

The Doctrine of Creation

(Adopted by the General Presbytery in session August 9-11, 2010)

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).¹ The Bible begins with creation, declares at the outset that God is Creator, and reiterates this understanding of origins from Genesis to Revelation.

The Bible makes no claim to be a scientific textbook, nor should it be understood as such. However, the Bible declares itself to be trustworthy in whatever it teaches to be true, whether relating to matters of faith, history, or the created order. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). We affirm with Jesus the authority, certainty, and finality of God’s eternal Word (Matthew 5:18; John 10:35).

The Bible Reveals God as the Creator

Scripture focuses our attention not so much on the act of creation as on the Creator. From Genesis 1:1 to 2:3, God’s presence and activity are primary. We read that “God created,” “God said,” “God saw,” God “separated,” “God called [named],” “God made,” “God set [placed],” “God blessed,” and God “rested.”

The creation accounts show God to be intelligent, loving, and personal. In contrast to pantheism, He is distinct from His creation (Psalm 90:2). In contrast to deism, He continues to be personally active in His handiwork; He upholds, sustains, and preserves it (Nehemiah 9:6).

The relational nature of the Creator is seen in His expectations of His human creatures. We are to worship and serve Him as the Creator (Isaiah 40:26,28,31). We are warned not to strive against our Maker (Isaiah 45:9). We are to commit the keeping of our souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19). We also recognize that our help comes from the One who made the heavens and the earth (Psalms 121:2; 124:8; 146:5,6), and there is nothing too hard for Him (Jeremiah 32:17).

The Bible also emphasizes that God is the Creator of all things, a vitally important truth repeated often in both Testaments (Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 146:6; Acts 14:17; Revelation 4:11; 10:6).

In contrast to ancient paganism and modern materialism, the Bible teaches a definitive beginning of the universe and everything in it. Early pagan thinking tended to be dualistic, teaching that the universe in some form existed eternally alongside the gods. In pagan mythologies, the gods are seen as having created certain things but always from preexisting materials. However, the very declaration that God is the Creator of all things sets Him apart from idols (Psalm 96:5).

¹ All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version (NIV).

Materialists teach that matter and its laws are eternal and are the sum total of all existence, thus ruling out the idea of God altogether. But the Bible declares that God existed before all things and is the Creator of all things (Psalm 90:2). Moreover, He also brought the universe into existence out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), that is, without preexisting materials (Romans 4:17; Hebrews 11:3).

The Bible also teaches that creation was a cooperative work of the Trinity. In addition to naming God as Creator, the Old Testament shows that the Spirit of God was active as well (Genesis 1:2). The New Testament further reveals that Jesus, who is the one Mediator between God and humankind (1 Timothy 2:5) in our redemption, was also the Mediator in Creation. Christ, called “the firstborn” because He has first place, the place of the heir (Colossians 1:15), was the active Agent in creation. “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). The Greek word translated “through” (*dia*) is a word of secondary agency, used, for example, where God spoke through the prophets. So God created by or through Jesus. Jesus is the living Word through whom God spoke the worlds into existence. He is the One who made humankind from the dust of the earth. He is before all things and is the Creator of the invisible spirit world as well (Colossians 1:16).

The Biblical Account of Creation Reveals Order, Progress, and Climax

Order, progress and climax are part of the biblical account of creation. Order is seen in the careful structuring of the various stages of creative activity in a six-day format, evening to morning. Progress can be seen in the increase of personal attention God gave to His creative work. Of the vegetation we read that God said, “ ‘Let the land produce vegetation . . .’ And it was so” (Genesis 1:11,12). Of the animals we read that God said, “ ‘Let the land produce living creatures . . .’ And it was so” (vv. 24,25). But of the human race God said, “ ‘Let us make man . . .’ So God created man . . . male and female he created them” (vv. 26, 27). The human race is thus a special and distinctive creation.

All this evidence of order, progress, and climax shows careful, intelligent planning. That God planned the creation rules out the idea that any part of creation came into being by mere chance. God exercised His wisdom and control at all times (Psalms 136:5; 148:5; Isaiah 45:12; 48:12,13) and brought the entire created order to a complete and well-designed end (Genesis 1:31).

Only God Can Create

It is also evident that no part of God’s creation, whether angel or human is creative in the sense God is. The Hebrew word for create (*bara*’) always has God as the subject of the verb. This word is used for God’s work of creation and is also used to indicate that God will do something unusual and unprecedented. For example, it is used when God said to Israel at Sinai: “I will do wonders never before done [*bara*’, “created”] in any nation in all the world” (Exodus 34:10).

The significance of the Hebrew verb *bara*’ is also illustrated when God spoke through Isaiah to his stubborn people, “ ‘From now on I will tell you of new things . . . They are created [*bara*’] now, and not long ago” (Isaiah 48:6,7). As in the first chapter of Genesis,

the word *bara'*, “to create,” is used only of completely new and unprecedented acts of God; that is, of the creation of the heavens and the earth in the beginning, of the creation of the first animal life in the sea (1:21), and of man and woman in God’s own image (1:27). At other times the word “made” (*asah*) is used. The word “create” (*bara'*) thus emphasizes that God alone is the Creator, and His acts of creation are unique and unprecedented.

God’s Creation Is Purposive

God had a stated purpose in creation. He created “for his own ends” (Proverbs 16:4) and for His glory (Isaiah 43:7). He “formed [the earth] to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18). All creation is thus an expression of His will and His power.

The creation story depicts human beings as the zenith of God’s creative activity. Their unique nature and role are portrayed in two separate and complementary accounts (Genesis 1 and 2). God lavished particular attention on both the man and the woman. It was only humans of whom God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule . . . over all the earth.” (1:26). Thereupon, God gave them a mandate to be benevolent and nurturing caretakers of the created order (Genesis 1:26, 28; Psalm 8:5–8).

Being made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26,27), human beings are free, rational, capable of self-appreciation and self-expression, capable of moral and spiritual understanding, and created for fellowship with God. That the first human pair, made in His image, would fall and lead the race into sin (3:1ff.) was hardly a surprise for the Creator, who purposed to create them anyway. The image of God divinely stamped on the race would be marred by sin. But Jesus Christ (Romans 5:15) was destined to redeem fallen humankind and include those who believe in Him in the final reconciliation of the universe (Romans 8:21; 1 Corinthians 15:20–28; Colossians 1:19).

The Reality of Creation

Genesis 1–3 accurately communicates God’s creation of the heavens and the earth. Using language that appears to employ both prose and poetry and that contains both literal and symbolic elements, the story is a simple yet beautiful and compelling narrative intended to speak to all humankind. The complexity of creation is such that humans will never fully comprehend it. But the message that God alone is Creator plainly has been communicated to all who, through the ages, hear and read the Genesis account.

Our understanding of God as Creator is rooted in a divine revelation of real events that occurred in time and space. Moreover, our understanding of God as Redeemer is rooted in the revelation of God’s dealings with Israel in history and in the historical events of the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. Likewise, the New Testament treats the first Adam as a historical person (Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Timothy 2:13,14).

Some have contended that the first two chapters of Genesis are poetical and are to be taken as parables. But a comparison of poetical references to creation (Deuteronomy 32 and 33; Job 38:4–11; Psalms 90; 104:5–9) shows that the Genesis account is in prose form, though it may contain some poetic language. Even so, however, poetry in the Bible

often describes actual, historical events, so the use of poetry does not make this account fictional.

It is significant that although creation events are not stated in modern scientific terminology, divine accommodation to human limitations puts them in vivid and understandable language that provides a reliable record for all peoples in all times (Ephesians 1:18).

Theories of Creation

The advance of scientific research, particularly in the last few centuries, has raised many questions about the interpretation of the Genesis accounts of creation. In attempting to reconcile the Bible and the theories and conclusions of contemporary scientists, it should be remembered that the creation accounts do not give precise details as to how God went about His creative activity. Nor do these accounts provide us with complete chronologies that enable us to date with precision the time of the various stages of creation. Similarly, the findings of science are constantly expanding; the accepted theories of one generation are often revised in the next.

As a result, equally devout Christian believers have formed very different opinions about the age of the earth, the age of humankind, and the ways in which God went about the creative processes. Given the limited information available in Scripture, it does not seem wise to be overly dogmatic about any particular creation theory.

Whatever creation theory we individually may prefer, we must affirm that the entire creation has been brought into being by the design and activity of the Triune God. Moreover, we also affirm that the New Testament treats the creation and fall of Adam and Eve as historical events in which the Creator is especially involved. We urge all sincere and conscientious believers to adhere to what the Bible plainly teaches and to avoid divisiveness over debatable theories of creation.

Christians have historically believed that “all truth is God’s truth” and that God reveals himself both in Scripture and the created order. Therefore, when God’s Word and God’s Work are properly understood, there is no disunity. Paul seems to have expressed that truth when he wrote, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

In summary, we see that the Bible from beginning to end identifies God as the Creator. “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Hebrews 11:3). “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Psalm 33:9).