

Genesis 1 & 2: How do they fit together?

BY LEWIS JONES

The opening chapters of Genesis remain a stumbling block to belief for many western people in our scientific age. Why? Is it because science has actually disproven certain key stories in the Bible?

No. It is because science has become the only way of knowing anything in our western world. That is called Scientism: *the belief that science is the highest and only truly reliable form of knowledge*. You may not articulate your thoughts that way, but when it comes down to choosing between eye witness testimony and the man in the lab coat, the lab coat always wins.

This is relevant to any investigation of Genesis because it will colour what you think Genesis is, how it functions in the Bible, what sort of literature it is, etc. With our Science-is-King glasses on, our interpretive decisions tend to be driven by what we think

science says about the passage. If we think scientific findings contradict the text, we either decide the text is figurative and avoid the science altogether or we decide the science is wrong and set out to show how science has misinterpreted its own evidence.

I want to try another approach, which is to ignore, as much as possible, external influences and let the Bible do the work of interpreting the Bible. What does the rest of the Bible say about the opening of Genesis? How is the opening of Genesis connected to the rest of the Bible? At the end of this, we won't have made lots of decisions about how science relates to the Bible, but we ought to have a greater confidence in the things the Bible thinks are important about its opening chapters. We can't give a full blown set of implications in this article, so we're just looking some preliminary results. Perhaps the editors will allow me to outline some implications next time around.

My aim for this article is to understand the relationship between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. In order to do that, we'll have to also spend time examining the nature of each of those passages individually.

What is the relationship between Genesis 1 and 2? Two common understandings are, one, that they show first the transcendent God over all of creation, then the immanent God involved in his creation, and, two, that Genesis 1 is the first seven days of the history of the universe and Genesis 2 is simply the continuation of that story, granted with a bit of overlap. Those two ideas are not mutually exclusive, but represent different emphases, the first more focused on what is revealed about God, the second more focused on the details of the historical narrative. In practice, the two approaches are often at odds with each other because the first generally understands the two chapters to be two distinct accounts of creation, and, therefore, historically discontinuous, while the second is premised on historical continuity.

Before we go any further, we need to clarify some terms. From here on, I'll use the term 'creation week' to refer to the section Genesis 1:1-2:3. That is the seven days of creation. Most often, when people refer to "Genesis

1", they mean creation week, all seven days. Let's stick with creation week from here out. Also, from now on, when I say 'Genesis 2', I will mean the section beginning at Genesis 2:4. Hopefully, that will help the discussion.

Genesis 2 is not historically continuous with the creation week.

Employing our principle of letting the Bible interpret itself, there are two textual reasons that push us away from the idea of historical continuity.

First, the seventh day has no end. The other six days of creation week end with a regular formula, e.g. "And there was evening, and there was morning--the third day." It closes out the day, describes the full extent of it, in preparation for moving on to the next day. The seventh day does not have that formula or anything else that would indicate day eight is just around the corner. God is at rest. The steady, methodical progression through the first six days is over. The movement ceases because there is no where else to go. God is finished. Creation has arrived where God wants it.

Day seven smacks more of eternity than the seventh 24-hour day in the history of the universe. In the progression of creation week, day seven shows creation at its goal and

God satisfied. Day seven finishes the story, so that there is no room for day eight in Genesis 2.

The second textual reason that pushes us away from historical continuity is that, at the point of the creation of humanity, certain plants had not been formed (2:5). On top of that, there is a connection made between the 'springing up' of those plants and the existence of a man to work the ground. That is, the arrival of certain plants on the earth was dependent on the arrival of humanity, which is not the picture from creation week of the finished work of creation. There is also some ambiguity as to whether Genesis 2 pictures the animals being formed after humans.

Fundamentally, of course, Genesis 2 picks up the story from within creation week, not at the end of it, so there can't truly be continuity. One could

ask, if Genesis 2 picks up from day six of creation week, where in the story flowing from Genesis 2 do we see day seven arrive?

Day seven and the differing details of creation week and Genesis 2 are good reasons to leave aside historical continuity as the best understanding of the relationship between the two passages.

Creation week and Genesis 2 are not two accounts of creation from different perspectives.

While the idea of two creation accounts from differing perspectives seems more plausible than the historical understanding, again, there are two reasons from within the text that discourage us from adopting that as the relationship between the passages. The first reason is the same as the second reason above. The differing details in the accounts



present us with a challenge. If the two passages are two accounts of creation, then how do we account for the differences? If we see the same scene from differing perspectives, we can imagine that we would be presented with a different set of details, in a similar way, perhaps, to the gospel accounts of Jesus' life. What we don't expect, however, is for the details to contradict each other, which seems to be the situation with plants coming after humans in Genesis 2.

The second reason is that there is no obvious end point for the creation account in Genesis 2. Does it end at the end of Chapter 2? Why? Chapter 3? Why? Chapter 4, 5, 11? Why? The difficulty is that Genesis 2 seems to be the beginning of a story that continues naturally into Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 and so on. What is it we will decide to call the creation account and why? If one bit is the creation account, then what do we call the rest of the story and why?

Genesis 2 is the beginning of a story that ends at Revelation 22.

The second reason above may sound, at first, like a relatively weak point, but I want to suggest that the rest of the Bible looks to Genesis 2 as the beginning of the story of the Bible that doesn't end until Revelation 22. That is, the events of Genesis 2 live in

continuity with everything that comes after it, Abraham, Israel, Jesus, the new creation. There are four main points to make here. The first is just by way of reminder. Day seven of creation week creates an uncrossable barrier between creation week and Genesis 2, in regards to the continuity of the story, such that we should likely see Genesis 2:4 as the beginning of something.

Second, skipping to the end of the story in Revelation 21-22, we find the images of the new creation to be drawn from Genesis 2 rather than creation week. Without too much reflection, we might point to the presences of rivers (cf. Gen 2:10-14 and Rev 22:1-2), the abundance of precious metals and stones (cf. Gen 2:11-12 and Rev 21:15-21), and the tree of life (cf. Gen 2:9 and Rev 22:2). Also, there will be nothing accursed in the new creation, perhaps a reminder that the serpent was present in the garden. The end then looks back to the beginning, but the beginning starts at Genesis 2:4.

Third, the genealogies are not conscious of any breaks as they carry the story through Genesis 5, are prominent through Genesis 11 and continue to crop up even into Exodus. They unashamedly start with Adam and Eve. Chronicles recounts the

genealogies from Adam up through the exile. In Luke, the genealogy of Jesus starts with Adam. My point here is not historical, that the genealogies mean that Adam must have been a real person, although I think that we lose a lot theologically, if we say he wasn't. My point here is literary, about the narrative. The history of creation that is told and retold, by way of genealogies, throughout the Scriptures, consistently starts with Adam in Genesis 2. The story starts in the garden, not before.

The final point is about a form of words we find in Genesis 2:4, "This is the account of". That phrase is scattered throughout the book of Genesis and introduces the story of a particular family (cf. Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). For example, Genesis 11:10 says, "This is the account of Shem" and goes on to detail Shem's descendants down the Terah, at which point, we get, "This is the account of Terah". My point is that this form of words introduces the family story of the person mentioned. Their life might already have been described, but it tells us the story of the family after them.

It's interesting then to look back at Genesis 2:4, "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created." This is telling us that

what follows is the family history of the heavens and the earth, God's creation. That is, the story of creation starts here.

There is one other use of this form of words in the Bible, Matthew 1:1, "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham." While it sounds a bit different in this English translation, the underlying Greek word is the same word used to translate the Hebrew word from Genesis 2:4. The opening of Matthew's gospel is meant to show us that Jesus is the end of history, the fulfilment of God's big story for Israel and the entire world. What Matthew wants us to see by using that quite particular form of words is that the great story that is coming to its culmination in Jesus began with that same form of words in Genesis 2:4.

Genesis 2:4 is the beginning of God's big story that ends in the consummation of the new creation in Revelation 22.

Genesis 1 is an overture to the whole Bible.

Andrew Lloyd-Weber is certainly one of the great composers of our time, with many Broadway and West End credits to his name. *Jesus Christ Superstar* is one of his smash hits. That musical, as do many, begins with an overture, a piece of music that

captures up the big picture of the musical as a whole. It meanders through the many themes and melodies that will be played out in full as the musical unfolds, and gives a sense of the different emotions we'll encounter as we watch and listen. It gets us in the mindset of the world of the musical.

Genesis 1 is an overture to the Bible. In that sense, I want to suggest that Genesis 1 is not an account of creation in any historical sense, but rather an account of God's relationship to his creation. Genesis 1 tells us what we need to know, in order to understand, and properly relate to, what follows in God's story. I've already suggested that because of the endless day seven, it is difficult to maintain the idea that Genesis 1, or creation week, is the first seven days of history.

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We might also consider the question of the context for the writing of Genesis 1. We know that Moses wrote books. He, at least, wrote down the legal code. The rest of the Scriptures, and certainly Jewish

tradition, believe that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, sometimes called the Pentateuch or the Torah or the Law. When did he write all this down? The only real choice would seem to be sometime during the wanderings in the desert, and, most likely as he sat in the plains of Moab awaiting the signal to send Israel into the promised land. For example, the book of Deuteronomy is a series of speeches delivered to Israel as they waited in the plains of Moab, and the book itself describes him writing down at least some of what he had said.

What's the point? The book of Deuteronomy describes the woes of Israel in their wanderings and how they had failed God, and the primary failure of Israel was in committing idolatry. Over and over again, Moses takes Israel to task for different ways they committed idolatry and details to them the lengths to which they will need to go in the promised land to avoid falling into it again. He reminds them that at Mount Sinai, they saw no form of God, but only heard him speak, so that they are supposed to listen to God and be ruled by his word, rather than making up our own worship of images that misrepresent a living, active, speaking God.

What is Genesis 1? It is the antidote to idolatry! A God who speaks, ruling creation through the power of his word, including humanity who are given their task to perform. This is what Israel needs to understand about the world, about themselves, and about the God they serve as they enter the promised land where there are many different cultures with lots of different gods, who will try to entice them away from the one true God who loves them and has saved them. Genesis 1 is a tract against idolatry, expounding for us the worldview that will make sense of what follows in the rest of the Scriptures.

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Creation week is also full of themes, like the overture to a musical, that will be developed and fulfilled as the story unfolds. The themes of work and God's rest, the proper rule of humanity over God's creation, the word as creative, the image of God, a special place for the third day. These are all themes we find popping up in creation week. Space won't allow us to explore them all in depth, so let's

look briefly at the rule of humanity over creation.

In Genesis 1:26-29, God creates humanity in His image and gives them a command. They are to rule over what God has made. This is the primary, overarching purpose of humanity. The first distinct command given to God's special image in the world. In Psalm 8, David reflects on Genesis 1 and the astounding reality of the relationship that God has entered into with humanity. He says,

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.

David recognises that this is the task for which humanity was created.

The problem is that we fail. The writer of Hebrews makes this point explicitly when he quotes Psalm 8, and then goes on to say in 2:8-9:

At present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now

crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

That is, we don't see humanity ruling God's creation the way God intended. We've failed. However, we see that Jesus has succeeded. Contained in Genesis 1 is the picture of the true human, Jesus, crowned with glory and honour, ruling God's creation as humanity was meant to do. More than that, we also see how that was going to be accomplished, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The path to being crowned was via the cross. Philippians 2 gives us the same logic. Jesus comes to earth from heaven, humbles himself to die on a cross, and is therefore exalted by God to the highest place. The picture of humanity in Genesis 1 is a theme that we see fulfilled definitively in the Lord Jesus.

So, then, what is the relationship between Genesis 1 and 2? Genesis 1, or creation week, is the overture to God's big story, setting the stage, outlining the parameters, for the more personal, detailed history of God's relationship with his people, which starts in Genesis 2:4 and finishes in Revelation 22. For me, this idea raises more questions than it answers, but, God, and editors, willing, there's always next time! ☺



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More information out soon!