

Genesis: More Resources

Any of the topics below provide information that will help you with your individual or small group study of Genesis”

Why is the Beginning of the Earth so Important to the Study of God?

Science has concluded – beyond any doubt – that the universe had a beginning at a specific point in time. This is a fairly recent determination for the scientific community in particular, and to the rest of the world in general. The idea that the universe had a specific beginning has never been widely accepted, except by those who believe in the Bible. Philosophers and scientists alike have resisted this notion because of the huge implications that follow from it.

Here is how Charles Colson describes those implications:

If the universe had a beginning, then something external to the universe must have caused it to come into existence – something, or Someone, transcendent to the natural world. As a result, the idea of creation is no longer merely a matter of religious faith; it is a conclusion based on the most straightforward reading of the scientific evidence.

Colson has explained precisely why people who don't believe in God are so resistant to the evidence that the universe has a beginning. It is easier to avoid the existence of God if the universe was always present (the “steady state” theory) and there was no Being that created it. But if you conclude that the universe had a point of beginning, then you have to concede that something or Someone got it started.

Does this put the importance of “the Beginning” into perspective? What you believe about the beginning of the world takes you directly to issue of God. And once you get to the God question, then you have to deal with Jesus Christ who claimed to be the Son of God.

What Does the Bible Know About Science?

Scientists, philosophers and theologians are pretty much agreed about this: It is the function of science to determine the facts of the universe; it is the function of religion to determine the meaning of the universe. If that is the case, then are we making a mistake by relying on the Bible for scientific information (such as the origin of the universe)?

It must be remembered that the Bible is not a science textbook. It won't tell you how to clone a sheep, but it will tell you the loving characteristics of a shepherd. Some people are critical of the Bible because it omits scientific facts, like the existence of the dinosaurs. Well, it was never intended to be zoologically exhaustive. (The Bible doesn't make mention of those little wiener dogs, but nobody seems to be complaining about that.)

The Bible is a book about God. So it is intended to tell us more about the Creator than the process of Creation. Nonetheless, God has used science and the Bible to tell us about Himself and the world.

God could have chosen any method He wanted to tell us about Himself and to prove His existence. Remember, He has those omniscient and omnipotent characteristics going for Him, so He could do whatever He wanted. But God wants us to decide about Him for ourselves without forcing Himself on us. That ruled out options like arranging the planets to spell out “It's Me – God!” or waking the human race from its sleep each morning with a booming Darth Vader-type voice saying, “It's 6:15 A.M. Now get out of bed and worship Me!” God is more subtle than that.

God chose two methods to reveal facts about Himself and His involvement in our world.

Method One: General Revelation. God uses the world (nature) to disclose facts about Himself.

Psalm 19:1 says: The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship.

Romans 1:20 says: From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God.

The disciplines of science can be used to make discoveries about the world (nature). These scientific findings can be interpreted to discover the truth about God.

Method Two: Special Revelation. God uses His Word (the Bible) to disclose facts about Himself. Theology systematizes our study of the Scriptures. The Bible can be interpreted to discover the truth about God.

What if the answers given by these two methods contradict each other? If God gives us both His Word and science, is it possible for them to be in conflict? In cases of contradictory conclusions, which one should be believed and which one should be discredited?

There are good questions, but they assume that God can contradict Himself with inconsistencies between scientific fact and biblical revelation. But this cannot happen. One of the other personality traits of God is truth.

1 Samuel 15:29 says: And he who is the Glory of Israel will not lie, nor will he change his mind. Hebrews 6:18 says: So God has given us both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie.

God speaks about things the way they really are. Whether He is talking about Himself or His creation, He speaks the truth. He cannot do otherwise.

While there can be no real contradictions between God's Word and science, we readily admit that there can be apparent discrepancies when science seems to say one thing and the Bible appears to say the opposite. How should that situation be handled?

Here are two guidelines you can use for handling what appear to be contradictions between science and the Bible:

1. Remember that the Bible is not a science textbook. It was written for the primary purpose of revealing God's plan to establish a relationship with humanity. So it is more focused on who God is and who we are from a relational point of view. (That's why the Bible often uses metaphors of a father or a shepherd to explain how God cares for us.) While the Bible contains some scientific information, it wasn't intended to explain all scientific intricacies and mathematical formulas. Scientists are intrigued by many matters that the Bible simply doesn't talk about (such as cavemen and male pattern baldness). The fact that the Bible is silent about these matters doesn't mean that it is wrong or misinformed or untrustworthy. It just means that God didn't feel compelled to talk about them.

2. Remember that both methods by which God reveals Himself (the Bible and science) involve interpretation. An apparent conflict might be due to an incorrect interpretation of facts or Scripture. The discrepancy may be cleared up in the future (such as the erroneous scientific view that the world was flat).

Age of the Earth: Which view is the oldest?

The "old earth" view sees the age of the earth in the billions of years (with humans showing up only about 20-25,000 years ago). The "young earth" view considers the earth to be about 15-25,000 years old (with humans showing up six days after the start of it all).

You may be wondering which view of Creation has been around the longest. According to both Dr. Hugh Ross and Fred Hereen, the early church fathers believed the Creation days were not necessarily "solar days." In the second century A.D., Clement of Alexandria taught that the Genesis creation days were not literal 24-hour days. He believed that the order of the Creation days was more important than the time frame. In the fourth century, Augustine believed that the "evenings and mornings" of Genesis were figurative, not literal.

The six days of Genesis 1 and 2 were not considered literal until the 17th century, when John Lightfoot of Cambridge and James Ussher of Ireland competed to come up with an exact date for the beginning of Creation.

Basing their calculations on the genealogies of the King James Version of the Bible (published in 1611), Lightfoot and Ussher counted the generations backwards from Jesus to Adam. Ussher arrived at October 4, 4004 B.C. as the date of Creation, which Lightfoot later corrected to October 18, 4004. One of the problems with the work of these two men was in the genealogies themselves. Bible scholars have demonstrated that the Bible doesn't include every generation in the genealogies, which means that basing dates on the number of generations in the Bible isn't a reliable method.

God and the Theory of Relativity

We won't even try to begin to explain Einstein's theory of relativity, which revolutionized science in the twentieth century, but we will make this observation based on one thing we know about it. One of the things Einstein discovered is that the speed of light is constant, and that the speed is 186,000 miles per second. He theorized that time slows down relative to speed, and when speed equals the speed of light, time ceases altogether.

If time stands still at the speed of light, then try to ponder this: How fast is God? Pretty fast. More than pretty fast. God is infinitely fast. At least as fast as light and probably faster. (Isn't it interesting how many times the Bible refers to God and Jesus in terms of light?)

This means that for God, time stands still. Not only are a thousand years like a few hours (Psalm 90:4), but an infinite number of years are like a few hours.

Perhaps the best way to understand this is to see that God dwells outside the dimension of time. He created time for our benefit, not His. God exists in the eternal present. When Moses asked God to describe Himself, here is what God said: "I AM THE ONE WHO ALWAYS IS" (Exodus 3:14).

When Jesus told the people that he had seen Abraham, even though Abraham had been dead for thousands of years, Jesus explained: "I existed before Abraham was even born!" (John 8:58). On the surface, that statement doesn't make much sense. But when you realize that Jesus is God, and that God is eternally present, it makes complete sense. It also helps us understand God's infinite nature when it comes to time.