PREACHING THE WORD

GENESIS

Beginning and Blessing

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A Word to Those Who Preach the Word

There are times when I am preaching that I have especially sensed the pleasure of God. I usually become aware of it through the unnatural silence. The ever-present coughing ceases, and the pews stop creaking, bringing an almost physical quiet to the sanctuary — through which my words sail like arrows. I experience a heightened eloquence, so that the cadence and volume of my voice intensify the truth I am preaching.

There is nothing quite like it — the Holy Spirit filling one’s sails, the sense of his pleasure, and the awareness that something is happening among one’s hearers. This experience is, of course, not unique, for thousands of preachers have similar experiences, even greater ones.

What has happened when this takes place? How do we account for this sense of his smile? The answer for me has come from the ancient rhetorical categories of logos, ethos, and pathos.

The first reason for his smile is the logos — in terms of preaching, God’s Word. This means that as we stand before God’s people to proclaim his Word, we have done our homework. We have exegeted the passage, mined the significance of its words in their context, and applied sound hermeneutical principles in interpreting the text so that we understand what its words meant to its hearers. And it means that we have labored long until we can express in a sentence what the theme of the text is — so that our outline springs from the text. Then our preparation will be such that as we preach, we will not be preaching our own thoughts about God’s Word, but God’s actual Word, his logos. This is fundamental to pleasing him in preaching.

The second element in knowing God’s smile in preaching is ethos — what you are as a person. There is a danger endemic to preaching, which is having your hands and heart cauterized by holy things. Phillips Brooks
illustrated it by the analogy of a train conductor who comes to believe that he has been to the places he announces because of his long and loud heralding of them. And that is why Brooks insisted that preaching must be “the bringing of truth through personality.” Though we can never perfectly embody the truth we preach, we must be subject to it, long for it, and make it as much a part of our ethos as possible. As the Puritan William Ames said, “Next to the Scriptures, nothing makes a sermon more to pierce, than when it comes out of the inward affection of the heart without any affectation.” When a preacher’s ethos backs up his logos, there will be the pleasure of God.

Last, there is pathos — personal passion and conviction. David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and skeptic, was once challenged as he was seen going to hear George Whitefield preach: “I thought you do not believe in the gospel.” Hume replied, “I don’t, but he does.” Just so! When a preacher believes what he preaches, there will be passion. And this belief and requisite passion will know the smile of God.

The pleasure of God is a matter of logos (the Word), ethos (what you are), and pathos (your passion). As you preach the Word may you experience his smile — the Holy Spirit in your sails!

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It was the custom in ancient times to name a book by its opening word, which is what the Hebrews did in titling this initial Bible book *Bereshith*, which means “in the beginning.” When the Old Testament was translated into Greek about 250 B.C. the Greek equivalent of the title was rendered Genesis, which both the Latin and English translations have adopted letter for letter. It is an exquisitely perfect title because this book gives us the genesis (the beginning) of the doctrine of God, which rose to tower high over the pagan notions of the day. It is the genesis of the doctrine of creation, which likewise rose far above the crude mythologies of the surrounding nations. Genesis gives us the doctrine of man, demonstrating that from the beginning we are both wonderful and awful. The doctrine of salvation too has its genesis in Eden and its grand development throughout the whole book.

Astounding! What we know about God, about creation, about ourselves, and about salvation begins in Genesis. It provides the theological pillars on which the rest of the Bible stands. Jesus, the Messiah, has his prophetic genesis in the opening chapters of Genesis (cf. 3:15). The importance of Genesis for the believing heart can hardly be overstated.

At the same time, as deep and weighty as the book of Genesis is, it is no dry textbook. Its narratives of the garden, the flood, and the tower of Babel have captivated hearts for over three millennia and have provided inspiration for the world’s greatest poetry. The earthy, epic lives of Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob and Esau, and Joseph in Egypt are so primary and universal and so skillfully told that they have never ceased to enthrall listeners. The last decade of the twentieth century and the opening years of the twenty-first century produced a renewed public interest in the narratives
of Genesis, and even a PBS special, and numbers of books on the shelves of popular bookstores. Genesis is in as literature. And what grand preaching material it is!

An overview of Genesis reveals neatly structured themes. It is widely accepted that chapters 1 — 11 cover primeval history (the early history of Planet Earth) and chapters 12 — 50 patriarchal history (the history of Israel’s founding fathers). The famous Hebrew term toledoth, literally translated “generations of,” occurs ten times in Genesis. Five refer to primeval history and five to patriarchal history.1 Closer examination reveals that five of them variously introduce narratives, and five introduce genealogies.2 Genesis is finely crafted.

Primeval history. The first eleven chapters, which give us the primeval history (universal history) of the world, do so by relating five stories that all have the same structure. The stories are of the fall, Cain, the sons of God marrying the daughters of man, the flood, and the tower of Babel. All five stories follow this fourfold pattern: a) Sin: the sin is described; b) Speech: there is a speech by God announcing the penalty; c) Grace: God brings grace to the situation to ease the misery due to sin; and d) Punishment: God punishes the sin. See an instructive chart on this in the footnotes.3 Here is amazing grace — amazing because though in all five stories there is an increasing avalanche of sin and resulting punishment that necessarily becomes increasingly severe, there is always more grace. Adam and Eve are punished, but God graciously withholds the death penalty. Cain is banished from his family, but God graces him with a mark of protection. The flood comes, but God graciously preserves the human race through Noah. Only in the case of Babel is the element of grace muted.4

Patriarchal history. But this lack serves to set up the continuation of grace during the following patriarchal section of Genesis 12 — 50. In this section Abraham receives the gracious promise that through him all the peoples of the world will be blessed (cf. 12:3). And then the patriarchal period unfolds the fulfilling of that gracious promise. Despite the patriarchs’ repeated sins, God’s promise stands. The salvation history of the patriarchal narratives functions as the gracious answer to mankind’s scattering at Babel.5

Genesis is about grace. The Apostle Paul’s aphorism, “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20) sums up this major theme of Genesis. Genesis, far from being a faded page fallen from antiquity, breathes the grace of God. What a time we’re going to have as our souls are worked over by the sin-speech-grace-punishment pattern of chapters 1 — 11, and by the overall “where sin increases, grace abounds” theme of the whole book. This is good soul medicine — strong meat. It was grace from the beginning — in both primeval and patriarchal history. It always will be grace.

Genesis also provides us with a grand revelation of God’s faithfulness as
it recounts God’s fidelity over and over again in the lives of the patriarchs. We see that God remains faithful even when the people to whom the promises are made become the greatest threat to the fulfillment of the promise. Such is God’s faithfulness that the sinful, disordered lives of the promise-bearers can’t abort the promises. This is the way God has always been. The New Testament puts it this way:

*If we are faithless, he remains faithful —
for he cannot deny himself.* (2 Timothy 2:13)

Faithfulness is a primary reality about God — the Genesis reality. It’s nothing new, but it is everything.

In regard to man, Genesis is eloquent: He is at the same time truly wonderful and truly awful. The bulk of Genesis affirms our terrible sinfulness. Even the best of the patriarchs are helpless, hopeless sinners. Not one ever comes to merit salvation. So we understand that from the first, salvation could come only through faith. Moses makes it clear that is how Abraham, the greatest of the patriarchs, was saved: “And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). Paul would allude to this multiple times in the New Testament, saying of Abraham in Romans, “The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe . . . so that righteousness would be counted to them as well” (4:11). There is only one way that fallen humanity can be saved — the Genesis way — by faith. There never has been another.

**Who wrote Genesis?** The Scriptures, both Old Testament and New Testament, affirm that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible (Genesis through Deuteronomy; cf. Exodus 17:14; Deuteronomy 31:24; Joshua 8:31; 2 Kings 14:6; Romans 10:5; and 2 Corinthians 3:15). Most significantly Jesus himself confirms Mosaic authorship (cf. John 5:45-47). Of course, Moses’ writing was somewhat revised and added to by others. Moses would have had a hard time writing Deuteronomy 34, the last chapter of the book, which describes his death.6

Internal biblical dating points to the late fifteenth century B.C. at the time of or following the exodus when Israel wandered in the wilderness.7 In the dynamic context of the wilderness journey, as God’s people dreamed of the promised land, they would naturally ask about Abraham and the patriarchs who had brought them down to Egypt. And beyond that they would ask about their ultimate origins. Thus God met Moses with his Word, giving him not only Genesis but what we call the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible.

As we now consider the opening lines of Genesis, we must carefully note that Israel had just escaped the oppressive polytheism of Egypt’s temples and pyramids with its solar and lunar gods. In Egypt, the pagan mytholo-
The Egyptians had opposed Israel’s monotheism. In opposition to a single creator, the Egyptians taught pantheism and shored up their beliefs with elaborate myths of love affairs and reproduction among the gods, of warfare marking out the heavens and the earth. Their priests annually mimed their myths, hoping that by reenacting them they would create life. And that was not without effect. Some of God’s people had succumbed to the lavish liturgies of the Nile.

So Moses took them on. These opening lines would forever establish a true understanding about God, the universe, and humanity. Moses began with a radical and sweeping affirmation of monotheism over polytheism. His style was one of calm, majestic, measured grandeur. Moses did not condescend to mention the pagan worldviews but answered them through deliberate, solemn utterances that dismissed the opposing cosmologies by silence and subtle allusion: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 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” (vv. 1, 2). The emphasis is threefold: first God, then the universe, and then the earth.

**GOD AND THE BEGINNING**

Derek Kidner, one-time warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge, has pointed out that it is no accident that God is the subject of the first sentence of the Bible because his name here, Elohim, dominates the whole chapter — occurring some thirty-five times in all, so that it catches the reader’s eye again and again. Kidner’s point is that this section and indeed the entire book of Genesis is about God from first to last — and to read it any other way is to misread it. We will keep this advice in the forefront, especially as Genesis begins to focus on God the Son as the beginning and end of history.

Remarkably, the mystery of the Holy Trinity is embedded in the first three Hebrew words of the text (Bereshith bara Elohim) because the name “God,” Elohim, is in the plural, and the verb “created” (bara) is in the singular, so that God (plural) created (singular). On the one hand the Bible teaches that God is a unity: “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4; cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6). On the other hand, it is equally as explicit that God is three persons (cf. Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14) — and that all three Persons were active in creation (God and the Spirit in Genesis 1:1, 2; God and the Son in John 1:1-3, 10; and the Son in Colossians 1:15-17 and Hebrews 1:1-3). So it is that we meet the awesome Triune God in the first three words of Biblical revelation!

God was there in the beginning. And here the context means “the beginning” of time itself, not sometime within eternity. Later Moses would give God’s presence at the beginning wonderful poetic expression when he sang,
Before the mountains were brought forth,  

or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  

from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:2)

Whichever way we look — to the vanishing points of the beginning or the end — God is there, having always been there.

And even more, God created everything out of nothing. “It is correct to say that the verb *bara*, 'create,' contains the idea both of complete effortlessness and *creatio ex nihilo*, since it is never connected with any statement of the material” (Von Rad). Believing God’s word, the writer of Hebrews gave it precise explanation, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (11:3; cf. Isaiah 40:26; Revelation 4:11).

Moses’ assertion that nothing existed before God spoke it into existence was an attack on the polytheism and pantheism from which his people had just escaped. Today it stands as the answer to philosophical materialism and naturalism, which hold that the only real things are material, physical things — or as the opening line of Carl Sagan’s best-seller *Cosmos* puts it: “The cosmos is all there is, or has been, or will be” — matter is God! As we all know, this worldview has dominated the sciences for the last one hundred years. And it is defended, by some, against all logic — for fear that a Divine Foot might get in the door. In particular, absolute devotion to materialism has been the creed of Darwinian evolution and its dubious and increasingly discredited doctrine of natural selection.

Significantly, the emergence of the Intelligent Design Movement and the appearance of books the caliber of Michael Behe’s *Darwin’s Black Box* have moved some old-line Darwinists to retreat. Intelligent Design asks questions that the Darwinists can only answer by faith in metaphysical materialism. Thus William Dembski writes in his introduction to *Mere Creation:*

Darwin gave us a creation story, one in which God was absent and undirected natural processes did all the work. That creation story has held sway for more than a hundred years. It is now on the way out. . . . In *The End of Christendom* Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, “I myself am convinced that the theory of evolution, especially to the extent to which it has been applied, will be one of the greatest jokes in the history books of the future. Posterity will marvel that so very flimsy and dubious an hypothesis could be accepted with the incredible credulity it has.”

Well, what do you know? The Bible was right. Creation could not happen without God!

In the beginning God existed in plural unity as the Holy Trinity. In the
beginning God was existing from eternity to eternity. In the beginning was God — before there was as much as a material atom of the cosmos.

**GOD AND THE UNIVERSE (v. 1)**

“In the beginning,” says Moses, “God created the heavens and the earth” (v. 1). Moses uses very specialized and honed vocabulary here. “Created” is only used of God in the Bible. Only God creates. And in Genesis 1 the verb “created” is reserved only for the most crucial items in God’s plan: the universe (1:1), animate life (1:21), and man (1:27). The combination of the words “heavens and earth” is also very specialized. It is a merism (a statement of two opposites to indicate a totality), so that the sense is, “In the beginning God created the cosmos.” God created everything there is in all creation.

Cambridge University physicist Stephen Hawking, who has been called “the most brilliant theoretical physicist since Einstein,” says in his best-selling *A Brief History of Time* that our galaxy is an average-sized spiral galaxy that looks to other galaxies like a swirl in a pastry roll and that it is over 100,000 light-years across — about six hundred trillion miles. He says, “We now know that our galaxy is only one of some hundred thousand million that can be seen using modern telescopes, each galaxy itself containing some hundred thousand million stars.” It is commonly held that the average distance between these hundred thousand million galaxies (each six hundred trillion miles across and containing one hundred thousand million stars) is three million light-years! On top of that, the work of Edwin Hubble, based on the Doppler effect, has shown that all red-spectrumed galaxies are moving away from us — and that nearly all are red. Thus, the universe is constantly expanding. Some estimates say that the most distant galaxy is eight billion light-years away — and racing away at two hundred million miles an hour. Finally, the fact of the expanding universe demands a beginning, though Hawking now doubts that a Big Bang was its beginning.

Not only that — God created every speck of dust in the hundred thousand million galaxies of the universe. He created every atom — the submicroscopic solar systems with their whimsically named quarks (from James Joyce’s *Three Quarks for Master Mark*) and leptons (the same Greek word used for the widow’s mite) and electrons and neutrinos (“little neutral ones”) — all of which have no measurable size.

The awesomeness of creation has been the subject of famous biblical poems like Job 38, Psalms 19, 33, 136, and Isaiah 45. Isaiah 40 references creation repeatedly, culminating in this expression:

*To whom then will you compare me,*  
*that I should be like him? says the Holy One.*  
*Lift up your eyes on high and see:*
who created these?
He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name,
by the greatness of his might,
and because he is strong in power
not one is missing. (vv. 25, 26)

The force of Moses’ words, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” was not lost on the children of the exodus. The night skies of Sinai, the diaphanous veil of the Milky Way, the paths of the comets, and the intermittent meteor showers sang to them of an omnipotent Creator who cared for his people. No wonder the poetry! How we need to rise above the congestion and smog of our existence and see our Creator, our cosmic caregiver.

GOD AND THE EARTH (v. 2)
The second half of Moses’ introduction brings us down to earth: “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” (v. 2). The perspective is geocentric — from earth level — and from that view earth is seen as uninhabitable. The Hebrew of “without form and void” is rhythmic (tohu wabohu) and served as a common expression for a place that is disordered and empty and therefore uninhabitable and uninhabited — the very opposite of what the earth would be after the six days of creation.

Spread over the uninhabitable earth was “darkness,” serving to emphasize the emptiness. Darkness is impenetrable to man but transparent to God (cf. Psalm 139:12). God was there. And under the darkness and covering the earth was “the deep,” the primeval ocean. The famed Genesis commentator Umberto Cassuto provides this picture:

Just as the potter, when he wishes to fashion a beautiful vessel, takes first of all a lump of clay, and places it upon his wheel in order to mould it according to his wish, so the Creator first prepared for Himself the raw material . . . with a view to giving it afterwards order and life. . . . It is this terrestrial state that is called tohu and bohu.

However, above the primeval chaos floated unutterable beauty — “and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” The verbal picture comes clear in the final Psalm of Moses where he uses the same word to describe “an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young” (Deuteronomy 32:11). We have seen it when a bird suspends itself station-
ary in the sky by fluttering its wings. The Spirit of God fluttered like a nurturing bird over the dark in preparation for day one.24

The beauty and spiritual symmetry of the Bible’s opening words become even clearer as we see that the word “Spirit” in Hebrew also means “breath.” God’s creative breath hovered over the water, and on day one his breath would come forth as speech — his word. Psalm 33:6 makes this connection:

*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,*
*and by the breath of his mouth all their host.*

The Spirit is to God’s word as breath is to speech.

On day one the miracle would begin with God speaking light into existence and that light shining in the darkness. None less than the Apostle Paul made the application of this truth to our dark hearts: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Just as the Spirit of God fluttered over the dark waters, so he does over the dark hearts of humanity, preparing them for the word of God that will make them into new creations in Christ.

God created the heavens and the earth, the universe! He can make you new as well.

In the beginning was God. In the end God will be.

Genesis is about God, the universe, and you.

Genesis is about grace.

May his grace abound to you and me as we study the book of beginnings.
Forming the Earth

Genesis 1:3-13

Through the centuries Christians who have held that the Scriptures are inerrant and wholly true have differed over the interpretation of the six days of creation. Bryan Chapell, president of Covenant Seminary, has noted that those who believe that the Bible teaches that creation took place in six twenty-four-hour solar days include such greats as John Calvin (though Warfield says he was open to other views), William Henry Thornwell, and Louis Berkhof. Others of equal stature have believed that the six days of Genesis did not limit God’s creating actions to the 144 hours of six days. These include the ancients Augustine and Aquinas, the Puritan William Ames, the great nineteenth-century defenders of orthodoxy Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and B. B. Warfield, and prominent twentieth-century defenders of the faith such as J. Gresham Machen, J. Oliver Buswell, Donald Grey Barnhouse, and Francis Schaeffer.¹

It is therefore an established fact that godly, Scripture-loving people who have given their lives to God’s Word have differed over the opening verses of the Bible. What they have not differed on is the utter truth of God’s Word and that the Genesis accounts are factual and historical. Neither have they differed over the historicity of Adam and Eve as special creations of God and the truth of the fall.

This ought to give pause to those who employ a particular view of creation as a litmus test for orthodoxy. Furthermore, the remarkable diversity of the major views of the six days ought to make us cautious and humble in our judgments.

There are at least six views of the six days, namely: 1) the twenty-four-hour solar day view (creation took place in 144 hours); 2) the punctuated activity view (the twenty-four-hour days of creation activity were
separated by indefinite periods); 3) the gap view (there is a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 2, wherein a primeval rebellion took place, and the creation week is a remaking of the earth after the rebellion); 4) the day-age view (which understands the days as corresponding to geological ages); 5) the framework view (the days are a literary structuring device to convey the truth of creation, and not consecutive days); and 6) the analogical day view (the days are God’s workdays). Certainly these six views cannot all be correct. In fact, only one can be right. And it is our duty to seek it. But in the seeking and finding and holding of our view we ought to employ goodwill and magnanimity.

A model for this is the way we hold our millennial views. Here Dr. Chapell offers some seasoned advice:

Some of us are pre-millennial, some are amillennial, some are post-millennial. There are serious questions among us about the timing of the events that will end the world. Still, we recognize that people can differ over the timing issues and still believe the Bible is entirely true, and we accept these differences without accusing one another of being unorthodox. The same ought to be possible in the discussions we are having over the timing of the days at the beginning of the world.²

Hopefully, this is the spirit in which this exposition of the days of creation will be conducted. The interpretive goal is to say no more and no less than what Scripture says. We must stay on the line of Scripture.

MOSES’ INTENT

Moses’ careful intent is evident in the majestic arrangement, symmetry, and subtle craft of his writing.

Arrangement. A quick read reveals that the six days of creation are perfectly divided, so that the first three days describe the forming of the earth and the last three its filling. The two sets of days are a direct echo and remedy to the opening statement that the earth was “without form and void.” The earth’s formlessness was remedied by its forming in days one to three, and its emptiness by its filling on days four to six. This is exactly what happened, and Moses was at pains to make sure his hearers did not miss it.

Correspondence. There is also a remarkable correspondence between the first three days and the last three. Day four corresponds to day one, day five to day two, and day six to day three.

It is all so beautiful! On day one the light was created. On the corresponding day four there came the sun and moon to rule the light. On day two God created the expanse that he called the sky, separating the waters above from the waters below. And on the parallel day five God filled the
sky and waters with fowl and fish. On day three God separated the water and dry land and created vegetation. On the matching day six God filled the land with animal life and created man to rule over it all.

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<tr>
<td><strong>DAY 1</strong> Light</td>
<td><strong>DAY 4</strong> Luminaries</td>
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<td><strong>DAY 2</strong> Sky (waters below)</td>
<td><strong>DAY 5</strong> Birds and fish</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DAY 3</strong> Land (plants)</td>
<td><strong>DAY 6</strong> Animals and man (plants for food)</td>
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On days three and six the correspondence is especially emphasized by the double repetitions of “God said” and of “it was good” — emphasizing a formal correspondence between the final days of forming and filling the earth. These correspondences reveal an astonishing record of the symmetries of creation.

**Perfection.** The late Hebrew University professor Umberto Cassuto points out that the structure of the days of creation is based on a system of numerical harmony, using the number seven. He wrote, “The work of the Creator, which is marked by absolute perfection and flawless systematic orderliness, is distributed over seven days: Six days of labour and a seventh day set aside for the enjoyment of the completed task.”

And then he made these observations: The words “God” (Elohim), “heavens” (samayim), and “earth” (eretz), which are the three nouns of the opening verse, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” are repeated in this creation account in multiples of seven. “God” occurs thirty-five times (5 x 7), “heavens” twenty-one times (3 x 7), and “earth” twenty-one times. In addition to this, in the Hebrew original the first verse has seven words, and the second fourteen words. The seventh paragraph (the seventh day) has three sentences, each of which has seven words, and contains in the middle the phrase, “the seventh day.” Cassuto concludes: “This numerical symmetry is as it were, the golden thread that binds together all the parts of the section and serves as a convincing proof of its unity.” So Genesis 1 is remarkable literature as to its arrangement, its correspondences and symmetries, and its literary-numerical perfection.

**History.** However, this said, it is not poetry but narrative prose. The whole account is written in the normal Hebrew narrative tense. There is no question that the Genesis account is written as history. “Moses presents the creation story as what actually happened in the time space world we experience.” And that is the way that every Biblical author who looks back to it treats it (cf. Exodus 20:11; Isaiah 40:26; Jonah 1:9; Hebrews 11:3; Revelation 4:11). Thus Francis Schaeffer writes:

The mentality of the whole Scripture . . . is that creation is as historically real as the history of the Jews and our present moment of time. Both the Old
and the New Testaments deliberately root themselves back into the early chapters of Genesis, insisting that they are a record of historical events.\(^7\)

Genesis 1 is therefore exalted, carefully structured and worded narrative prose — history. Certainly it is not meant to be an exhaustive account of creation. It is only one page long! It must not be treated as a photograph of creation but rather as a broad-stroked painting of what happened when God created the heavens and the earth.

The narrative tense presents a sequence in those six days that demands chronological reality.\(^8\) Day two followed day one, etc. Derek Kidner writes: “The march of the days is too majestic a progress to carry no implication of ordered sequence; it also seems over-subtle to adopt a view of the passage which discounts one of the primary impressions it makes on the ordinary, reader.”\(^9\)

So then, how did Moses’ hearers understand the days of creation as he read them the account? Certainly they did not understand it as myth! It was a polemic against the pagan mythologies of the surrounding nations. Each day of creation attacks one of the gods in the pagan pantheons of the day and declares that they are not gods at all. On day one the gods of light and darkness are dismissed. On day two, the gods of sky and sea. On day three, the earth gods and gods of vegetation. On day four, the sun, moon, and star gods. Days five and six dispense with the ideas of divinity within the animal kingdom. Finally, it is made clear that humans and humanity are not divine, while also teaching that all, from the greatest to the least, are made in the image of God.\(^10\) Thus Biblical reality replaced myth.

Neither did Moses’ hearers regard the days as metaphorical or literary. The Hebrew tense used here is the \textit{wayyiqtol}, that of narrative history. Elevated, sonorous, primeval history is what they heard in the six days of creation.

Could the Israelites have understood the days as geological ages? Impossible. What ignorant arrogance people bring to the text when they imagine that God directly referenced the shifting scientific paradigms of the last hundred years.

Possibly the Israelites understood Moses as describing creation in six twenty-four-hour days. Genesis can reasonably be interpreted as reading this way.\(^11\) But I do not think that is how the Israelites heard it.

Most probably the six days of creation are God’s workdays, which are not identical to ours but are analogous to ours. We understand something about God’s days from our experience of living in earth days. The six days are not solar days but God’s days because: 1) the first three days couldn’t have been solar because God made the sun and moon on the fourth day, and 2) the seventh day has no end. The phrase “and there was evening and there was morning” does not appear with day seven (see 2:2, 3).
Those who hold that the word “day” here must be a twenty-four-hour
day do so by arguing that every place in Scripture that the word “day” (yom)
is used with a designating number, it is a solar day. But they ignore a card-
nal rule of biblical interpretation — namely, when a word like yom appears
in a text (a word that has a wide range of meanings), the context must deter-
mine the word’s meaning. Here, in the immediate context, the seventh day
is not a twenty-four-hour day. Thus it indicates that the preceding six days
must be similarly understood.12

As a matter of fact God still is in the seventh day, the day of rest. He
has been so since the creation of the world. Significantly, the writer of
Hebrews bases his whole argument regarding God’s people entering the
rest by faith upon the fact that God is still resting, though also at work
(Hebrews 4:3-11; cf. Psalm 95:11).

Therefore, Genesis 1 is history, the literal history of what God did when
he created the heavens and the earth. He did it in six days, his days. He did
it in the order described. The Genesis account is a majestic, finely-wrought
telling of what God did in time and space. It is our history.

FORMING THE WORLD

Day one. As mentioned, the first three days remedy the fact that “the earth
was without form.” The formless world, covered with primeval sea, was
floating in space, like an unformed lump of clay on the potter’s wheel. The
Spirit of God fluttered over the dark waters in anticipation.

His word. His only tool was his word, the revelation of his will — “And
God said” — his speech. That is all. In creating everything through his
word, God’s thought shaped itself exactly to the least cell and atom. The
vast universe was shaped by his thought and will, as was each of the tril-
lions of cells in our body, each cell’s nucleus containing a coded database
larger in information content than all thirty volumes of the Encyclopedia
Britannica.13 There is such intimacy and immediacy in his knowledge in
the willing of creation that we might say he knows each aspect of creation
by experience. But, as Kidner says, “experience is too weak a word.”14 This
is not pantheism. This is taking creation seriously!

And God does it all with such ease. A “mere” utterance. C. S. Lewis
attempted to capture God’s ease and joy in creation by his word in his Narnia
Chronicles where he has Aslan creating the universe. Aslan’s mouth is wide-
open in song, and as he sings, the color green begins to form around his
feet and spreads out in a pool. Then flowers and heather appear on the hill-
side and move out before him. As the tempo of the music picks up, showers
of birds fly out of a tree, and butterflies begin to flit about. Then comes
great celebration as the song breaks into even wilder song.15
The fanciful figure fits. In Genesis, God is like the soloist — “Let there be light,” and the narrator is like the accompanist — “and there was light.”

*Light.* The first day reads, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day” (vv. 3-5). For the first three days light shone from a source other than the sun. Thus we observe that the Bible begins with light but no sun and ends the same way — “And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5). Calvin said of this, “Therefore the Lord, by the very order of creation, bears witness that he holds in his hands the light, which he is able to impart to us without the sun and moon.” The rhythm of evening beginning the day, in Jewish reckoning, begins here because the darkness over the face of the earth was followed by the first light for the first day.

The pronouncement “good” is the first of seven such benedictions. The great artist admires his handiwork. It is good and perfect and will accomplish what he desires. As for the pagan cosmologies? The gods of light and darkness are dismissed without mention.

This is the beginning of the motif of darkness and light in Scripture, in which darkness and light are mutually exclusive realms. Ultimately Christ will bring eternal light to his people and to all creation. The end will be an explosion of light.

*Day two.* Light shone on the glistening deep of the unworked, unordered earth. Then God spoke again: “And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ 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. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day” (vv. 6-8).

The expanse (*raqia*) signifies a kind of horizontal area, extending through the very heart of the mass of water and dividing it into two layers, one above the other, creating upper and lower layers of water (Cassuto). It was the visible expanse of sky with the waters of the sea below and the clouds holding water above. It is the blue we see. God called it “Sky” (alternate translation of the word “Heaven” in verse 8). This is a phenomenological description of the earth’s atmosphere as viewed from earth.

The naming that took place of the “Day” and the “Night” on the first day and the “Sky” on day two was understood in biblical culture to be an act of sovereign dominion. Later God would entrust his dominion over the earth to Adam by letting him name all living creatures. Here the naming dismisses the pagan gods of sky and sea without a word.

*Day three.* During the first two days of creation God had brought
increasing form and order to creation. The earth, warmed by light, was now robed in blue and dappled with clouds floating over a sparkling sea. The picture is increasingly inviting. Now, on day three God spoke twice more. His first speech completed the forming of earth — “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. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good” (vv. 9, 10). There was no new creation here, but a final ordering. The world as we know it had been given shape. The chaos had disappeared.

Then, with his second word on the third day, the emphasis began to switch toward the theme of fullness as he spoke plant life into existence: 

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. 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. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. (vv. 11-13)

Here the gods of earth and vegetation, the gods of fertility, are powerfully dismissed. There is no sea god, only the seas that God controls, as he likewise controls the earth and its harvest.

The earth is now ready for animate, mobile life. The fixed forms are in place. God has sublimely ordered the chaos by his word. This is the history of the world’s first three days.

**CHRIST AND CREATION**

*Christ is the light.* Because the Bible begins and ends by describing an untainted world that is filled with light but no sun and shows God as the source of light, it was fitting that Jesus called himself the light, saying “I am the light of the world.” And he would continue by saying, “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). It was an audacious claim because as Jesus spoke these words he was standing in the temple treasury by the massive extinguished torches that had burned that very night in the ceremony of the Illumination of the Temple, which celebrated the Shekinah glory that led Israel for forty years in the wilderness. It was a solemn declaration of his divinity as “the light of the world.” This divine-light declaration ultimately identified him with the giver of light in Genesis 1. Indeed Revelation says of Jesus, “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (21:23). It was also an unfailing promise because Jesus needs merely to speak, and men and women receive his light.
Christ the Creator. Jesus the light was present when creation was spoken into existence. The Scriptures are explicit. John’s Gospel begins, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (1:1-4). Nothing was made without Christ! Paul likewise affirms, “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Corinthians 8:6, italics added). All things came, at once, from God the Father and God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And again Paul says of Jesus, “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:16). And then hear the twenty-four elders as they cast their crowns before him: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

Christ brings order. The grand point is that it is Christ the light, Christ the Creator, who brings order out of the dark chaos of our lives — who brings form to the chaos of our lives. If your life is dark and desolate, if your life is out of control, if there is no light in your life, but only darkness, and there seems to be no hope — there is!

The very same power that flung the stars out into the unfathomable, expanding universe while orchestrating life in the irreducible complexity of the cells of your body will act on your behalf if you come to him. He will turn your night into day with a word. He will reorder your broken life with a word. He will bring form out of chaos with a word. It is his specialty.

He is not only the light, the Creator, and the Son of God — he is the Savior of the World. This very one who created the fleeing constellations, who orders the cell, who sustains every atom, came and died on the cross for your sins. This one will save you. He can bring a genesis to your life. That is what he came to do!

If you have never understood this before, realize that there is hope for you. There is creation power that can re-create your life. There is eternal life that will turn the midnight of your life into dawn and daylight and life and spring.

This is our God. He gives form. He reorders life. He will do it for you.
CHAPTER ONE: BEGINNING

3. See D. J. A. Clines, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, No. 38 (1976), pp. 487, 488. Clines explains that Gerhard Von Rad initially observed a pattern of *sin, mitigation, and punishment*. Then Claus Westermann discerned another element, that of *divine speech*. Though he did not include it in the pattern, Clines does. Thus the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.</th>
<th>II.</th>
<th>III.</th>
<th>IV.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sin</td>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Cain</td>
<td>4:8</td>
<td>4:10-12</td>
<td>4:15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Only chapter 34 is demonstrably post-Mosaic, since it contains a short account of Moses’ decease. But this does not endanger in the slightest the Mosaic authenticity of the other thirty-three chapters, for the closing chapter furnishes only that type of obituary which is often appended to the final work of great men of letters. An author’s final work is often published posthumously (provided he has been writing up to the time of his death). Since Joshua is recorded to have been a faithful and zealous custodian of the Torah, Moses’ literary achievement, it is quite unthinkable that he would have published it without appending such a notice of the decease of his great predecessor.


... archaeological evidence (primarily from Ebla in northern Syria) has tended to push back the dating of the patriarchal period. These factors in particular have strengthened the position of those who hold to the 1445 date—a date that, in any case, fits better with a literal understanding of the internal biblical chronology than the 1290 date does. According to 1 Kings 6:1, Solomon began to build the temple in the fourth year of his reign over Israel, which was “the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt.” The fourth year of Solomon’s reign was about 966 B.C., and 480 years before that would give us a date of 1445 for the exodus.

Israel’s wanderings in the Sinai desert, under the leadership of Moses, would then have taken place during the forty years immediately following 1445 B.C. It would therefore seem safe to assume that Moses—a man suitably qualified for
the task in terms of possessing the necessary education, motivation, energy, and time — wrote the Pentateuch, including the book of Genesis, late in the fifteenth century before Christ.


   "beginning" is an abstract noun etymologically related to הָנֵֽךְ "head," and הָנֵֽכָה "first." In temporal phrases it is most often used relatively, i.e., it specifies the beginning of a particular period, e.g., "From the beginning of the year" (Deut 11:12) or "At the beginning of the reign of" (Jer. 26:1). More rarely, as here, it is used absolutely, with the period of time left unspecified; only the context shows precisely when it is meant, e.g., Isa 46:10. "Declaring the end from the beginning from ancient times (הָנֵֽכָה) things not yet done" (cf. Prov. 8:22). The contexts here and in Gen 1 suggest הָנֵֽכָה refers to the beginning of time itself, not to a particular period within eternity (cf. Isa 40:21; 41:4; H. P. Müller, _THWAT_ 2:711-12).
19. _Ibid._
21. _Ibid._, 50:

   The final result was a joint paper by Penrose and myself in 1970, which at last proved that there must have been a big bang singularity provided only that general relativity is correct and the universe contains as much matter as we observe. There was a lot of opposition to our work, partly from the Russians because of their Marxist belief in scientific determinism, and partly from people who felt that the whole idea of singularities was repugnant and spoiled the beauty of Einstein’s theory. However, one cannot really argue with a mathematical theorem. So in the end our work became generally accepted and nowadays nearly everyone assumes that the universe started with a big bang singularity. It is perhaps ironic that, having changed my mind, I am now trying to convince other physicists that there was in fact no singularity at the beginning of the universe — as we shall see later, it can disappear once quantum effects are taken into account.
24. _Ibid._, p. 25 writes:

   “... to fly to and fro, flutter,” the sense in which it is used in Deut. xxxii 11: Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that FLUTTERS over its young. Likewise in the Ugaritic writings, the meaning of the stem rhp is “to flutter”... the young eaglets, which are not yet capable of fending for themselves, are unable by their own efforts to subsist and grow strong and become fully-grown eagles, and only the care of their
NOTES

parents, who hover over them, enables them to survive and develop, so, too, in the
case of the earth, which was still an unformed, lifeless mass, the paternal care of
the Divine Spirit, which hovered over it.

CHAPTER TWO: FORMING THE EARTH

1. Bryan Chapell, Covenant Theological Seminary '98-'99 President’s Goals and Report
prepared for December 5, 1997 Executive Committee Meeting with revisions from the
2. Ibid., p. 3.
p. 12.
4. Ibid., p. 15.
5. Joseph Pipa, Jr. and David Hall, eds., Did God Create in Six Days?, chapter 6, C. John
Collins, “Reading Genesis 1:1 — 2:3 as an Act of Communication: Discourse Analysis
and Literal Interpretation” (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press/Oak Ridge, TN:
Covenant Foundation, 1999), pp. 131, 132.
6. Ibid., p. 139.
7. Francis Schaeffer, Genesis in Time and Space (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press,
8. Pipa, Jr. and Hall, eds., Did God Create in Six Days?, p. 141, where Collins explains:
That is to say, whatever length those six days are, and whatever the degree of
overlap and topical arrangement, still they are “broadly sequential,” and extend over
some span of elapsed time. The sequentiality comes from the combined effect of the
use of the wayyiqtol tense for the main narrative events, and from the march of the
numbered days.
9. Derek Kidner, Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary (Downers Grove, IL:
11. Douglas F. Kelly, Creation and Change (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus
Some have maintained that the days of Genesis 1 must be “literal” days, because
whenever the Hebrew word yom “day” has a number in the rest of the Old
Testament, it is a “literal” day. The statistic cited may in fact be accurate, but sta-
tistics alone are not enough to establish an inductive argument (which is what this
argument is). We would need, not just a statistic, but an explanation of why the sta-
tistic demonstrates a principle. For a lexical argument such as this one, this expla-
nation would be in terms of the combinational rules of the Hebrew word yom
“day” and the kinds of words with which it is being combined. For this argument
to be good, then, we must propose a combinational rule for the Hebrew word yom
when it is modified by a number. We would then have to show that the rule applies
in every case; and to do that we would have to show that it was the rule, and not
the context of the other usages, which secured the interpretation of yom. To do so we
would have to compare like with like, i.e. we would need a context comparable to
that of Genesis 1 where the proposed rule over rode any contextual factors which
pointed away from a strictly “literal” understanding of yom (unfortunately I do not
know of such a context in the Hebrew Bible).
13. Phillip E. Johnson, Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law, and
Culture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 51, quoting Richard Dawkins,


**CHAPTER THREE: FILLING THE EARTH**

1. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), pp. 21, 22 notes the “well-organized concentric structure” with this chart:
   
   A to divide the day from the night (14a)
   B for signs, for fixed times, for days and years (14b)
   C to give light on the earth (15)
   D to rule the day (16a)    D’ to rule the night (16b)    two lights
   C’ to give light on the earth (17)
   B’ to rule the day and the night (18a)
   A’ to divide the light from the darkness (18b)


   What is it, then, that this desire and this inability proclaim to us, but that there was once in man a true happiness of which there now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present? But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself. He only is our true good, and since we have forsaken Him, it is a strange thing that there is nothing in nature which has not been serviceable in taking His place; the stars, the heavens, earth, the elements, plants, cabbages, leeks, animals, insects, calves, serpents, fever, pestilence, war, famine, vices, adultery, incest. And since man has lost the true good, everything can appear equally good to him, even his own destruction, though so opposed to God, to reason, and to the whole course of nature.

**CHAPTER FOUR: GOD RESTS**