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### The Genesis Debate

The Genesis Debate is the debate on how God created the world; more specifically, it concerns how Genesis 1 is to be interpreted and how it is related to modern views of science. The author of Genesis 1 describes how all of creation was brought about by God in six days. The nature of these “days” is the center of this debate, and there are four main views that evangelicals debate on concerning this. These views are: the young earth view, the day-age view, the restoration view, and the literary framework view.

Despite the clear differences that set these four views apart, there are central dogmas that all evangelicals, and therefore believers of each of these views, agree on. First, it is important to note that all evangelicals hold Theism as their worldview. They “uphold the biblical claim that the Triune God alone is the sovereign Creator of all that is and that he is active in his creation” (p. 71). Therefore, evangelicals stand against the secular understanding of reality that denies that the universe was created by a personal creator. Such understandings of the universe include materialism and naturalism. Evangelicals also stand against alternative spiritual worldviews, such as pantheism, which believes that the world is God, panentheism, which believes that the world is in God, and polytheism, which believes that there are more than one gods. In other words, all evangelicals, and therefore the four main views surrounding this debate, are united in their belief that God alone created the world and that he is involved with his creation.

Now that the common ground that all four views share has been established, let us look at what sets them apart. The first view that will be observed is the young earth view. The young

earth view argues that the “days” in Genesis 1 “refer to literal successive twenty-four-hour periods” and that creation, therefore, is “no more than ten thousand years old” (p. 71). They believe that the notion that the earth is billions of years old contradicts the biblical understanding of creation, because the meaning of “day” is a twenty-four-hour period. There are five biblical arguments in defense of this. First, the Hebrew word *yom*, used in Genesis 1, meaning “day,” always refers to a twenty-four-hour period when used in its singular form. Second, whenever “day” or *yom* is used with a specific number before it, this also is referring to a twenty-four-hour day. Third, the author’s use of the words “morning” and “evening” for each “day” is additional evidence that the intention was for each “day” to be interpreted as normal days. Fourth, Genesis 1:14 says, “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years.’” Nobody questions that the “days” and “years” mentioned in this passage are literal, and so the natural conclusion is that the author of this chapter is using ordinary language throughout it. Fifth, in Exodus, God commands Israel to “imitate the pattern he set in Genesis 1 by working six days out of the week and resting on the seventh,” as he did on the seventh day after six days of creating (p. 74).

There are also a few other supporting arguments for the young earth view. The first argument is in relation to revelation and modern science. No matter what the prevailing opinions of scientists are, as Christians, we are “called to place God’s Word ... above the authority of science,” as God and his Word has ultimate authority (p. 74). Second, God’s supernatural work throughout Scripture is usually “sudden and instantaneous, not involving long drawn-out periods of time” (p. 75). For instance, this pattern is found throughout Jesus’ ministry, as he healed people suddenly, calmed the sea instantaneously, and rose people from the dead immediately.

Genesis 1 fits this pattern as well. The third argument concerns the fact that death came through Adam. This means that death was not originally intended for humans or animals when God created the universe. Young earth theorists argue, “How can one reconcile this teaching with the view, espoused by day-age theorists, that animals have been devouring other animals for millions of years?” (p. 75). “How can we accept that the present state of nature ... was the best the all-powerful Creator could come up with?” (p.75). “How could the all-good Creator, whom Scripture depicts as caring about the welfare of animals, pronounce” natural selection, the “bloody, pain-filled state of affairs [...] to be ‘good’?” (p. 75). Day-age theorists do not have good answers to these questions. Finally, there actually are a good number of scientists who believe that the old earth, evolutionary model that modern scientists work with is based on “weak evidence and supported by inconclusive arguments” (p. 76). For example, many geologists and paleontologists have rejected many of the dating techniques used today, as they have been shown to be unreliable. Therefore, for these reasons and the biblical evidence provided further above, the young earth view is able to hold that creation is no more than ten thousand years old and that creation happened in six literal twenty-four-hour days.

The second view, called the day-age view, holds that creation is as old as modern science says it is (9-15 billion years), and that the “days” in Genesis 1 refer to periods of time instead of literal twenty-four-hour days. There are four points the day-age view presents in defense of the fact that the universe is “a very old work of art”, and that this fact is consistent with Scripture and science (p. 78-79). First, the word “day” in Hebrew can be used as a reference to a twenty-four-hour period *as well as* a reference to an age, and day-age theorists push the age reference. Second, the interpretation of Genesis 1 as twenty-four-hour periods brings about difficulties with the Genesis account for two reasons. The sun does not appear until the fourth day in the creation

story, and at least two of the days speak of events that could not have happened over twenty-four-hours (the growth of vegetation and the naming of animals by Adam). Third, there are passages in Scripture that “teach that God’s ‘days’ are not measured like our ‘days’” (p. 80), which should lead us away from interpreting the word “day” in Genesis 1 in a literal way. Fourth, there are also passages in Scripture that teach that the earth is old. Habakkuk mentions “eternal mountains” and “everlasting hills,” Micah talks about the “enduring foundations” of the earth, and the author of Proverbs mentions that “Wisdom” was created “ages ago ... before the beginnings of the earth” (Hab. 3:6, Mic. 6:2, Prov. 8:22-23). These passages demonstrate that “there is nothing ‘ungodly’ or ‘secular’ about believing in a very old earth” (p. 81).

Furthermore, day-age theorists believe that their view expresses the truthfulness of God. Scripture teaches that God is completely truthful, and this is important to remember when considering the fact that the universe *appears* to be very old. Another supporting argument has to do with the credibility of the church. The church lost a lot of its credibility when “it locked horns with science in the sixteenth century” concerning the heliocentric view of the solar system (p. 81). It usually is not a good idea to interpret the Bible in ways that clearly conflict with science, “for creation too is ‘God’s Word’” (p. 81). Day-age theorists also argue that scientific evidence suggests the credibility of this view, and “while it is true that science should not determine our exegesis, it is also true that we should not ignore science in our exegesis” (p. 81). This statement is in line with the previous argument. It is a fact that the earth is billions of years old, as the majority of scientists from many different fields proclaim so. Topics explained by such scientists include the big bang theory held by contemporary astronomers, studies and evidence from contemporary geologists, the stratification of the earth’s layers, and evolution, both macro and micro. Because of these things and the biblical evidence provided, day-age theorists uphold their

view and interpretation of Genesis 1, and believe that they are holding true to God's word while doing so.

The third view, known as the restoration view, "claims that a large gap of time occurred between the first and second verses of Genesis 1" (p. 71), and therefore the debate between the young earth view and the day-age view is unnecessary. The original creation expressed in verse 1 was corrupted by demonic forces and was judged, becoming a "formless void" (Gen. 1:2). Then, "God restored the world and replenished it with beings who would love God and administrate his lordship over the earth" (p. 84). The first biblical argument in support of this view is that the description of the world as a "formless void" in which "darkness covered the face of the deep" is a description that expresses contempt (Gen. 1:2). When the words "formless" (*tohu*) and "void" (*bohu*) are used in Scripture, they are most likely referring to "something that has been corrupted, wasted, and/or judged" (p. 84). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the state described in Genesis 1:2 "refers to a state that was brought about by God's judgment" (p. 85). Second, many Old Testament scholars say that "the deep" has a negative connotation as well. Therefore, the harmful, evil nature of the deep suggests that the state described in Genesis 1:2 was not something God originally created. Third, there are other creation passages in the Bible apart from Genesis 1 and 2, and many of them "depict God doing battle with hostile forces in order to bring the world into being" (p. 85). The author of Genesis "began his narrative with the earth in its destroyed state," and "then emphasized the ease with which God re-created the world, thus expressing the victory and sovereignty of the Creator over all forces that oppose him" (p. 86). Fourth, Genesis 1 uses the word "make" (*asah*) instead of the word "create" (*bara*), with the exception of animals and humans. This means that "God fashions things out of preexisting material," and thus this observation fits with the view that "Genesis 1 and 2 are talking about the

restoration of the world, not its original creation from nothing” (p. 86). Fifth, there are confusing features of Genesis 1 that make sense in light of the restoration view. For example, when God commands mankind to “have dominion,” there is the suggestion that they will be met with resistance, as the Hebrew term for “dominion” in this case suggests “suppression, conquering, or enslaving hostile forces” (p. 86). God’s command to “keep” the garden also suggests “guarding” it from something in opposition. The confusing part is this: what were Adam and Eve guarding against if this was God’s original creation and all existed as God had intended it? Only through the restoration view do these commands make sense.

There are more supporting arguments for the restoration view as well. First, this view allows flexibility, and can bring together the young earth view and day-age view. Most restoration theorists say that the view of an old earth is applied to the first destroyed creation, and the literal twenty-four-hour days apply to the restoration of creation after its first destruction. Second, this view accounts for the “presence of animal suffering prior to the arrival of human beings” (p. 87). The restoration view affirms that animals have been carnivorous for millions of years because the demonic forces from God’s original creation corrupted them, and then God destroyed and restored the world to one in which animals were originally vegetarian. Therefore, due to the biblical evidence and these reasons, the restoration view holds that there is a time gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, and that the original creation was corrupted, destroyed, and then restored by God.

The final view, the literary framework view, suggests that none of the other three views “have seriously considered the most fundamental question concerning the kind of literature we are dealing with in Genesis 1” (p. 90). The literary framework view claims that the author is not trying to tell the age of the earth, but is instead expressing theological truth by proclaiming

monotheism. “He was interested in thematic rather than chronological organization” (p. 90), thus suggesting that considering the “days” in Genesis 1 as literal twenty-four-hour periods or not are beside the point. The biblical argument for this view is that first, Genesis 1:1 serves as an introductory statement, and second, Genesis 1:2 presents a problem that the rest of Genesis 1 will solve. The goal of the author is “to show how Yahweh solved each of these problems and thus succeeded in bringing order out of chaos” (p. 90). The creation week is separated into two groups of three days, “with the seventh day acting as a capstone” (p. 90), and the creative acts in the second group mirror the acts in the first group. The overall problem is that there was a formless void. The first set of three days addresses the problems of the darkness, the deep, and the formlessness of the earth, and that God solves these problems by creating spaces where things may exist. The second set of three days describes how God then solved the voidness problem by creating things to fill the spaces that were created in the first three days. Day 1 addresses the darkness problem: God created light and separated it from darkness. Then on Day 4 God created lights to fill the sky. Day 2 addresses the problem of the deep: God created the heavens, thus separating the waters above from the waters below. Then on Day 5 God created birds and fish to fill the water and air. Day 3 addresses the problem of the formlessness of earth: God created dry land and vegetation and separated earth from the waters below. Then on Day 6 God created animals and humans to fill the dry land. And, finally on Day 7, God celebrated the goodness of his creation by resting from his labor. In this way, “Genesis 1 is thematically and logically organized” and shows how God solved the problems he needed to solve “in order to bring creation out of chaos” (p. 91). Clearly there is neither suggestion nor need to suppose that the succession of days referred to a chronological succession.

It is also useful to consider the other supporting arguments for the literary framework view. First is that fact that “an examination of ancient Near Eastern creation literature seems to confirm this view” (p. 92). Many ancient Near Eastern texts that deal with creation use a “six plus one” structure to express the days of creation. Therefore, one can conclude that the author of Genesis was following a cultural pattern to tell God’s creation story. The second argument concerns the theology of Genesis 1, which “takes on a more profound significance when read against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern literature rather than against the backdrop of contemporary scientific concerns” (p. 92). Genesis 1 is a theological statement expressed in a similar way to the ancient Near Eastern way, and its purpose is to tell us who the Creator is, not how he created. Furthermore, when Genesis 1 is compared to ancient Near Eastern literature, it is clear that the author of Genesis is “engaging in a polemic against his pagan neighbors” (p. 92). He was battling false theology with true theology, and the meaning of “days” that the other views argue about are just part of a “literary structure that serves to support the theological claim that Yahweh-God alone is Creator-King” (p. 92). Third, the literary framework view avoids the weaknesses of the other views, such as their inability to explain how plant life could survive for a day or an entire age without a sun. This is because the order of the days does not reflect the chronology of creation for one that holds the literary framework view. Finally, the literary framework interpretation of the creation story “can easily be reconciled with any contemporary scientific theory of origin one chooses to embrace,” though that is not even necessary, as “Genesis 1 has no bearing on science,” for it is interested only in theology and not science (p. 93). Therefore, because of all these reasons and the biblical evidence, the literary framework view is able to hold that the other three views are missing the point, and that the creation story is just trying to express theological truth by explaining the story in a thematic manner.



Now that the four views surrounding the Genesis Debate have been thoroughly examined and explained, I would like to share which view I hold to. Until now, I have subconsciously been holding to the young earth view, just because it was the way I was brought up. I say subconsciously, because I have never explicitly talked or heard about the views surrounding this debate. Perhaps it would make more sense to say that it was a subconscious or implicit assumption, because what else would come first to a kid's mind when told that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh? Even as a teenager, a bit more mature, no other option really crossed my mind when I read or talked about Genesis 1. However, now that these other views have been presented before me, I have been able to sit myself down, really think, and decide for myself what it is that I believe in. And, the conclusion I have come to is this: I agree most with the literary framework view. Before I explain my reasons for coming to this conclusion, I must admit that the young earth view, the day-age view, and the restoration view all make very convincing points in their arguments. If I listened to one view in further detail for long enough, I feel like I would be persuaded towards that view. However, that is my problem with the other three views. I could never come to a conclusion because all are so convincing when the facts are laid out; as I read through each of them, each made sense while I was observing that particular view. After much thought, I realized the debate between these three views concerning the nature of "days" in Genesis 1 was pointless! What difference does it make whether God made creation in literal six twenty-four-hour periods or over the course of ages? Or that creation actually happened "twice" and we are living in the restored world? To me, it does not change the fact that God is the one true God who is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and everything else that he is. Furthermore, it does not change the fact that he created the universe, is involved with what he made, and that he created us in his image. I do not need to

know how long creation took or how old the earth is to know that he is sovereign, that he loves me, and that I want to have a relationship with him. That is why I hold to the literary framework view. I agree that the author of Genesis 1 was expressing theological truth in a thematic manner. Also, this thematic explanation of the days in which God solved the problem of voidness really made sense to me and resonated with my mind. I believe that God had a plan and was very careful in the way he created this world, and I see the thematic explanation as proof of his carefulness in design. The way he solved the voidness problem and the way the first set of three days mirrored the second set of three days shows God's precision and purpose in the way he created the world. Finally, from my observation, the literary framework view has fewer weaknesses, as it avoids scientific disputes entirely. In fact, the literary framework view allows one to hold any "contemporary scientific theory of origin," though that is not even necessary (p. 93). Therefore, in conclusion, it is for these reasons that I hold to the literary framework view, as I do not see the necessity or point in debating over what the other three views do. The literary framework interpretation in its entirety just makes the most sense to me and fits most with my beliefs.

Works Cited

Boyd, Gregory A., and Paul R. Eddy. *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009. Print.