

# Understanding *Genesis*, Part One: The Creation Account

by  
John A. “Jack” Crabtree  
Version 1.0  
August 16, 2017

The opening creation account in *Genesis* (*Genesis* 1:1–2:4a) is arguably the most important passage in the Bible. Everything the Bible teaches must ultimately be understood in the light of how we understand the nature of God and his relationship to created reality; and no passage explicates the nature of God and his relationship to created reality more directly than *Genesis* 1:1–2:4a. Hence, it is here, in the initial creation account, that we are introduced to that philosophical concept that is of unsurpassed importance for understanding the worldview and teaching of the entire Bible. Everything we come to understand with regard to what the Bible teaches will derive from our understanding of this particular account in *Genesis*.

But this creation account is as controversial as it is important. It is very possible that no passage of the Bible has caused greater conflict than this one. Since the ascent of naturalism, materialism, and Darwinism in the nineteenth century, pitch battles have been fought in the legal, political, and academic spheres over the truth, value, meaning, and significance of *Genesis* 1:1–2:4a.

Precisely because it is so controversial, the creation account<sup>1</sup> has been greatly misunderstood and misappropriated. In the last century or so, it is seldom approached with the intent of understanding what it says on its own terms. Rather, it is approached to find support for one’s position on some specific controversial issue.

In this brief paper, I want to understand the creation account on its own terms. I hope to clarify what it does and does not entail and how it should and should not be read. This is not a commentary on *Genesis* 1. It is not my purpose to explain every element of the text. And, more importantly, it is not my purpose to give a thorough defense of my interpretation. My purpose in this paper is merely to explain—as clearly as I can—what I understand the author of this account intends to teach.

## The Purpose of the Account

The key to understanding the creation account (*Genesis* 1:1–2:4a) is to understand its author’s purpose. In brief, its purpose is to give expression to the view that *God is the transcendent author of literally all that is*. Or, to put it another way, it is to articulate the theological-philosophical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (the creation of all things from out of nothing).<sup>2</sup> The author does this by cataloguing all of the various things that God created out of blank, sterile

- 
1. Throughout the remainder of the paper, when I refer to “the creation account,” I will always have *Genesis* 1:1-2:4a in mind. Many Bible students refer to a first creation account (in *Genesis* 1) and a second creation account (in *Genesis* 2). I do not believe the account in *Genesis* 2:4b-4:26 is a creation account, nor does it include a creation account. The “title” given to *Genesis* 2:4b-4:26 by the author of *Genesis* is “The Book of the Generations of Mankind (*Adam*)” (*Genesis* 5:1a). The author does not consider it a creation account (an account of the beginnings of created reality). Rather, he considers it an account of the beginnings of humankind. For this reason, I will not refer to a first and second creation account in *Genesis*. Accordingly, when I refer to “the creation account” I will always, and only, have *Genesis* 1:1-2:4a in mind.
  2. From *Genesis* 2:3 we can see that the account has another, *secondary* purpose: to explain the meaning and significance of Israel’s Sabbath-observance. This is clearly a purpose that the author of the account had in mind when he structured and composed the account in the way that he did. It would be a mistake, though, to take it as the primary purpose of the account. Explaining and articulating the author’s understanding of who God is and

nothingness and by asserting that what he created he created by simply willing it into existence. So, this is the essential purpose of the creation account: to give expression to the view that *literally everything that is and everything that occurs comes about because the transcendent author of all of reality has willed it to be so.*

## The Origin of the Account

It will be helpful to understand how and from whence this account arises. One is tempted to view this account as a blow-by-blow description of the events that occurred in connection with the creation of the cosmos. It could not, of course, be an eyewitness account. (No one existed who could serve as an eyewitness.) Hence, it could only be a blow-by-blow description of what transpired at the very beginning of time if it were based on direct, supernatural revelation from God himself. Certainly that would be possible. But that, as a matter of fact, does not seem to be the sort of account that it is. It appears, rather, to be a creative composition devised to give expression of the doctrines of creation *ex nihilo* and the transcendent authorship of God. Its author seems to be a human being who, through inspiration, had come to understand the concepts of creation *ex nihilo* and transcendent authorship. This author does not purport to know the exact order of events that transpired at the beginning of reality. Rather, he simply intends to portray the extent of God’s authorship and the nature of God’s creative power—namely, that God’s authorship spans the domain of everything that is and his power to create consisted of his *willing* reality into existence. In other words, the creation account was composed to convey the fact that nothing exists in all of created reality that Yahweh did not *will* into existence.

Therefore, since the account does not describe “historical” events and the order in which they occurred, nothing in the account requires supernaturally revealed information. The entire account could quite readily be composed by any individual at any point in history who (i) understands that God is the transcendent author of all that is,<sup>3</sup> and (ii) has an ordinary, everyday knowledge of all that is included in the domain of nature.

On the assumption that one understands who God is and understands God’s relationship to the created order, an individual today could, with no further information, compose something very like this creation account. What kinds of things exist? Well, there is light, and there is darkness. There are the sun, moon, and stars. There are the skies, the seas, and dry land. There are birds, fish, sea creatures, domestic animals, and wild animals. There are all sorts of plants. And, finally, there are human beings. This is not a scientifically sophisticated catalogue of everything that exists. But it is a fairly comprehensive catalogue of everything that can be known from the standpoint of ordinary, everyday observation. Therefore, this catalogue of things is one possible way that one could depict the notion of everything that exists. If, using a little creativity, one produced a new creation account that simply described how this whole catalogue of things came into existence simply by God’s willing it into existence, then this new account would be functionally equivalent to the opening creation account in *Genesis* 1. And, apart from a divinely-

---

how he is related to the rest of reality is beyond question the *primary* purpose of this account.

3. This, of course, would undoubtedly have been known through some form of divine revelation. The view of God and reality described by this account would have been so revolutionary within the ancient cultures of that day that it is highly unlikely that it could have been attained through anything but divine revelation.

given understanding of who God is in relation to created reality, nothing in his account would have depended in any way on a supernatural infusion of knowledge or understanding.

It would appear that this is exactly how we must understand the origins of *Genesis* 1:1–2:4a. Some individual in the ancient world<sup>4</sup>—likely as a gift from God—attained the revolutionary insight that there is one and only one transcendent being whose will brings into existence literally everything that is. Then, armed with this insight, he devised a creative way to convey it through a creation account that he composed. He divided the domain of things that exist into six distinct sub-domains. He then portrayed each of those different sub-domains as being willed (“spoken”) into existence on one of six different days of the Hebrew work week. On the first day God spoke day and night into existence. On the second he spoke the skies into existence. On the third, he spoke the seas, the land, and the plants into existence. On the fourth, he spoke the sun, moon, and stars into existence. On the fifth, he spoke the fish, sea creatures, and birds into existence. And on the sixth and final day, he spoke into existence human beings and all the other living beings who dwell on the land. On the seventh day (the Sabbath) he stopped, for he was done.

Part of this author’s creative contribution was to map the sub-domains of God’s created reality onto the days of the Hebrew week. Why did he do that? Did he do that because that was exactly the sequence that God followed when he created all of reality? No, rather, it was because the Hebrew work week provided the author with a very convenient and, in a sense, very natural structure for portraying God’s “work” of bringing created reality into being.<sup>5</sup> In other words, we have six days of creation followed by one Sabbath day of rest, not because that is what actually transpired at the beginning of created reality, but because that is the structure within which the author of this account creatively chose to portray God’s “speaking” the world into existence.<sup>6</sup>

- 
4. We cannot know who this individual is, of course. But, as likely as not, Moses is the author of the creation account. There is no reason that the account needs to be older than Moses. Nothing is required to compose this account beyond an understanding that God is the sole transcendent author of all of reality (which, arguably, Moses was the first to understand) and an everyday understanding of the domain of created existence. The fact that the author uses the 7-day week with its Sabbath as the ordering principle for this account strongly suggests that, at the time this account is composed, Sabbath-observance is already understood, if not already practiced. When God issues his instruction to Israel on Mt. Sinai to observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, his instruction presupposes that Israel already has some familiarity with the creation account. Therefore, whenever it was composed, it would seem that its composition must predate the giving of the Law (see Exodus 20:8–11). And, in view of Exodus 16:22–30, it would appear that an understanding of Sabbath observance (and perhaps the practice of Sabbath observance) pre-dated the Exodus. Therefore, if Moses is its author, the creation account was composed during a period of time that begins sometime before the Exodus and extends until sometime before the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai.
  5. To describe what God created by describing what he produced during the days that he “worked” is a very natural choice for how to portray God’s creation of reality.
  6. If we understand the author to be describing creation as occurring on the particular days that he does because “that’s how God did it,” then we misunderstand the nature of the account. When we attempt to read it that way, we end up with a very unrealistic and implausible account. For example, night and day would exist before the sun, moon, and stars exist. This would be a highly unrealistic scenario. However, if the author never intended to describe what things were created in what order, then this problem disappears. To be fair to the author, therefore, it makes a great deal more sense to see him as *artificially* and *unrealistically* dividing existing things up among a six-day “work” week, and as doing so simply so that he can describe them as coming into existence

It is critical to understand why the author of the creation account would feel free to create such an artificial structure and arbitrary order. The basis for his creative freedom lies in this: his purpose is *not* to describe *what transpired* at the beginning; his purpose is merely to describe *how* things came to exist—namely, that they came into existence through the transcendent author merely willing them to be what he wanted them to be. God only needed to express his desire that created reality be such-and-so, and it *was* such-and-so. The author of the creation account had no further purpose beyond conveying the simple fact that the created order resulted from God’s transcendent will.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, *any* order or literary structure that would have allowed him to portray the vast domain of things that existed as products of God’s will would serve his purpose. The six days do not correspond to actual events. They are six “compartments” used by the author within which to place distinct segments of existing reality.

### What Is Not the Purpose of the Account

Before we examine more closely some of the details of the account, it will be useful to examine a few of the more important ways that the purpose of this account has been misunderstood.

We have already seen that it is not the account’s purpose to give a straightforward, blow-by-blow rendering of the order of events that transpired at the beginning of created reality. It would be a mistake, therefore, to believe that *Genesis* 1 teaches as “historical” fact the rather cartoonish series of events that one would have to envision if he takes the account to be a chronological, literal account of exactly what transpired and when. Instead, its purpose is to advance the philosophically revolutionary idea that God creates and controls all of created reality simply by willing reality into being. However, some readers, not finding this latter purpose to be sufficiently profound, seek to see something more, something different, and something deeper in the account. As a result, they attempt to read *Genesis* 1 as a description of something that is completely compatible with the scientifically-sophisticated truth about when and how<sup>8</sup> created

---

as a result of God’s “work.” (In no measure would this be a criticism of the author. He is fully within his rights to compose his account in whatever way he wants to.) With the notable exception of humankind (which comes into existence on the last day), we misunderstand what the author is doing and why he is doing it, if we attribute any significance to the particular day on which any given thing is said to be brought into being.

7. Except, as we shall see below, to explain the meaning and significance of the Sabbath day. But it was not his purpose to give a blow-by-blow description of the various events that occurred at the beginning of creation. Given that Sabbath observance appears to have preceded the creation account (otherwise, why would the author of the creation account have made the distinctively Jewish 7-day week and Sabbath-observance the literary framework for his account), one of two things is true: either, (1) the creation account was purposefully composed in such a way that the meaning and significance of Sabbath observance, as it was already understood and practiced, could be *explained and articulated in a new and fresh way*, or (2) the composition of the creation account was itself intended to make a contribution to the process whereby Sabbath observance was *invested with a new and different meaning* from what it had previously had. In the absence of any evidence that the Sabbath had formerly possessed a different meaning and significance, the former seems the more likely. Hence, a secondary purpose of the creation account was to employ this account of the creation of the heavens and the earth as a new and fresh approach to *reminding* his readers of the meaning and significance of Sabbath observance.
8. So, for example, some want to see modern “big-bang theory” in “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” But even if there is a parallel between the “big bang” and the description of day one, it is a coincidence. It is not part of the intended meaning of the creation account. It is an interpretive mistake, therefore, to see a

reality came into existence.<sup>9</sup> As we have seen, this involves a misunderstanding of the purpose of the account.

But there are still other equally mistaken ways that people read the creation account in their search for some deeper purpose:

### Not a Polemic Against Polytheism

Some have suggested that *Genesis* 1 is a polemic against the polytheism of the ancient world. To determine whether this makes sense, we need to better understand exactly what is being claimed. There are two distinct possibilities:

(1) One way to understand such a claim derives from the fact that the ancient world saw conflicts between different people groups as conflicts between their respective gods. If one group went to war against another group, then—as a matter of fact—the god of the one group was coming up in combat against the god of the other group. The all-important question, therefore, was this: which god is mightier. The people group with the mightier god would most certainly have victory over the group with the weaker god. Therefore, through the sacred (political) literature that any given people group consumed, they would certainly hear a defense of the superiority of their god to that of others. So, one way to understand the creation account in *Genesis* 1 is that it was a myth utilized by the Hebrew people to assure them that their god—Yahweh—was superior to any and all of the gods of the other surrounding people groups.<sup>10</sup>

- This proposal for how to understand the purpose of the creation account is plausible, *only if we assume that it does not reflect the inspired truth about objective reality*. It makes sense only if we assume that it reflects the fallible human interests of ancient men in their ancient contexts. Therefore, no one who believes in the inerrancy and absolute authority of the Bible can consistently accept this understanding of the purpose of the account.<sup>11</sup>

(2) The other possible way to understand such a claim is that the author of this account is offering a worldview and an understanding of God that is inimical to the worldview of ancient polytheism and that it is the author’s express purpose to propose his worldview of

---

reference to the “big bang” in the creation account.

9. As such, they see *Genesis* 1 as a polemic against Darwinism, evolutionary philosophy, etc. But this too is a mistake. The fact of the matter is that—no matter what level of scientific sophistication we read into the description of each day—it is not the purpose of *Genesis* 1 to outline the order of events that transpired at the beginning of creation. Therefore, it is not part of its purpose to offer an alternative “story” of the origin of the universe to the one that is told by modern science. In truth, *Genesis* 1 should not be construed as offering *any* “story” of the origin of the universe at all. It is making a philosophical statement about God and the nature of reality relative to him. It is not telling a story. It does not outline an order of events.

10. Or, perhaps, only to assure them that Yahweh is superior to one specific god of one specific rival people group.

11. At least, no one who believes that the locus of the inspired, inerrant, authoritative truth within a biblical text lies in the inspired understanding of the human being who authored that text. Views of biblical authority that take authoritative divine truth to be the accidental product of fallible human understanding and purpose are problematic in several different respects.

transcendent monotheism as an alternative to and a counter to the ancient polytheistic worldview of his day.

- On the one hand, this clearly has to be the case. No matter who its author is, the author of this account lived in the midst of cultures that embraced thoroughly polytheistic worldviews. Clearly, therefore, it is the author’s express purpose to present Yahweh as the transcendent author of all that exists in direct opposition to a polytheistic understanding of reality.
- But how does this account do that? One typical suggestion is that—by asserting that Yahweh created the sun, the moon, and the stars—all of which were “gods” within the worldview of ancient polytheism—the author of this account is seeking to make the point that Yahweh is the one and only source of all that is—including *those very things that polytheists take to be gods*. Therefore, because Yahweh is being portrayed as having created them, Yahweh is being portrayed as superior to the other gods. But this reading fundamentally misunderstands the account. The whole point of the account is to suggest that Yahweh is the creator of absolutely anything and everything that exists. If it exists, Yahweh spoke it into existence.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the point of the account is to suggest that Yahweh created absolutely everything that exists without exerting any effort. He did not so much as lift a finger to create what he did. He merely had to wish it to be and it was so. So, if the account clearly and explicitly teaches that Yahweh—by merely willing it into existence—brought absolutely everything that is into being, then there would be no further purpose served by pitting Yahweh against other specific gods. No god, within polytheism, can even hold a candle to the power and authority that Yahweh’s transcendent authorship affords him. In other words, the point is this: It is not the author’s purpose to maintain that Yahweh is superior to god W, god X, god Y, and god Z. His purpose, rather, is to describe Yahweh and his relationship to contingent reality in such a way that it becomes clear and obvious that *no conception of any god* within a polytheistic worldview can even come close to possessing the power and stature that Yahweh does. Hence, the elements of the created order that are explicitly said to be created by Yahweh in this account are not chosen because they somehow represent heathen gods, they are chosen in accord with some other criterion.<sup>13</sup> Arguably, he chose

---

12. Granted, the account does not explicitly say as much. But, if I have rightly understood the account, that is its true import. The catalogue of things that the account does explicitly assert to be creations of God are intended to represent the entire domain of everything that exists in created reality. Hence, from the fact that the account does not explicitly assert that entity X was created by God, it does not follow that the account does not teach that God created entity X. On the contrary, it is the intent of the account itself to represent God as the creator of absolutely everything.

13. Ultimately, I do not know why the author explicitly lists the specific entities that he does (day, night, dry land, plants, animals, etc.) and neglects to list others (time, space, angels, microorganisms, etc.). However, when we take into account the fact that many of the “entities” that he mentions are general *classes of things* (e.g., plants, animals), we see that virtually nothing that could be known through ordinary, everyday experience is missing from his list of things created by God. The things that don’t make the list are things that are invisible to the naked eye (e.g., angels, microorganisms) or are “invisible” abstract realities (e.g., wisdom, righteousness, justice). And some of the latter may not have even been part of the conceptual vocabulary of the ancient world (e.g., space, time). So, all of this is to say that—if the author is limiting his list to things that would be apparent to ordinary, everyday sense perception—it is arguable that his list is exhaustive. It leaves nothing out.

elements that virtually exhaust the field of all that exists within the realm of ordinary, everyday experience.

So, is the creation account of *Genesis* 1 a polemic against the ancient polytheism of that day? On the one hand, yes it is. But yet, on the other hand, it was not written to be a polemic *per se*. That is, it was not written in order to gain some cultural victory and to establish the superiority of Yahweh over certain polytheistic gods. Rather, it was written to describe the nature of reality for what, in fact, it is—the creation of Yahweh, who is the one and only transcendent author of all. The author of this creation account had one and only one purpose or agenda: to articulate his (inspired) insight into the nature of God and the nature of God’s relationship to reality. Having done that, his account clearly and undeniably lies in polemical opposition to any and every other worldview that is incompatible with it—including ancient polytheism. But there is nothing about the account that makes it expressly and pointedly polemical. It’s primary thrust is positive and affirmative, to affirm what is true; not negative and polemical. In other words, its essential purpose is not to defeat a different set of ideas; its essential purpose is to articulate the truth.

### **Not A Creation Myth Composed to Support the Worship of Yahweh**

For the purposes of this paper, I define a ‘myth’ as a piece of sacred writing composed for the purpose of encouraging and supporting a particular set of religious practices.<sup>14</sup> By that definition, we do not rightly understand *Genesis* 1 if we take it to be a creation myth composed to support the worship of Yahweh, the god of the Hebrews. There is a fundamental tension between the purpose of a myth and the purpose of this account. The purpose of a myth, as I am defining it, is to encourage participation in a particular set of religious practices. The myth need not tell it like it is. For it can fulfill its function whether it tells the truth or not. Therefore, by the very nature of a mythical account (as I have defined it), a mythical account need not be a true account.

But this does not describe the nature and purpose of the creation account in *Genesis* 1. The intrinsic genre of the account of creation in *Genesis* 1 differs from that of a myth. The purpose of the creation account in *Genesis* 1 is to articulate the *truth* with respect to Yahweh’s relationship to reality. Granted, the truth it tells may, in fact, have the effect of supporting faithful service to Yahweh. But that is not the primary purpose of the account. The primary purpose of the account is nothing more and nothing less than to describe what is so—namely, to articulate the fact that Yahweh is the transcendent author of everything that exists.

It is highly misleading and inaccurate, therefore, to describe *Genesis* 1 as a creation myth. To describe it as a “myth” tends to suggest two things: (i) its purpose is to support a particular religion and its practices, and (ii) it is not a true account.<sup>15</sup> Neither of these aptly characterize *Genesis* 1. Its intended purpose, rather, is to offer a true account of the origins of created reality.

---

14. The concept of ‘myth’ is a particularly vague concept that, so far as I can determine, lacks a rigorous and clear definition that is commonly accepted. If *Genesis* 1 qualifies as a ‘myth’ by someone’s particular definition is not of concern to me here. The question I am addressing is whether *Genesis* 1 qualifies as a ‘myth’ by the definition that I am giving to the term ‘myth’ here in this paper.

15. To the typical person, the purpose of a mythical account is to promote and advance allegiance to a particular religion and its practices without significant regard to whether the account is true. Its truthfulness is irrelevant to its purpose. So long as people accept it and respond appropriately—by giving themselves over to the practice of that religion—it makes no real difference whether the account tells the truth. So, if the intended purpose of the account in *Genesis* 1 is to tell the truth about where created reality came from, then it has a decidedly different

And its purpose *centers* in articulating this truth. It does not *center* in promoting a religion. Furthermore, since most myths are widely accepted to be accounts that do not tell the truth, the concept of a ‘mythical account’ carries with it an expectation that the account is not true. And this, I submit, is not the case with the account in *Genesis* 1. Hence, it is highly misleading to attach the label “creation myth” to *Genesis* 1.

One might object that there are other ways to conceive of and define the concept of ‘myth’ that would aptly describe *Genesis* 1. That may very well be so. But I cannot conceive of any concept of ‘myth’ that would aptly describe *Genesis* 1 and would also impart some *non-obvious* information about the nature of that account.<sup>16</sup> In other words, I cannot conceive of a concept of ‘myth’ that—when attached to *Genesis* 1 as a label— would help me attain a better understanding of the account. Hence, in the absence of any positive value to labelling it as a “myth”—alongside the clear tendency for such a label to mislead—I see no value in attaching the label “myth” to the account of creation in *Genesis* 1.

## Observations About Specific Elements of the Account

In this section, I attempt to elucidate the more important of the specific elements within this account. It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a thorough defense of why I interpret the text as I do. My purpose is to be as clear as I can with regard to *how* I understand the text, not *why* I understand it as I do. What I might offer by way of defense for why I read the account the way I do will be spotty, at best.

### The “Introduction” to the Account

One important, controversial issue is how to interpret the first verse, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” There are two viable options: (i) It could be a straightforward description of an event—in particular, it could be a description of the event that *preceded* all the creative activity that is described in day 1 through day 6 of the subsequent account. Or, (ii) It could be a statement that is meant, in summary form, to capture what the subsequent account in *Genesis* 1:2–2:4a pertains to—namely, it pertains to the creation of the heavens and the earth.

I would maintain that the second option is the right way to take *Genesis* 1:1. It does not describe some initial event that precedes all the other events described in the creation account. Rather, it orients the reader to the topic of the subsequent account. That is to say, the topic of *Genesis* 1 is the creation of the heavens and the earth. The subsequent account is an account of the creation of everything—a “creation account.” *Genesis* 1:1 serves as a sort of introduction to and summary of the topic of the account that follows.

---

purpose and nature from that of a myth (as the typical person understands that concept).

16. So, for example, we could define a ‘myth’ as an account that described the origin of something and involved the role of gods. On the one hand, *Genesis* 1 would most definitely fit this definition. But, on the other hand, it is *obvious* that *Genesis* 1 speaks of the origin of something (namely, of the heavens and the earth) and that it tells of the role of God. So, what possible, NON-OBVIOUS information about the nature of the account is imparted by labeling it a “myth” in this sense?

### “Without Form and Void”

Immediately following the “introduction” to the account, the author inserts a sort of prologue. The prologue describes the state of things immediately prior to creation, before he begins the creation account itself. Prior to creation, all was empty and without any structure. In other words, not only did nothing exist, but neither did there exist even the possibility of anything existing, for there existed no framework for the existence of real things.

There are two importantly different ways that we can conceive of ‘nothingness.’ On the one hand, we can conceive of nothingness as empty space—a space where nothing of any substance exists in it. However, such a space *could* contain something. It has the potential for being filled with being. I will call this “fertile nothingness.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, we can conceive of nothing as being the very absence of space itself. This conception is harder to visualize. But it is a meaningful concept that is significantly different from the first one. We can think of it this way: think of a place where not only does nothing of any substance exist in it, but there does not even exist the possibility that something could exist in it. It is a place that does not even contain any space (if we conceive of ‘space’ as a location that has the potential for something to be there). I will call this sort of nothingness “sterile nothingness.”

Consider the following thought experiment. Visualize the room you are sitting in. Empty it of furnishings and anything that is in the room. Now you have an empty space enclosed by walls. Now get rid of the walls so that you envision nothing but the space that those walls once enclosed. Now get rid of the space itself. Granted, it is impossible to *visualize* this, but you can *conceive* of it. That thing of which you have now formed a conception is what I am calling “sterile nothingness.”

When I suggest that within sterile nothingness there does not even exist the possibility that something could exist, I do not mean this in any sense that would preclude the possibility of God creating something there. Fertile nothingness is empty of actual being, but it lies ready and waiting for actual being to move in and be present. This is not the case with sterile nothingness. Not only is sterile nothingness empty of actual being, but neither does it lie ready for any actual being to move in and be present. *Until God creates the possibility of actual beings being there*, no actual beings could exist in sterile nothingness. But God can nevertheless create such a possibility. *Genesis* 1 is an account of how God created the possibility for actual things to exist when, prior to his doing so, there was not even the possibility for actual things existing.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the void that God filled with being through his creative work at the beginning was the void of *sterile* nothingness, not the void of *fertile* nothingness.

With regard to *Genesis* 1:2, the author of this creation account is describing the state of affairs at the very beginning, before God created the world. Before the beginning, there was simply

---

17. This is the concept of ὕλη (*hule*, usually translated “matter”) in Aristotelian philosophy. *Hule* is “pure potentiality.” That is, it is a state wherein there is present the potentiality for existing things to be there, but where no actual existing things are there.

18. I say that there was “not even the possibility for actual things existing” in the sense that the state of things did not inherently possess that possibility within itself. Certainly, what is not inherently possible in and of itself can nevertheless be possible for God.

blank, empty, sterile nothingness. There were no things. There was no space. There was no energy. There was no structure to nature (natural laws, etc.). There was no time. Nothing. There was absolute blank nothingness, without even a possibility of something coming to be.

One of the important ways this passage is misunderstood is by taking the assertion, “Now the earth was without form and void,” to be a description of the condition of the earth that was actually there. It is often taken to mean that there already existed an earth and that the initial state of that earth was chaos. This is a perfectly understandable way to read the assertion in *Genesis* 1:2,<sup>19</sup> but it is not right. The author is not intending to describe an existing chaos. Rather, he is intending to describe blank, empty, sterile nothingness.

An important objection can be raised to my understanding of *Genesis* 1:2. How can an assertion of the form “The earth was X” fail to imply that the earth exists? In particular, how can the assertion, “the earth was without form and void,” possibly be compatible with the conclusion that there was no earth at all? If “the earth is without form and void,” does there not, of necessity have to exist an earth that is “without form and void”? No, there does not. To see how this is possible, consider the following scenario:

I am standing at my dining room window with a dinner guest. I point to the house directly across the street from mine and I say, “See that house right there. That house was a filbert orchard when I first moved here.” Clearly, my intention is not to describe the state of that house at the time when I moved into my house. That other house did not exist at that time! Rather, my intention is to say, “When I first moved into my house, there existed a filbert orchard where that house now sits.” This is exactly how the author of *Genesis* 1 expects us to take his assertion. We could paraphrase it something roughly like this:

*Before God created anything, where the earth now lies, there was nothing but blank, empty, sterile nothingness.*

The author expects us to take the next assertion in just the same way. His assertion, “and darkness was over the surface of the deep,” could be paraphrased like this:

*And there was nothing but absolute darkness where the ocean waters now lie.*

But what about the next assertion, does it not imply that the ocean waters already existed? The account reads, “and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.” Does this not suggest that there were ocean waters there for the Spirit of God to be moving over? It could imply that, certainly. But it need not do so. It could be exactly the same sort of figurative device that we described above. It is a way of expressing the fact that, where *now* we see the surface of an ocean of water, at that time there was nothing but the Spirit of God himself. The Spirit of God is described as “moving.” The Hebrew word here seems to suggest motion that reflects care, planning, anticipation, and expectation. The Spirit of God is busy planning and anticipating the cosmos that he intends to bring into being. Quite poetically, the author suggests a parallel

---

19. Especially if one has already mistakenly read the “introduction” of the account (*Genesis* 1:1) as a description of an event that occurred prior to verse 2. Some take *Genesis* 1:1 to describe an initial act of creation whereby a first phase of the earth’s existence was brought into being—namely, the earth in a state of chaos—and then they take *Genesis* 1:2 ff as describing the “improvement” or “ordering” of that initial, chaotic earth. But this is the wrong way to take *Genesis* 1:1. It misconstrues the whole point and purpose of the account.

between the movement of the surface of the ocean and the “movement” of the Spirit of God. Where now we see the constant motion and flux of the surface of the oceans, before God created the cosmos, there was nothing but the anticipatory “motions” of the Spirit of God himself.

Putting all of these observations together, we could paraphrase all of verse 2 something roughly like this:

*Before God created anything, where the earth now lies, there was nothing but blank, empty, sterile nothingness. And where the ocean waters now lie, there was nothing but absolute darkness. Nothing whatsoever existed except the anticipatory purposing of the invisible transcendent author himself. Where now there is the motion and flux of sea water, there was then nothing but the motions of God’s creative mind.*

We can see, then, that the purpose of this “prologue” is to make clear that God’s creative activity involved creating the whole cosmos out of blank, sterile nothingness. God did not begin with some sort of pre-existing stuff (whether eternal or otherwise) and fashion it into the cosmos.<sup>20</sup> God began with an emptiness that was so empty that it did not even contain the possibility of something existing from and within it. So, before we get to God’s first act of creation in this creation account, the author attempts to express as vividly and dramatically as he can that God’s creative activity began with blank, empty, sterile nothingness.

An objection will likely be raised against my interpretation of this account—namely, that it is not possible for the author of the creation account to be thinking about God and creation in the way that my interpretation suggests. My reading of this account suggests that its author was conversant in philosophical concepts, questions, and perspectives that were not available to him.<sup>21</sup> That is, the views, beliefs, concepts, and perspectives that shaped the author’s intended purpose—according to my reading—did not arise in the history of ideas until much, much later. Hence—so the objection goes—my interpretation “reads into” the author’s intent ideas that could not possibly have been a part of his understanding.<sup>22</sup>

---

20. This is in stark contrast to any and every other creation account that we know. All other creation accounts begin with some pre-existing something out of which a god or gods fashion or shape the heavens and the earth. The not uncommon conclusion that *Genesis* 1 “parallels” or “resembles” the creation accounts of other religions is, for just this reason, an incredibly shallow and superficial analysis. What is striking is how profoundly *different* the account of *Genesis* 1 is from all other creation accounts. It embodies a radically different worldview. Any similarities that might exist to other creation accounts are incredibly superficial and trivial by comparison.

21. The alternative envisioned by this objection is that one should interpret the creation account in such a way that its author’s understanding reflects the worldview and ideas of the ancient world. It has always seemed to me that those who press this objection have it completely backwards. They begin with the assumption that the creation account is radically similar to the other ancient creation accounts. Then, starting from that unfounded *a priori* assumption, they interpret the creation account accordingly. Each and every interpretive judgment they make is made in the light of the expectation that the creation account is very similar to all the other ancient creation accounts. But this is completely backwards. One ought to understand and interpret the creation account on its own terms, without making any assumptions—one way or the other—with regard to whether it is like or unlike the other ancient creation accounts. Only then—once one has understood the creation account on its own terms—can one decide whether it is radically similar or radically dissimilar to the other ancient creation accounts.

22. So, for example, the one who presses this objection likely assumes that the concept of *creation ex nihilo* had never even been conceived before the time that this account was composed and was not a live option at that

This objection is based on a faulty assumption. It assumes that no human being is capable of embracing and promoting any idea that is contrary to the ideas embraced and accepted by his culture. It assumes that there can be no such thing as a revolutionary idea, no such thing as a countercultural viewpoint. If that were the case, then how would the notion of *creation ex nihilo* have ever arisen? If he can only think what his culture thinks, then how could any human individual ever have innovated the concepts of transcendent monotheism and *creation ex nihilo* at any time whatsoever? He would have to do so in a world where polytheism and its concomitant notions were universally accepted. Obviously, somebody somewhere had to have a new, different, and countercultural idea in order for the concept of *creation ex nihilo* to be born. It is utterly fallacious, then, to assume that no human being can ever have thoughts and beliefs that run contrary to his culture.

So why must I think—as the objection seems to dictate—that the author of the *Genesis* creation account is incapable of being that somebody with a countercultural insight? Why must I believe that the author of the creation account is intellectually incapable of grasping and working with the philosophical concepts that—according to my reading of it—are embodied in the account (*creation ex nihilo*; blank, sterile nothingness; the absolute transcendence of the creator; transcendent monotheism; divine determinism; etc.)?<sup>23</sup> Only intellectual chauvinism and chronological snobbery<sup>24</sup> could maintain that its author must necessarily lack the philosophical sophistication (and intelligence?) needed to compose the creation account as my interpretation understands it. But surely our reading of the creation account must not be influenced by this sort of chauvinism.

Why think, then, that the author of the creation account could not possibly intend to teach *creation ex nihilo*—and the notions of God and created reality that are correlated with it? True, such concepts and beliefs were not current in any of the cultures of the ancient world. But what does that prove? There can be no question but what—if my interpretation is correct—the worldview embodied in the creation account is absolutely revolutionary in the world of its time.<sup>25</sup> But that does not make my interpretation wrong. It is not a valid reason to reject it.

---

time it was composed. Therefore, it is historically unlikely that this account articulates *creation ex nihilo*, for no ancient person had ever even conceived of *creation ex nihilo*. Hence, to read this creation account as teaching *creation ex nihilo* must necessarily involve “reading into” the account something that cannot possibly be there.

23. It is important to distinguish a concept from the name given to that same concept. Clearly, the biblical author did not employ the same “names” as we do for the relevant concepts embodied in the creation account. But not knowing the “sophisticated” modern names of concepts is not the same as not having a grasp of the concepts themselves. Even when they have understood one and the same concept in exactly the same way, human beings have created a wide variety of different ways to refer to it and describe it. It is very important, therefore, that we distinguish the intellectual concept itself from the linguistic device used to signify it. Why is this important? It is important for this reason: just because the biblical author of the creation account never uses the term “transcendence” does not mean that his account is not intended to convey the concept of transcendence. And the same can be said for “*creation ex nihilo*” and other related concepts.
24. Namely, drawing the conclusion that he lacked this philosophical sophistication merely by virtue of the fact that he was an ancient.
25. Indeed, it is absolutely revolutionary in the world of our time!

There can be no possible grounds upon which one can maintain that it is impossible for a biblical author to advance revolutionary and countercultural views. With respect to any ancient author, one must always leave room for the possibility that he is advocating countercultural ideas. And if one believes in biblical inspiration, this is all the more true in the case of biblical authors. One should fully expect an *inspired* account to be a *revolutionary* account—to be contrary to the cultural assumptions of its day and to find its source outside the author’s culture, not inside it.

Therefore, if we grant to biblical inspiration and authority the weight that is due them, there no longer remains a basis for the above objection. God has inspired the author of this account with an accurate understanding of the true nature of God and his relationship to reality. Out of that true and inspired understanding, the human author has crafted an account that reflects his understanding. We would fully expect that such an account will be different from, independent of, and not explicable in terms of the beliefs and assumptions of the ancient world. If the biblical account were not in tension with the beliefs and assumptions of its time, then we would legitimately question whether it was, in fact, an inspired account.

The upshot of the above discussion is this: the purpose of the creation account in *Genesis* 1:1-2:4a is to articulate the inspired, revolutionary perspective that God is the transcendent author of all of reality who brought everything that exists into existence out of blank, sterile nothingness. Accordingly, the point of *Genesis* 1:2 is to describe the blank, sterile nothingness that existed before God created anything at all. Before God willed reality into existence, where there is now an earth and the heavens above it, there was then the deep empty darkness of blank, sterile nothingness.

### **The Structure and Nature of the Body of the Creation Account**

After the very brief prologue in *Genesis* 1:2, we find the body of the creation account itself. The nature and structure of the account can be characterized by all of the following:

- (1) In the body of the creation account, the author’s purpose is to make a fairly comprehensive list of all the different things that God created. His list ranges over *the various things that can be known through ordinary, everyday experience*. He intends for his list to serve as a representation of everything that exists. His purpose for the list is to represent the fact that God created *absolutely everything*.
- (2) The author’s method seems to be as follows: Having distinguished qualitatively different classes of things within the catalogue of things God created, he assigns the creation of each different class of things to different days of the Jewish “work” week.<sup>26</sup> So, for example, the creation of “light” is assigned to the first day of the week. The creation of the sun, moon, and stars is assigned to the fourth day of the week. Etc.

The author has chosen the seven-day Jewish week to serve as the literary framework within which to compose his account. From the standpoint of his purpose to describe the scope of the creative work of God, there is no reason to think that this is anything other than an arbitrary choice. He could just as well have chosen the four points of the compass

---

26. The seven-day week excluding the Sabbath day.

to provide the literary framework for his account. (E.g., “From the east God said, ‘Let there be light and there was light...’ From the west God said, ‘Let the waters be gathered into one place and let the dry land appear...’” etc.) While I may not fully understand why the author of the creation account chose the days of the week to serve as his literary framework, it does seem to be a fitting and natural choice. This is an account of God’s “working” to produce the cosmos. It seems fitting, therefore, for him to situate it within a “work” week. The author of the account wants to make clear that the cosmos is a product of God’s creative “work.” At one point, reality did not exist. God “worked” to bring it into being. And then—when he had finished working—the cosmos was there.

The author draws on an analogy to human activity: when a human being has been working to accomplish something and he accomplishes what he set out to do, then he stops doing the work, for the task is complete. That is exactly how the author of this account wants to describe God’s relationship to created reality. Once God had completed the task of bringing the cosmos into being, he ceased working, for his task was complete. In other words, there came a point in time when the creation of the cosmos ended, having been completed. At that point, the story of history began. God’s “rest” (that is, his cessation from his creation-of-the-cosmos activity) marked the *end* of the initial phase of God’s creative activity—a phase within which God was preparing the setting and context for the story that he wanted to create. But it also marked the *beginning* of a subsequent phase of creative activity—the phase within which the story of mankind would be created.

- (3) The author distinguishes various created spaces from the various created beings that exist in those spaces. Hence, his list of created things includes both created spaces and the created beings that dwell in them. He created the skies, but he also created birds to “dwell” in the skies. He created water, but he also created fish and sea creatures to dwell in the water. He created dry land, but he also created plants, animals, and mankind to dwell on the land.
- (4) The author uses the repetition of various formulaic phrases to create a kind of structure, rhythm, and symmetry to his list of created things. (E.g., “Then God said, ‘Let there be ...’ and there was ... .” And, “God saw that ... was good.” And, “And there was evening and there was morning, a ... day.” Etc.)<sup>27</sup>

However, the structure of this account is not so regular and predictable as to be helpfully classed as poetry. It utilizes various poetic devices, certainly. But the account of each “day” (that is, the account of the creation of each distinct class of created things) is described on its own terms. The author clearly adjusts and customizes what he says about the creation of each distinct class of things. He is not at all constrained by the requirements or rules of some established poetic form. Hence, *Genesis* 1 is not helpfully viewed as a poem.

---

27. For a complete analysis of the literary structure of the creation account, see Appendices A and B.

### “And God Said”: The Nature of God’s Creative Power

One of the most significant formulaic phrases used throughout this account is “And God said, ‘Let there be ...’ and there was... .” It is represented as the language that God uses in the very act of creating. What is the significance of this?

On the one hand—unlike creation accounts from other cultures of the ancient world—God is *not* portrayed as “fashioning” the world in the way an artisan fashions an artifact. He does not build, construct, or make the world. He “speaks” it into existence. God, using language, expresses what he wants reality to be like, and, as a result, reality takes just the form he wanted.

But, while God is portrayed as speaking the world into existence, it would be a mistake to think that his speech is being portrayed as having magical or supernatural power. The reason reality comes into being as a result of God’s speech is not because his speech is imbued with supernatural (magical) power. Rather, it is because God’s will transcendentally determines all that is. God’s speech, in this account, is simply a *verbalization of his will*. We can legitimately characterize the account this way: God wills that X be so, and X becomes so. It is very important and highly significant that whenever God speaks in this account, he is always giving expression to his will. He does not use magical words like “Abracadabra.” For it is not God’s utterance that has creative power, neither is it the particular words he uses. It is clearly and unquestionably his *will* that is the locus of his creative power.

Therefore, the creation account offers a very distinctive concept of God and his relationship to reality. God is *not* an artificer who molds and shapes the world out of materials that are at hand. He is *not* a powerful wizard who has learned to master and control various pre-existing forces through incantations and magical formulas. Rather, the God of *Genesis* 1 is like the author of a story. As its author, it is Yahweh’s prerogative to take the story of reality in whatever direction he wants to take it. It is his *will* that is sovereign. Just as every detail of any story that a human author creates is determined by that human author’s will, every detail of created reality is determined by the will of God. God’s *will* will always be done. It cannot be otherwise. For he is the author of the whole of reality.<sup>28</sup>

### The Anthropocentric Nature of the Account

One striking characteristic of the creation account is its anthropocentric nature. One can see its anthropocentricity in at least three different ways:

- (1) The account places man at the apex of God’s creative work. Man is created on the final day, the day just before God’s creative work in *Genesis* 1 reaches its completion.
- (2) The creation of everything else in the account is described and characterized from a man-centered point of view.

Some things are obviously presented from a man-centered point of view. Others less obviously so. For example, consider the following: “Let there be lights in the expanse of

---

28. While the creation account never explicitly identifies God as the *author* of reality, seeing God as an author (rather than as an artificer or a wizard) is the only way to make sense of how God is portrayed in the creation account. In the creation account, God does not build the cosmos, nor does he conjure it through magic. He *wills* it to be what he wills it to be and it is. This describes the relationship of an author to his story.

the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth.” Clearly the sun and moon are “for signs and for seasons” *in relation to mankind*. They demarcate the passage of time *for mankind*. No other creature marks the passage of time as mankind does. But this is just one example. The entire passage—either overtly and obviously, or more subtly—describes created reality from a distinctly human point of view. Hence, it is *to human beings* that God announces the fact that the plants and the trees have been expressly created to serve as food for *them* (as well as for the animals).

- (3) The account clearly describes man as special and distinctive. Indeed, one could justly conclude that the account characterizes man as the most important being in all of God’s creation.

No other creature is said to be created “in the image of God.”<sup>29</sup> Only mankind is characterized this way. Mankind is expressly instructed to “rule over” all the other creatures. Man’s exalted status is clearly and explicitly stated in the account.

This fact is a very distinctive feature of the creation account as compared to other ancient creation accounts. In other creation accounts, human beings are typically characterized as afterthoughts who were created to serve the gods. It is the gods who are important. The only value that a human being has is to the end that he might serve the gods and make their lives easier. In *Genesis* 1, on the other hand, mankind was created to fill an exalted role—to rule and to have other creatures serve them.

That the purpose of man is to honor, to serve, and to obey the creator is never explicitly mentioned in the *Genesis* 1 account.<sup>30</sup> It is highly likely that man’s obligation to honor and serve God is part of the author’s perspective. But it is suppressed and left unhighlighted in the creation account. What is thrust to the forefront instead is man’s exalted assignment to “rule” over the rest of creation.

In its anthropocentric nature lies a very significant aspect of what the creation account teaches. The author’s understanding includes the perspective that mankind is the most significant, most important, and most central aspect of God’s creation. This is in direct contradiction to the prevailing tendency within our contemporary culture. Contemporary cultures tends to view man as a species of animal that is not categorically more important than any other species of animal. The true and inspired understanding of the man who composed the creation account is radically

---

29. Being “created in the image of God” is what distinguishes human beings from animals in the creation account. Accordingly, it seems apparent that “to be made in the image of God” is to be made a “person.” The distinctive characteristic of the human creature that makes him like God in a way that no animal is like God is the fact that he is a “person.” Personhood involves a certain distinctive level of rationality or intelligence which includes a distinctive kind of creativity, intentionality, imagination, and language ability. But the most distinctive and essential mark of personhood is morality. Persons are moral beings. Animals are not.

30. It is a rather remarkable fact that this is so. Although, while it is not explicit in the account, it may be present in the account implicitly. Certainly, the obligation to serve and obey God is implicit in the very nature of the relationship between God and man as that is depicted in the account. God is the sovereign author whose will governs everything. Man is one among other things that God has willed into existence. Implicit in that very relationship is the obligation of man to “do the will” of the sovereign author of all and to honor him as such.

different. Man—created in the image of God—is a qualitatively different and more important kind of being from any animal. This truth (about man and his relationship to the rest of creation) has radical and far-reaching implications that we ignore to our own peril. The wise individual will never view himself as merely an animal. To do so is the height of folly in so many different respects.

### **God’s Statements of Evaluation**

After many of the distinct acts of creation, the account reads, “And God saw that it was good.” Such statements are not moral statements, neither are they absolute statements. It would be a mistake to take them as such. God is not claiming that any aspect of his creation is perfectly morally good. Nor is he claiming that any aspect of his creation is an absolute good, metaphysically. Rather, he is making a claim with respect to how what he created relates to his purposes. With respect to God’s purposes, what he made was “good”—that is, what he made was going to suit the purposes he had for the created order.

As an analogy, picture a cook making a sauce. He adds a mix of spices to the sauce, samples it, and says, “now that’s good.” He does not mean that—on some *absolute* scale or by some *absolute* standard—the sauce is good. In fact, he does not necessarily mean that—as compared to all other sauces—this is a good one. Rather, he means that, *relative to the taste that he was seeking to achieve*, the sauce he has now concocted successfully achieves that taste. That is, it is “good.” And, clearly, he is not making a *moral* judgment—that is, the cook is not saying that the state that the sauce is currently in is a morally good state, that it is in the state that every sauce ought to be in.

Making this observation is critical for theology. Many people have developed false and misleading beliefs due to a misunderstanding of this divine pronouncement in *Genesis* 1. Not infrequently, one hears that human beings were created to be morally perfect and sinless. On what basis is that said? Because *Genesis* 1 says that, having created human beings, God “saw that it was good.” This is a fallacious inference from the account. What if, for the purposes of the story that God wanted to create, God created a race of totally sinful rebels against himself (from which he would create a manifold of different stories—some being stories of mercy and redemption, others being stories of judgment and condemnation)? Even though human beings were created evil, would not the creation account still read, “and God saw that it was good”? If, in order to accomplish the purposes he set out to accomplish, God’s creation needed a set of just the right sort of sinners, then his creation would be “good” (in exactly the sense the account means it) if mankind was created to be just that right sort of sinners. In any case, all this is to say that one can draw no conclusion whatsoever about the moral condition of the human being from the statement made in this account to the effect that “God saw that it was good.” The “goodness” that God saw was not absolute moral goodness. It was goodness relative to his purposes.

### **And God Rested From All of His Works**

At the end of the account, we read, “By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.” (Gen. 2:2, NASV). What exactly is meant by describing God as “resting”? Is the author suggesting that God had been wearied and depleted by his creative work and that he was now resting in order to be restored? Surely that cannot be. It makes no sense to see God’s creative activity as toilsome labor

that wearied and depleted him.<sup>31</sup> God is not the sort of being that can be wearied. Hence, he certainly did not need to “rest up” because he was tired. That is not the author’s point. To take it to be would badly misunderstand the account.

Reading *Genesis* 2:2 carefully, we note that the author’s emphasis is on the fact that God is *finished*, that he is *done* with his work because he has *completed* what he was working on. And what he had “completed” is spelled out quite explicitly—namely, “all his work which he had done.” So, a careful reading makes clear what we are to understand by this statement:

*The work God set out to do on the six days of creation constituted a very specific project. That project was entirely finished after those six days of working. On the seventh day, there was no further work that he needed to do on the project that had occupied his attention for those six days.*<sup>32</sup>

This brings us to a critical question: after having completed the project that had occupied his attention for those six days of creation, what did God do then? He “stopped,” or “ceased,” or “rested,” the author tells us. But what does that mean?

There are two options for what the author might want us to understand from his assertion. On the one hand, he might want us to conclude that, at that point, God ceased all work—all creative activity—altogether. Or, on the other hand, he might want us to conclude that God, having completed the project that occupied his attention for the six days of creation, now began a new project. I will consider each of these two options in turn:

(1) It is noteworthy that here—but nowhere else in the Bible—is the point made that God has ceased working. If it were the case that, after his initial six days of creative work, God ceased from all creative activity altogether, one would think that we would find such a fact repeated, acknowledged, or affirmed somewhere else in the Bible. But it is not. There is no indication anywhere else in the Bible that God’s creative work has ceased. As a matter of fact, we find indications of exactly the opposite.<sup>33</sup> The clear impression left by the biblical writings is that God’s creative activity is ongoing. He is always present and available to create and shape reality. Indeed, the worldview presented in the Bible would entail that God’s creative work could never not be active. For it is God’s creative activity that sustains each and every

---

31. The account does not describe God as *doing* anything to create the world other than to *will* it be what he wanted it to be. In other words, God’s only “effort” was strictly volitional. Even if such a thing were possible for God, he did not “physically” exert himself at all.

32. In the following discussion I will frequently refer to God’s working for six days and resting on the seventh day. I do not mean this literally. I am merely reflecting the language and rhetorical device used by the author of the creation account. However long it may have taken, the “six days” that God worked represents the period of time when God was involved in creating the heavens and the earth as described on day one through day six of the creation account. It may have taken two nanoseconds. It may have taken 500 trillion years. But, however long it took, it is represented in the account by day one through day six. The seventh day represents the time subsequent to God’s creation of the heavens and the earth as described on day one through day six of the account. It does not represent a period of specific duration. It represents the fact that there came to be a time when the creative project accomplished during “day one” through “day six” was finished.

33. Note, for example, that, in *John* 5:17, Jesus explicitly states that God (“his Father”) is “working.” Jesus is referring to the creative activity of God giving strength to a lame man. Jesus clearly does not view God as presently inactive, as “resting.” During Jesus’ life on earth, God is active to “bear witness” to the true identity of Jesus as his Son by working various “works” that involve creative activity.

moment of reality.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, unless the creation account is promoting a radically different view of God and reality from that underlying the remainder of the Bible, it cannot possibly intend to suggest that, after the initial six days of creation, God ceased all work—all creative activity—altogether.

It would be reasonable enough to take the creation account to be suggesting—anthropomorphically—that God finished everything he wanted to create after the initial six days of working and that then, beginning on the seventh day, he kicked back to simply “enjoy” the fruit of his labor. He had worked hard to create what he had created. Now was his time to benefit from what he had created. However, as reasonable as it might be to read it this way, nothing in the remainder of Scripture suggests that God is now resting. That is, nothing suggests that he is now enjoying—or even attempting to enjoy—the created order. Rather, God is currently still working. Therefore, if he is currently working, then the creation account cannot mean to suggest that God has ceased working altogether, never to work again.

- (2) By default, therefore, the second option must capture what the creation account intends. It intends to suggest that God, having completed the project that occupied his attention for the initial six days of creation, is now free to begin a new project. He did not, on the seventh day, “rest” from any and all creative activity. He only “rested” from the work that he had been doing on the initial six days of Creation. *That* work was done. He stopped working on *it*. But we are not meant to conclude that he stopped creating altogether.

It is unfortunate that our English translations translate *Genesis* 2:2, “God *rested* from all his work that he had done.” It would more helpfully be translated “God *ceased* from all his work that he had done.” The author’s point is that God stopped working on the particular project being described in *Genesis* 1. He had come to the end of *that* project. He finished everything that he had set out to accomplish then and there. But he stopped doing *that* in order that he might turn his attention to something else. Therefore, it is a significant mistake to take *Genesis* 2:2–3 to be saying that, after the creative activity represented by day one through day six, God was (and is) no longer involved in any creative activity at all—nor that he was (or is) no longer “working.” God DOES continue to work. But he is doing something other than “creating the heavens and the earth.” That project is done. It was completed a long time ago.

This conclusion, in turn, leads us to another question: What was the nature of the new project that God started upon after completing the creation of the heavens and the earth? Was it a project that was in some way connected to what he had just completed? Or, was it a whole new creative project that was completely unrelated and unconnected to the initial project that he had completed?

---

34. The very concept of God and his relationship to reality that the Bible promotes is such that each and every nanosecond of reality is utterly and completely dependent upon the creative activity of God. If God does not will the next moment into existence, it will not come into existence. *Acts* 17:27b–28a is the most direct and explicit statement of the utter dependence of created reality (in this case, of human beings) upon the will of God.

Everything in what the Bible goes on to teach us suggests the former rather than the latter. There is absolutely no reason to think that the next project that God concerned himself with was unconnected to the project he had just completed.<sup>35</sup> The initial creation account is placed at the beginning of *Genesis* precisely because everything that follows in *Genesis* is intended to be viewed as somehow connected to it. The creation account ends with—in effect—“God completed his work creating the heavens and the earth” in order to invite the following question: “So that he could begin creating what next?” The rest of *Genesis*, I would submit, goes on to answer this very question. After he finished creating the heavens and the earth, he began creating the story (the stories) of mankind.

Therefore, the most reasonable way to construe the creation account is to understand that God, on the seventh day, began a whole new project that was closely connected to what he had just completed. To be specific, he began the project of creating the complex of multiple, interlocking narratives of human beings. The project that constituted the first phase of God’s creative activity—the one described in *Genesis* 1—was intended to create the context within which that complex of multiple, interlocking stories would transpire. The project that constituted the next phase of God’s creative activity was to create the set of stories itself. So, as we have seen, it would be a mistake to understand God to have ceased “working” after he completed the “work” that he did on the six days of the creation account. He did not cease *working* on the seventh day. He ceased working on phase one. He then went to work on phase two.

What is of note about these two phases of God’s creative activity is that they are not of equal weight. As important as phase one was, it was clearly meant to be preparatory to phase two. Phase one was meant to set up and establish the context within which phase two would be created. Phase one merely set the stage for phase two. Phase two was the main event.

So, to sum up, the point of *Genesis* 2:2–3 is not to suggest that God—upon completing the creation of the heavens and the earth in day one through day six—ceased all creative activity (all “work”) altogether. Rather, the point is that God—upon completing the creation of the heavens and the earth—*reached a turning point* in his creative activity. Having completed the first phase of his creation on day six, he advanced to a whole new phase of his creative activity.

During the first phase of his creative work (day one through day six), all of God’s sovereign control over reality was devoted to preparing for and setting the stage for the story of mankind. During phase one, he was focused on creating the context, on setting the stage. But after completing the work assigned to day six, everything changed. Now, with phase two, the real

---

35. That is, there is no reason to think that his next project was unconnected to the project that he had just completed in day one through day six of the creation account. It is noteworthy that the very next account in *Genesis* after the creation account is a more detailed account of the creation of human beings (the creation of Adam and Eve) and the very beginnings of the story of mankind. This is highly suggestive that the primary project of God’s creative activity was the creation of mankind along with all the drama and narrative that would go with it. God’s primary project was NOT the creation of the universe. It was the creation of the story of mankind. While the creation of mankind and human history was closely connected to the creation of the universe (the universe was to be the arena within which the drama of human history unfolded), yet the creation of mankind and human history is quite clearly prior in importance. The universe was created for man, not man for the universe. The creation of the narratives of human lives was God’s primary and central project.

work of creation begins. No longer is God merely setting the stage. Now he is intent on creating the set of multiple, interlocking narratives of human beings.<sup>36</sup>

### God Blessed the Seventh Day and Sanctified It

The body of the creation account ends with the assertion, “Now God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because in it he rested from all His work which God had created and made.”<sup>37</sup> We are not to read this statement as if the author of the account is describing an actual occurrence that happened long ago, at the beginning of creation. We are not intended to think that God, on the day after he had completed the creation of the heavens and the earth, spoke a blessing whereby he blessed that particular day.

But, if not, then how are we to understand this statement? To achieve an understanding of this assertion, we need to answer four questions: (i) what is the “seventh day” that God blessed and sanctified? (ii) what does it mean to suggest that God “blessed” it? (iii) what does it mean that God “sanctified” it? and (iv) why did God bless and sanctify it? I will address each of these questions in turn:

- (1) The “seventh day”—as I already suggested—is NOT the day immediately following the day when God completed the creation of the heavens and the earth (the “sixth day”). Rather, the seventh day is the seventh day of the Jewish week. It is the weekly Sabbath day in the Jewish calendar. Further, it makes little sense for God to “bless” a day. Hence, it is not the day *per se* that God is blessing. Rather, *he is blessing the Jewish practice of keeping the Sabbath day holy*. It is Sabbath *observance*, not the Sabbath *day* as such, that is blessed by God.
- (2) When the creation account speaks of God “blessing” something, it means that he *approves or sanctions* it.<sup>38</sup> So, in this case, to state that God “blessed” the seventh day (that is, to state that he “blessed” the practice of keeping the Sabbath holy) means that God *sanctioned* the religious practice of keeping the Sabbath day holy. At whatever time in history he did so,<sup>39</sup>

---

36. God’s ongoing activity to create the stories that constitute human existence is no less his creative activity—and is no less his “work”—than the creative acts described in *Genesis* 1. Therefore, we must not view *Genesis* 1 as describing the full extent of God’s creative work and fail to see that God is continuing to create throughout time and history. God creates each new moment of reality. The distinction between the activity of God described by the creation account in *Genesis* 1 and his activity *now*, therefore, is not that formerly he was working to create and now he is not. Rather, it is that formerly he was working to create the *context* within which the human story would unfold, but now he is working to create *the human story itself*.

37. This is essentially the NASV translation of *Genesis* 2:3. However, I have translated it “*Now* God blessed...” rather than “*Then* God blessed...” The NASV translation misleads us at this point. The author is not intending to suggest that this is the next event in a series of events. (“*And then this happened—*God blessed...”.) Rather, he is intending it as a side comment about the meaning and significance of Jewish Sabbath-observance. He sees how the significance of Jewish Sabbath-observance is actually reflected in the creation account, and he chooses to comment upon that fact. (*Now, in the light of this account of God’s creating the heavens and the earth, we can see why* God blessed ... .)

38. God’s “blessing” of the multiplication of the birds and sea creatures (*Genesis* 1:22) is his approving of and sanctioning their reproducing and multiplying. God’s “blessing” of the multiplication of human beings and of the “ruling” of human beings over the other creatures (*Genesis* 1:28) is his approving of and sanctioning just such things.

39. From *Exodus* 16:22–30, it is apparent that Sabbath observance was understood (if not actually practiced) before the Mosaic Covenant was even instituted. However, we do not know when, in the history of mankind, God had

God sanctioned the practice of observing the seventh day by setting it apart as a holy day upon which one did not engage in the labor of ordinary, mundane existence.

From what has been said, we can see more clearly the nature of the author’s assertion here in *Genesis* 2:3–4. Rather than describing an event that occurred immediately after the completion of God’s six-day creation project, the author is making a side comment wherein he intends to explain the meaning and significance of Sabbath observance within the religious practices of Israel. Because he sees the meaning and significance of Sabbath observance as ultimately founded on the fact that God is the creator of all of reality, he has chosen an account of God’s initial creation of the heavens and the earth as the context within which to offer a defense and explanation of Sabbath observance. So, when he says, “Now God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because in it he rested from all His work which God had created and made,” we could paraphrase it something like this:

“Now when God, later in history, asked his people Israel to sanctify the seventh day and treat it as special, he did so because the weekly Sabbath day represents the very point in time where God ceased from all the creative activity he had performed in order to complete the initial phase of creating reality.”

- (3) When the creation account speaks of God “sanctifying” the seventh day, it means that he has set it aside as “holy.”<sup>40</sup> That is to say, God approves of the Sabbath not being treated as just any other day of the week. Specifically, he approves of the weekly Sabbath being set aside as a day upon which the everyday, mundane business of survival is not pursued.

*Genesis* 2:3 reads, “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (NASV) The first occurrence of “it” denotes the seventh day of the week (the weekly Sabbath day). The second occurrence of “it” also refers to the weekly Sabbath day. However, that reference—the second occurrence of “it”—is a metonymy used to denote what the weekly Sabbath represents—namely, the period of time after the sixth day in the creation account. So we can analyze the statement this way: “*Now God blessed weekly observance of the seventh day and sanctified the weekly Sabbath day, because in the period of time that the weekly Sabbath represents and commemorates, God rested from all his work which he had created and made.*” And what is the period of time (the day) that the weekly Sabbath represents and commemorates? It is that time portrayed as the day after the sixth day of creation in the creation account. It is that time in the history of the cosmos when God had *completed* preparing it for the various human stories that he wanted to create.

---

instructed someone to “observe the Sabbath and keep it holy.” It could have been very early in the history of mankind. Or, it could have been much later. Furthermore, it need not have originated from a direct instruction by God. Some human being could have “invented” Sabbath keeping as a way to remember who he was in relation to God. The point being made in the creation account is not that God “invented” Sabbath-keeping. Rather, the point being made is that he *approved* of it and *sanctioned* it (that is, he “blessed” it and “sanctified” it). When did God “officially” and “formally” sanction it? Certainly, he did so in the Mosaic Covenant (cf. *Exodus* 20:8–11). But, arguably—in the light of *Exodus* 16:22–30—he may have done so even earlier, in some unknown time, place, and manner.

40. The Hebrew word translated “sanctified” and the Hebrew word translated “holy” share the same root—שָׁבַע.

- (4) Why then did God bless and sanctify the “seventh day”? That is, why did God approve of and sanction Sabbath observance? The text says explicitly that it is because, on the day represented by the weekly Sabbath, “He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”

But why would that (his “resting” from his work) be a reason for God to bless and sanctify the Sabbath? In light of how the text reads, it would appear that his completion of all that he set out to do on the initial “six days” of creation is, in God’s mind, a moment worth remembering and commemorating. But why? Why would that moment be worth remembering and commemorating? To answer this, we need to rightly assess the significance of the seventh day in the creation account. Many readers will understandably—but wrongly, in my judgment—conclude that the seventh day represents the end of something—that it represents the fact that something has been completed. But a more accurate understanding of the seventh day is this: *because the initial phase of God’s purpose for created reality has been completed and come to an end, now **the next phase** of God’s creative activity has **begun** and is in progress.* In other words, the seventh day is not noteworthy for its being the *end* of something; it is noteworthy for its being the *beginning* of something else.<sup>41</sup> Specifically, it is noteworthy for its representing the beginning of God’s creation of the complex of multiple, interlocking stories of human beings.<sup>42</sup> It is *this*, then, that God believes is worth remembering and commemorating on each and every Sabbath day: *the fact that God has begun, and is presently engaged in, his creation of the set of interlocking stories that constitute the history of mankind.* God, therefore, “blessed” the observance of the seventh day and “sanctified” it because he approves of our regularly remembering the fact that *God is now engaged in creating the nexus of stories that constitutes human history.*<sup>43</sup>

To fully understand how the author of the creation account understands the meaning and significance of the Sabbath, we need to answer yet one further question—why is *this* worth remembering? Why is it worth remembering that, *presently*, God is engaged in creating the nexus

---

41. Note carefully how the account reads: “By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.” It says that God completed the work *which he had done* (as described in the six days of creation). But it does not say that God completed the work *that he had set out to do from before the beginning of creation*. That is, he did not rest (stop) from doing all the work that he had ever purposed to do. Therefore, if we rightly understand the account, we are led to understand that there is more to come. What God completed on the sixth day was his work *to prepare for something bigger, more significant, and more important*—to prepare for a something else that had been God’s *real, ultimate purpose*. The creation of the heavens and the earth was God’s creation of the *context*—the arena—in which that something else would be created and would unfold.

42. This, of course, cannot be known directly from the creation account alone. It must be inferred from the creation account in conjunction with data gleaned from other portions of Scripture, including what immediately follows in *Genesis*. From the creation account alone, we could rightly conclude that there was something more that God intended to create. But the account itself does not tell us what that something more is.

43. God is no longer engaged in preparing the *context* for the nexus of stories that constitute human history. That work is long past. It was finished before the beginning of history. The initial stage of God’s creative activity having been completed, God has gone on to the next stage. And that next stage is the stage of creation in which we currently find ourselves.

of human stories that constitutes human history? Does this have any direct personal significance to me? If God sanctions and approves—as a good and meaningful practice—my weekly remembrance of this fact, why does he do so? How will such a remembrance benefit or affect me?

To answer this question, we must understand the significance of this fact that I am to remember through Sabbath observance. In other words, I must understand the significance of the fact that God is presently engaged in creating the complex of interlocking human stories that make up human history. We see the significance of this fact when we observe that God’s present activity (of creating human history)—in contrast to his previous activity (of creating the heavens and the earth)—constitutes *the primary purpose and point* of God’s bringing anything into existence at all. Why did God bring created reality into existence? He brought it into existence in order that he might embody in it the multitude of stories that he had purposed to create—the stories that were to be centered in the individual human beings whom he would create. Therefore, the initial phase of creation, the creation of the heavens and the earth (represented by the first six days of creation), is only preparation for what God ultimately wanted to create. It is not the primary reality that he purposed to create. Instead, the primary reality that God wanted to create is found in the next phase of his creative activity (the creation represented by the seventh day in the creation account).<sup>44</sup> The phase of creation in which we now find ourselves (represented as the seventh day) is the very point and purpose for there being any created reality at all. So, THIS is the truth that is worth remembering on a weekly basis through Sabbath observance—namely, the truth that, in this present time, insofar as God is engaged in creating the nexus of interlocking human stories that constitute human history, God is engaged in creating *the primary thing that he set out to create from before the foundation of the world*. In other words, this is the real deal, the main event.

But why is that point worth remembering? Why is that fact significant to me? Because it means that *my present existence, my story, is a part of the very point and purpose of created reality*. My

---

44. God’s creation of the cosmos (of the heavens and the earth and of everything that is in them) was not intended to be an end in itself. It was intended to make possible something that was more important and more significant. After God completed the creative activity described in the first six days, he was not done! Created reality is not a static installation piece. It is an ongoing project. God’s creative activity continues. The sixth day of the creation account was not the end, it was the beginning. It was not the culmination of God’s purposes, it was a turning point in those purposes. The sixth day DID mark the end of the *preparation phase* of God’s project. But it did NOT mark the end of his project altogether. The author of the creation account says that God sanctified the seventh day because “in it he rested from all his work which God had created and made.” It is important to understand his point. He is not saying that God sanctified the seventh day because “in it he RESTED.” Rather, he is saying that he sanctified the seventh day because in it he *ceased* (“rested”) *from all his work which God had created and made*.” It is not THE FACT that God ceased working that is important, it is WHAT God ceased working on that is important. He ceased working on all those things that are mentioned during the six work days of creation. He ceased working to bring into being the heavens, the earth, the seas, and everything that lived in them. Now what were those things? They were the elements of reality that would make the ongoing history of mankind possible. They were the context; they were the stage upon which the human drama would unfold. They were the things that constituted the scene within which God would create the story he wanted to create. So, what is the author’s point? God sanctified the seventh day because, in it, God was no longer involved in *preparing* for the main event, he had now shifted his focus on to *making* the main event itself. On the seventh day, no longer are we waiting for God to get ready to create what he ultimately set out to create. Now he can begin creating it. He can now focus on the story of mankind itself.

life and being is right at the center of God's creative project. Therefore, *my existence is meaningful and significant.*

I will develop this idea further. If my life and existence as an individual is part and parcel of the very thing that God wanted to create when he purposed to bring reality into existence in the first place, there are three important ramifications of this fact:

(1) My existence has meaning and purpose.

My existence is not some incidental, unplanned accident. It is not a meaningless, random event. It is a part of the predetermined purpose of God. In the beginning, when there was only blank, sterile nothingness, God was moved to create a multitude of human stories. My personal, individual story was one of those. Therefore, before the foundation of created reality, God willed reality into existence in order that my story (along with many, many others) might come to be. My life, my being, and my story was purposed and pre-determined by God. It is not a meaningless chance accident. It is a creation of the author of all reality.

(2) My existence has substance, weight, and significance.

In the beginning, when there was blank, sterile nothingness, what is it that moved God to will a universe into existence? Not a desire for stars, galaxies, and solar systems to exist. Rather, a desire to create a multitude of human stories. At the center of God's purpose in bringing reality into existence was his desire to create a set of interlocking stories among human beings. And my personal, individual story was one of them. My life, then, is not part of some sort of dress rehearsal or practice session. It is part of the main performance itself. It is why the universe exists. Hence, it has all the weight, solemnity, and seriousness of a main performance. It is not something that I can take casually. I must regard it with the utmost seriousness. It is not on the periphery of God's creative project. It is right at the heart and center of it. My existence is part of *the primary purpose* of God. And it bears all the weight that goes with that.

Therefore, every choice I face in my life involves my creating the real, permanent, divinely-willed story that God wants to create. The life-story that I create through my choices is the creation that God has purposed from before the foundation of the world. Therefore, *it is not trivial!* It is not something I can view with indifference. It is not something I can fritter away. And it is not something I can take lightly. *I must treat my life and choices with the utmost seriousness.*

(3) My life exists FOR God.

Every ounce of the meaning and significance of my existence is derived from the purposes of God. Apart from God and his purposes, my existence has no meaning. Therefore, my entire existence should be lived out under the understanding that I am here (that I exist) FOR God. I exist to serve his purposes. Therefore, my existence should be given over to knowing him, honoring him, obeying him, serving him, and loving him.

In the final analysis, then, the purpose of Sabbath-keeping comes down to this—*that I might remember and reflect on the truth that my life and existence have purpose and significance that*

*comes from God.* That is the truth that is so worth remembering that God sanctioned setting apart a day to be devoted to remembering it.

We can capture the full force of what the author of the creation account is saying with regard to Sabbath observance this way: God “blessed” Sabbath observance and set the weekly Sabbath day apart as “holy” to the end that I (as a Sabbath observer) might remember, reflect on, and commemorate this extremely important truth: *because my existence right now is an integral part of what constitutes the primary object of God’s creative effort, my existence has meaning, purpose, weight, and substance which are derived from the creative purpose of God. And because the meaning and significance of my existence is derived from God, I should devote myself to knowing, serving, and honoring him.*<sup>45</sup>

## The Significance and Import of The Creation Account

From what has been said, it should be clear what a vitally important portion of Scripture the initial creation account is. It would be difficult to think of a passage that has greater importance. Having a mastery of what this account teaches and what it entails is foundational to understanding everything else that the Bible teaches. What is taught here, in this account, is implicitly assumed by every verse of the Bible. In this account, it is taught explicitly, directly, and overtly. That is why it is so critical to understand this passage.

I conclude this paper by highlighting the most important contributions that this account makes to our understanding of the objective truth about reality. The creation account teaches us six important things:

- (1) It teaches us that transcendent monotheism is the right model for conceiving of God (Yahweh).
  - It teaches the concept of divine transcendence—namely, the concept that God does not exist on the same plane of reality that we inhabit. God exists above and beyond the plane

---

45. An objection could be raised that other passages seem to offer a different perspective on the meaning and significance of Sabbath-observance. In *Exodus* 31:13, Israel is instructed to keep the Sabbath, “for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.” They are to celebrate it “as a perpetual covenant.” (*Exodus* 31:16) In *Deuteronomy*. 5:15, Moses tells Israel, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.” In *Ezekiel* 20:12, the prophet says, “Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.” And again, in *Ezekiel* 20:20, Yahweh says, “Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.” However, none of these other statements are in conflict with the meaning and significance of the Sabbath that is taught here in *Genesis* 2:3. True, “keeping the Sabbath” is a perpetual covenant between Israel and Yahweh that traces back to God delivering them from Egypt, making a covenant with them at Sinai, and committing himself to be their God even as he sets them apart as his people. But this does not constitute the *meaning* of Sabbath observance. (The meaning of Sabbath observance is spelled out in *Genesis* 2:3.) Rather, it speaks to the *significance of why God, as a part of his covenant with Israel, instructed Israel to faithfully observe the Sabbath.* Israel’s faithful practice of Sabbath observance will be a sign of their covenant with Yahweh throughout their generations. But the *meaning* of Sabbath observance is what we have explicated in this paper.

on which we live. He does not “exist” with the same sort of being and reality that we possess. Rather, he “exists” with a sort of being and reality that is “higher” than the one we possess. At a time when we had no being or reality at all, God *did*. God *was*, when created reality was *not*. In other words, God *transcends* the created realm in which we live; he exists above and beyond it. It is not as if he lives in the upper story of the same house in which we live. Rather, it is as if he lives outside our house altogether, as its architect and builder.<sup>46</sup>

- It also teaches monotheism—that is, it teaches that there is one and only one divine will that governs the shape and direction of reality, that there is one and only one will that counts. According to this creation account, the singular divine will that matters is the will of Yahweh. It is Yahweh’s will and purpose that controls everything about reality.<sup>47</sup> Whatever Yahweh wants, that is what reality will be.

(2) It teaches us that total divine determinism is the right model for understanding the relationship between God and created reality.

- It teaches total divine determinism—that is, it teaches that absolutely everything that is and everything that occurs is caused by and determined by God. Since nothing can come into existence except by God willing it to be, there is nothing that exists and nothing that occurs that God has not willed to be. God is not a bigger and more powerful version of us. He does not use strength or might to craft, fashion, or cause reality to be what he wants it to be. Rather, he shapes and governs reality by simply *willing* reality to be what he wants it to be. He only has to think, “Let there be X,” and there will be X. Given the “power” of his will, there is nothing in all of reality that is outside the scope of his creative will. God is an entirely different sort of being who transcends the created realm and, from his position outside of it, *he causes and determines everything that happens within it*. Nothing that comes into existence in created reality comes into existence in any other way, or from any other source. God’s will causes and determines absolutely everything.<sup>48</sup>

(3) It teaches us that the right conception of who God is in relation to us (and in relation to the rest of the created order) is to conceive of him as the *author* of all reality.

- The relationship between an author and the characters in a story that that author is creating is the only conceivable relationship where one being (the author) has total determinative control over the existence of another being (e.g., the character) *simply*

---

46. Hence, before anything existed at all—when blank, sterile nothingness was all that was there—the spirit of God DID EXIST and “moved upon the face of the deep.” His being and existence are clearly being portrayed in the creation account as independent of, apart from, prior to, and “above” the created reality of which we are a part.

47. This is represented in the account by repeated assertions to the effect that when God said, “let it be so,” it was so. The clear intent of the account is to portray the will of Yahweh as determinative of the way reality is.

48. Granted, the creation account does not explicitly and specifically make the claim that there are absolutely no exceptions to the determinative control of God’s will. However, I would argue that that is the intent of the account. The creation account intends to depict God as the sort of being who, in his relationship to the created realm, is totally and absolutely in determinative control. Hence, while total divine determinism is not explicitly taught in the creation account, it is arguably implicit within that account.

*through the operation of his will.*<sup>49</sup> Since this is exactly how the creation account depicts God—namely, that, through nothing other than his will and imagination, he has total determinative control over everything that exists—it follows that there is an analogy between what God is to us and what an author is to the characters in a story he is creating.<sup>50</sup> In other words, it follows that God—in a manner of speaking—is the “author” of all created reality.<sup>51</sup>

- (4) It teaches us that human beings are qualitatively different from the rest of God’s creation and that, in fact, they are the most important of all of God’s creatures.
- The cosmos that God created was created in order to provide the setting—the context—for the multitude of interlocking storylines centered around human beings. Each and every human being is the primary character within the drama of his life. All other creatures are simply supporting characters or props within that drama.
- (5) It teaches us that each of our lives, individually, is a substantive, non-trivial creation of God that deserves to be treated with the utmost seriousness and gravity.
- Creating the story of my life is an essential element within the primary, most important, and ultimate purpose of the divine creator. The creation of the physical cosmos—the phase of God’s creative project outlined in the creation account—was *not* God’s primary purpose. It was merely preparatory to what God really wanted to accomplish. From the beginning, God’s ultimate project was to create a nexus of interlocking human stories. The physical cosmos simply created the context and arena within which those stories were to take place. Because the story of my life is an essential component of God’s *primary* purpose and agenda, it follows that my existence right now is at the center of God’s primary project.<sup>52</sup> My existence, therefore, is a weighty, important, and significant matter. I dare not deem trivial what God has deemed of utmost importance. I dare not treat causally what God treats with seriousness.

- 
49. At least, the author-character relationship is the only relationship I have been able to conceive where one being can shape and create the being of another through nothing other than his imagination and will.
50. The creation account clearly presents God as being able to will, “Let there be X,” and there will be X. Nothing in the account suggest that God has a wizard-like knowledge and control of “spiritual forces” such that he can “command” those forces to do what he wants done. Rather, the account clearly intends to depict God as shaping and controlling reality through his mere will. He is not commanding powers that are inherent within reality to “cause” reality to be what he wants it to be. It is God’s *will*, pure and simple—and not spiritual forces at God’s command—that controls and determines the shape of created reality. Hence, God must not be conceived as wizard-like. He must be conceived as author-like. In our experience, only an author is capable of controlling and determining the shape of some reality (namely, the story he is authoring) by his will, pure and simple.
51. There is another point of analogy between God and an author. An author “transcends” the reality of his story just as God “transcends” created reality. Just as the author is not a peer to the characters in his story, God is not our peer. We do not and cannot exist alongside of him as his equal. Neither do we—nor can we—exist and function independently of him. Anything and everything we choose will and must be because God has willed that we do so. Hence, he exists as our “author,” not as a fellow actor.
52. My individual existence is more central to God’s purposes (and more important to God) than the existence of the most massive star in the universe!

(6) It teaches us that human existence is not given to me so that I might flourish, materially and physically, it is given to me so that I might function as the protagonist in a story that God wants to tell and, preferably (for me), to the end that—as the protagonist in my story—I might learn to conduct myself as a truly good and godly person.

- The creation account *emphasizes* the fact that God’s creation of the physical cosmos came to an end. It was not an enduring project. God finished his creation of the physical cosmos and quit working on it. In the context of the remainder of *Genesis*, such an emphasis suggests how relatively unimportant the physical cosmos is. The physical universe was not at the heart of what God set out to create. Rather, the “heavens and the earth” was merely the stage, the context, the arena within which God would create what he wanted to create. My physical being and existence is a part of the physical cosmos. So, what can be said of the physical cosmos can be said of my physical being as well. It is the *context* in and through which my personal being expresses itself. *It is not the center and essence of what God is creating as he creates me.* God’s essential purpose, in my existence, is to create a “person,” not to create a tangible, material being. Therefore, just as the cosmos itself is only the context for God’s real project, so my physical existence is only the context for the real individual that God wants to create in his creation of me. What is of primary importance to God is not my physical, material being, it is the invisible, intangible *person* that I am. God’s real project is to create, in me, the protagonist of an eternally relevant story, not to keep and preserve me physically.

- Admittedly, the creation account *per se* does not explicitly teach that God’s primary interest in me is to make my existence an eternally relevant story. This must be derived from various clues we glean from the rest of the Scriptures. But that this is, in fact, the case is implicit in what the author of *Genesis* is seeking to accomplish by composing the creation account as he does and positioning it in the larger work of *Genesis* as he does. Namely, *Genesis* clearly sets out to tell the beginning of the story of mankind. One can reasonably conclude that the *stories* are what is important. The creation account is the account of how God began and finished creating the context for the *stories* that were to follow.

- It is better for me if my story is the story of a person who learns to conduct himself as a truly good and godly person. However, this particular fact is not taught in the creation account at all. It can only be gleaned from the teaching of the rest of Scripture.

- God, as part of his choosing Israel for his covenant people, commanded each individual Jew to set aside each Sabbath day to reflect on the true meaning and purpose of his individual existence. Every Sabbath he was to cease from “work” (from his pursuit of mere survival) in order to remember and reflect on the real meaning and significance of his existence. Specifically, he was to reflect on the fact that he was not given existence merely so that he might survive, or even flourish, he was given existence so that his life might tell a story—a story that would embody for all eternity something of who God, the Author, is.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, every Sabbath day, the individual Jew was to step aside from the

---

53. The creation account is intentionally composed in such a way that, as a secondary purpose, it explains the purpose and rationale for Sabbath observance. Sabbath-observance involves ceasing to engage in the work of ordinary, everyday survival for that one day in order to reflect on the fact that one’s existence involves much

preoccupations of his workaday life and consider carefully what shape and flavor he wanted to give to his existence—an existence granted to him by his author. Would he make choices that ultimately made his existence tragic—choices that led to condemnation, judgment, and destruction? Or would he make choices that ultimately made his existence blessed—choices that led to mercy, forgiveness, honor, and glory? The Sabbath day was a day set aside for him to contemplate that question.

---

more than mere physical survival. The creation account suggests that God’s creation of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them was not meant to be an end in itself. It was intended to make something more important possible. By the same token, I was given physical existence (within that physical cosmos), not as an end in itself, but as a means to a greater end. Hence, the significance of my existence transcends my mere survival. There is something about me that is more important than my physical wellbeing. The purpose of Sabbath observance is so that the Sabbath-observer might take time to reflect on what that something more important is.

# Appendix A

## The Creation Account

### *Genesis 1:1–2:4a*

#### NASV Translation

#### (Re-formatted)

#### Summary Introduction

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

1:1

#### Prologue

The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

1:2

#### Day One

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 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, one day.

1:3–5

#### Day Two

Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

1:6–8

#### Day Three

Then God said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, *and* fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them"; and it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a third day.

1:9–13

#### Day Four

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; *He made* the stars also. God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to govern

the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

1:14–19

Day Five

Then God said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

1:20–23

Day Six

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, *I have given* every green plant for food"; and it was so. God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

1:24–31

Day Seven–Sabbath Day

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

2:1–3

Identifying "Title" of the Account Just Concluded

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

2:4a

# Appendix B

## *Genesis* 1:1–2:4a

### Analysis of the Structure of the Different Acts of Creation Elements That Make Up the Accounts of These Different Acts of Creation

The author of the creation account assigns different acts of creation to different “days” of the week and composes a different account for each of the “days.” Each different act of creation is concerned with a different segment of reality. Hence, each day represents a separate and distinct account of the creation of a different segment of reality. Each of these separate and distinct accounts (days) is composed from a set of thirteen different literary elements. The table below lists and describes the thirteen different elements from which the author composes each distinct account of the six different acts of creation that he has assigned to six different days of the week.

ELEMENT ID	ELEMENT NAME	ELEMENT DESCRIPTION
A	WILL	Statement of God’s will or desire that some particular thing be so. (This is <i>the formulaic beginning</i> of each “day.”)
B	SEPARATION - DISTINCTION	Statement of some act of separation that is necessary to the creation of something that God desires; or, alternatively, the description of a distinction that God created among the created realities.
C	RESULT-FACT	Description of the result or outcome of God’s will or desire that some particular thing be so by simply stating that as a matter of fact it came to be.
D	RESULT- DESCRIPTION	Statement of the result or outcome of God’s willing that some particular thing be so—a statement of exactly what God made and why he made it.
E	PURPOSE	Statement of the divine purpose for the thing that God created.
F	NAME	Identification of the name for the thing that God created.
G	EVALUATION	Statement of God’s evaluation of the result or outcome of his willing that some particular thing be so.
Hr	BLESSING - REPRODUCTION	Statement of God’s approval (blessing) of the reproduction (multiplying) of a thing.
Hs	BLESSING- SANCTIFIED STATUS	Statement of God’s approval (blessing) of a practice (activity) as special, sanctified.
I	CREATED NATURE	Description of something about the nature of some specific thing that God created.
J	INSTRUCTION	Statement of God’s instruction to humankind with respect to certain purposes for the things that he has created.
K	DAYS	Identification of one particular domain within the reality that God has created. (This is <i>the formulaic ending</i> of each of the six distinct accounts of God’s creative activity.)
L	REST	Statement that God has completed and, therefore, ceased his creative “work.”

**Analysis of the Elements Included in Each of the “Days”**

Below is a table that displays which of the above elements occur in each of the accounts of the six different acts (days) of the creation account. It also displays the order in which the elements occur in each of the accounts.

- Note that Day 3 and Day 6 each describe two distinct acts of creation. I have indicated the separate acts of creation on each of these days by identifying them as “Day 3a,” “Day 3b,” “Day 6a,” and “Day 6b.”
- The left hand column lists the specific account (“Day”) that is being analyzed. The right hand column displays the elements that are utilized in that account (by way of their Element ID), and it lists them (from left to right) in the order in which they occur in the account.
- Sometimes the author modifies an element by combining it with one or more of the other elements. When a dominant element subsumes another element within it, I use the following notation: A(+B). This notation means that element B has been combined with and has been subsumed within element A. If more than one element has been subsumed within a dominant element, the notation will look like this: A(+B+E). This notation means that both elements B and E have been combined with and have been subsumed within element A.

	<b>Sequence of the narrative elements that make up the account for this Day:</b>
DAY 1	A—C—G—B—F—K
DAY 2	A(+B+E)—D—C—F—K
DAY 3a	A(+B)—F—G
DAY 3b	A(+B)—C—D(+B)—G—K
DAY 4	A(+E+B)—C—D(+E+B)—G—K
DAY 5	A—D(+B)—G—Hr—K
DAY 6a	A(+B)—C—D(+B)—G
DAY 6b	A(+I+E)—D(+I)—Hr(+E)—J—C—G—K
DAY 7	C—L—Hs

When we observe the structure of these accounts of God’s creative acts on day 1 through day 6, we note that *there is no obviously discernible pattern*. Both the elements that compose each account and the order in which these elements occur within each account vary significantly from one day to the next. It does not appear that the author is attempting to compose his accounts in such a way that they conform to some established form. Therefore, it is not particularly helpful to view *Genesis* 1:1–2:4a (the creation account) as an instance of poetry, nor as an instance of any

other literary form. It simply does not present itself as such. It is certainly true that—through a repetition of certain formulaic phrases—the author has created a larger, overarching structure to *Genesis* 1:1–2:4a. But this larger, overarching structure is the only literary structure to be found in the account. Within this larger structure, the author exercises a great deal of freedom. And he composes his accounts with a great deal of variety.

# Appendix C

## The Creation Account and Evolution

What bearing does the creation account have on the theory of evolution? Is the theory of evolution compatible with the creation account in *Genesis* 1:1–2:4a? Or is the creation account completely incompatible with the theory of evolution?

(1) It should be obvious that the creation account is absolutely incompatible with any theory of evolution (like Darwinian theory) that attributes the existence of life to *random accident* rather than intelligent purpose. The creation account clearly and indisputably entails that all of created reality, included biological life, was designed, purposed, and brought into being in accord with the purposes of an intelligent being. Therefore, any theory that maintains—with respect to *any part* of reality—that our present reality came to be as a result of undirected, random accident is utterly incompatible with the creation account.

- Any theory of “theistic evolution” that attempts to simultaneously believe that God created the world and that life evolved through random occurrence and natural selection is fundamentally incoherent. The concepts of divine creation and evolution *through randomness* are rationally incompatible. One or the other must be the case. It makes no sense whatsoever to attempt to claim that both are true.

- Therefore, the only theory of “theistic evolution” that could make any sense at all would be a theory that posits that certain mechanisms and initial conditions were “programmed” into an original “seed” of life such that the whole course and history of the evolution of life was predetermined in the creation of that original “seed” of life. Nothing in the creation account is incompatible with such a theory. But only a theory of “theistic evolution” such as this—one that posits “intelligent design”—can possibly be construed as compatible with the creation account.

- If we create a false dichotomy between “intelligent design” and “evolution” such that we construe them to be mutually exclusive theories, then clearly the creation account supports intelligent design *rather than* evolution. However, as the above point suggests, there is no reason to reject the possibility that the processes of evolution were intelligently designed. Hence, evolutionary theory does not have to be incompatible with intelligent design.<sup>54</sup>

(2) It should be clear from this paper that the creation account does not intend to teach—nor does it require us to treat as fact—that the heavens and the earth and everything in them were created by God in six days (that is, six 24-hour periods). According to the creation account, God said, “Let there be X,” and there was X. However, it does not indicate how long it took

---

54. However, it is a cultural reality, today, that those who passionately advocate for accepting the theory of evolution as scientific fact inevitably mean to preclude creationism and intelligent design in any form whatsoever. But such passionate advocates of evolutionary theory hold a philosophically invalid perspective. There is no necessary incompatibility between evolution and intelligent design. The necessary incompatibility lies between *evolution as a result of random occurrences* and *intelligent design*.

for X to result after God had willed for X to be. So far as the creation account is concerned, it could have taken one nanosecond, or it could have taken 100 billion years. The creation account does not intend to give a description of the historical events that constituted God’s creation of the heavens and the earth. Hence, it is not part of the purpose of the creation account to describe how long it took for God to create what he created. Therefore, in that sense—from the standpoint of time scale—the creation account is not incompatible with any theory of evolution.<sup>55</sup>

- (3) The creation account does not intend to teach—nor does it require us to treat as fact—any form of evolutionary process whatsoever. The purpose of the creation account is to teach the FACT that God created all of created reality *by willing it into existence*. It is not its purpose to describe what it looked like when he did so. So far as the creation account is concerned, we cannot reject the possibility that, by the will of God, a set of fully-developed creatures just spontaneously popped into existence in an instance. This is just as compatible with the purpose of the creation account as are evolutionary processes.
- (4) It follows from the above points that, from what is taught in the creation account, we will have no basis for deciding whether God employed any evolutionary processes when he created created reality. This question will need to be answered on the basis of sound philosophical reflection alongside insights gained from the advance of scientific knowledge.

- Two things are, in fact, true with regard to theories of biological evolution: (1) I can embrace the absolute authority and inerrancy of Scripture, but yet realize that *no biblical teaching* rules out the possibility of intelligently-guided biological evolution, and (2) I might nevertheless find that a theory of intelligently-guided biological evolution is implausible on *strictly scientific and philosophical grounds*. Hence, while there is no biblical basis for challenging intelligently-guided biological evolution, there might still remain strictly scientific and philosophical grounds for challenging it.<sup>56</sup>

---

55. However, see point 1.

56. I do, as a matter of fact—on strictly scientific and philosophical grounds—have serious questions about the plausibility of intelligently-guided biological evolution. Until and unless some advance in scientific knowledge renders it more plausible than it is now, I doubt that life resulted from strictly evolutionary processes, intelligently-designed or otherwise.

# Appendix D

## Keeping the Sabbath

If our observance of the Sabbath were informed by what the creation account says about the Sabbath, how and why would we keep the Sabbath? I will answer this by answering the following questions:

(1) In the light of what we find in *Genesis* 1, why would a person observe the Sabbath? What would be the point?

- The purpose of Sabbath-observance is to devote a day to reflecting on the fact that there is more to my existence than physical survival and flourishing in this present material world. After God created the physical cosmos, he was not done creating. The physical cosmos was not God’s primary project and agenda. It was only the arena within which his primary work was to be created. Therefore, physical flourishing in the physical universe is not the point of my existence. The point of my existence goes beyond that and is more than that. The point of my existence is to embody the moral values and attributes of God in the drama and narrative of my life. To be a good human creature would be to reflect the righteousness and goodness of God in all that I do, in all that I think, and in all that I desire. That is what my existence is really all about. It is about being a good human creature. The purpose of Sabbath-observance is to reflect on this very fact.

- If and when one chooses to “keep the Sabbath,” it would be in order to remember, reflect on, acknowledge, and reinforce the belief that the purpose of human existence—beyond physical survival and material flourishing—is to the end that one might flourish as a personal being, made in the image of God. The purpose of my existence is to the end that I be a good person, not to the end that I have a satisfied body.

(2) In the light of what we find in *Genesis* 1, how would one observe the Sabbath? What would one do on the Sabbath day?

- To observe the Sabbath, one will stop doing those things he normally does in pursuit of survival and material flourishing. He will do other things instead. What “other things” will he do? He will do things that help him remember, reflect on, acknowledge, or reinforce his belief in the truth that the purpose of human existence is to be a good person. Sabbath observance would not primarily be defined by what one *does*; it would primarily be defined by what he does *not* do. Specifically, he does not do what he normally does (the other six days of the week) in order to pursue survival and/or to seek material flourishing.

(3) In the light of what we find in *Genesis* 1, what is the connection between what Sabbath observance means and what one does to keep the Sabbath?

- After completing his “work” of creating the physical cosmos on the sixth day, God stopped (on the seventh day) “working” on that phase of his project. He stopped creating the physical cosmos. He began, instead, to focus on that phase of his project that

pertained to the personal (the spiritual) aspect of his creation. For this reason, we remember the fact that there is more to human existence than its physical aspect by imitating God's seventh day. Specifically, we stop working on that aspect of our existence that pertains to physical, material reality, and we focus instead on that aspect of our existence that pertains to the personal (the spiritual). For that is what God did on the seventh day of the creation account: he ceased "working" on the physical material cosmos and turned to working on the storylines of human persons.

- God, on the seventh day of the creation account, was turning to what was of primary importance within his project: individual human persons and their stories. And he ceased to concern himself with the mere background and context for those individuals and their stories, the physical universe. Sabbath observance is meant to be an imitation of God and his priorities. I am to turn my attention to what is of primary importance: my individual personhood and the story that my life will tell. And I must turn my attention away from the physical and material context of my life and story.

(4) In the light of what we find in *Genesis* 1, is it necessary to keep the Sabbath? Is it an obligation?

- There is nothing in *Genesis* 1, or anywhere else in the Bible, that suggests that Sabbath-keeping is a universally-binding religious obligation placed upon all of mankind. Because God included it as one of the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant, it is a binding religious obligation on God's chosen people, the Jews. But there is nothing to suggest that it is a binding religious obligation on all of mankind. While Sabbath observance could be meaningful and instructive for any and every human being, it is not obligatory. It would appear that Sabbath observance was a religious practice that was known and understood before God made his covenant with Israel. It is possible, therefore, that God had already required Sabbath observance of at least some human beings. However, we have no record of any divine instructions to that effect. So we have no way of knowing who it was that was placed under such an obligation. Therefore, in the absence of any clear evidence to the contrary, we must assume that Sabbath-keeping is not an obligation that has been placed on human beings as human beings.