Creator-God.

II. The conditions as Creation began (Genesis 1:2)

1. The "framework hypothesis" considers Genesis 1 to be a poetic expression of God's sovereignty in which the order and duration of creation are irrelevant. The structure is allegedly a "framework" to express God's majesty and sense of order. But the language of the text is prose, not poetry. Other texts treat the passage historically, e.g., Exodus 20:11 and Mark 10:6.
2. The "ruin-reconstruction" theory, or popularly the "gap" theory, suggests that Genesis 1:1 describes a very old, perfect, original creation, which then suffered a catastrophe (usually associated with the fall of Satan). Verses 3ff allegedly describe a reforming of the world. (The proposed length of the reforming varies.)
 - a. Support is allegedly from geology, from the implication of judgment in the descriptions "without form and void" and "darkness", from the distinction of the Hebrew words for "create" and "make", and from an alternate translation of 1:2, "and the earth became without form and void".
 - b. The alleged support is not without problems. Geological formations (such as the Grand Canyon) and even fossilization have been shown to be able to happen rapidly. The Genesis flood offers sufficient explanation. Darkness was part of God's good creation (cf Ps 104:19-24). "Without form and void" can mean not yet shaped or filled as God would eventually do. The distinction between "create" and "make" is not as sharp as argued. Verses 21 and 24 use "create" and "make" respectively. In the proposed alternate translation, the verb can be translated "become" but not in the syntax of Genesis 1 which requires it to be understood circumstantially, "now the earth was".

See below for additional reasons against this view. Genesis 1:2 appears to describe the conditions as God began the process of creating the earth. It was unformed and unfilled, light had not yet been created, and the Spirit of God was present, earth, participating in the creative process.

III. The first "day" of creation (Genesis 1:3-5)

1. "Progressive creation" or "threshold evolution" is more commonly called the "Day-Age Theory" because it suggests that "days" of Genesis 1 correspond to geological ages.
 - a. To my knowledge there are four primary reasons given: Geology and astronomy allegedly require a long time. The Hebrew word translated "day" can be used figuratively. The sixth day was too full for 24 hours. God rested on the 7th day and His rest continues.
 - b. There are objections to each of these arguments. (1) The Genesis flood can adequately account for geological formations. Apparent age is necessary in some areas like astronomy. (2) The Hebrew word for "day" might be used figuratively, but never as a plural for long periods of time nor with a numerical adjective. See also the use in 1:5 and 14-19, as well as Adam's existence from the sixth through the 7th day. (3) The "fullness" of the 6th day is questionable and in the context of the magnitude of the creation not significant. (4) God rested on the 7th day and according to Heb. 4:1-11 He is resting, but nothing claims that the 7th day of Genesis is continuing. Furthermore, the correspondence with ages just does not work either with evolutionary theory nor with the necessities of biological systems.

2. The final theory of interpretation understands Genesis 1 and 2 to report a recent creation, accepting the text as historical narrative, holding that everything was created in six literal (cf. Ex 20:11), interpreting Genesis 1:2 as the start of the creation process, and suggesting the world-wide flood (Genesis 6-9) as a sufficient explanation for the geological formations which we observe.
 - a. Opponents often portray this view as naive and unscientific. It is unscientific if by that is meant a belief in non-natural causes and forces. But it does accept and encourage the use of scientific methods to interpret data. But it is equally unscientific to assume uniform conditions throughout history or to accept only assumptions which support one's own view.
 - b. Christian opponents claim that a recent creation is not a necessary interpretation of Scripture. But previously mentioned reasons argue otherwise (Exodus 20:11; the consistent literal use of "days", and day with a numerical adjective; the language of prose rather than poetry). Furthermore, God describes His creation as good and very good (Gen 1:31). Decay and "frustration" (Romans 8:19-22) are not good but a result of sin after the creation. Finally, as part of that, sin and death entered through Adam (Rom 5:12). That death was spiritual and physical as seen in the curse upon man (Genesis 3:19), in the penalty of sin upon Christ (1 Peter 2:24; Romans 5:9), and in the promise of physical resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15).

I believe that a simple, face-value interpretation of Genesis 1 is the most Biblically consistent. What we believe about the first chapters of Genesis has far-reaching implications. To reject the accuracy and historicity of these chapters sets a precedent for our thinking about Scripture in general which can creep into other texts as well. Other doctrines may well be challenged other doctrines. Accepting any naturalistic explanation of the existence of our world is, for example, a denial of Romans 1:18-20 which claims that creation reveals God's existence, power and glory. Naturalistic explanations of creation excuse man for not seeing the existence of God and thereby undermines as well the entire gospel presentation of Romans.

Views which seek to incorporate naturalistic explanations seem to deprive God of the praise which is rightfully His. The world was created for Jesus Christ, not to bring praise or attention to time and chance. See Colossians 1:16; Psalm 148:1-5, 13; 33:6-9. In everything Christ should have the supremacy.