Genesis 1 and 2 are True; Creationism is Not **[1]**

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I am fortunate to be a father of two small children in a time where we have Bluey1. In an episode entitled Fairytale [2], Bingo asks her dad, Bandit, whether fairytales are “true, or not true”. Many parents may have the knee-jerk response of saying that they are “not true” and only made-up stories. But Bandit has a more nuanced reply, “what do you mean by true?” He goes on to explain that the stories did not happen “for real”, but that “they’ve got true things in them”.

The creation story (stories?) in Genesis 1 and 2 are famous for causing controversy with rationalists who take science seriously. The fossil record and astronomical observations point to the earth, and life on it, emerging over millions and billions of years. On the other hand are those for whom it is important to take the Bible literally. They argue that, if the creation story should be read metaphorically, then it will create a slippery slope where nothing of the Bible can eventually be read as recording real history. Everything in the Bible can then be allegorised, leading to endless opportunities for the Bible to be abused and a myriad of heresies to be conceived. People can then also fall away from or reject the faith, because they are not compelled by historical facts to believe [3].

I do not believe that the dichotomy between rationalists and literalists is the only option. What muddies the water, is Western culture’s insistence that something had to have taken place in space and time for it to be true, or have relevance and meaning. N. T. Wright argues that the conflict over the literal interpretation of the creation account in Genesis is a consequence of enlightenment rationalism that developed particularly in north America.

The first thing to say about the creation story is that it is not about how God created the world in seven days. If someone summarises the story in Genesis 1 in one sentence as “God made the world in seven days”, then they have missed the point. The subtle features of the story, such as each creation being “good”, with the contrast of everything together being described as “very good”, the first six days being described as ending while the last day doesn’t, all point to deeper descriptions of creation than merely answering the question “where do the sun and plants come from?” In ancient literature, subtle changes or breaks in patterns were used for emphasis. We see, therefore, that Genesis 1 is a carefully crafted literary piece.

Genesis 1 and 2 are about God, and who God is. It is not the story of how the world was created, where God is merely a character in a narrative. It doesn’t assume God as a character, it introduces God. The opening chapters of God’s revealed message to the world is all about Him.

The opening lines of Genesis 1 have been imitated and parodied countless times. Perhaps the earliest imitation is from the first century Gospel According to John, which fused the Jewish religion with gentile (Greek) philosophy to stunning effect. It does this to tell us about the divinity of Jesus:

> In the beginning was the Word,
> and the Word was with God,
> and the Word was God.
> The same was in the beginning with God.
> All things were made through Him.
> Without Him, nothing was made that has been made.
> In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
>
> John 1:1–4

A modern parody is found in Douglas Adams' *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*:

> In the beginning the Universe was created. This has made a lot of people very angry and been widely regarded as a bad move.
>
> Douglas Adams, The Restaurant at the End of the Universe

This quote conveys Adams' “radical atheism” (as Adams described himself [4]), by representing the supposed creator God of the universe as a buffoon. It is subtle in referring to the universe as being created, but not mentioning God, thereby side lining Him, focussing only on the unhappy created beings (such as those who consider themselves to live in a senseless world where the only recourse is nihilism, or the absurdist comedy, in which Adams was so proficient).

Both of these are intended to tell us primarily about the Creator (or lack of), with the implication on creation being secondary, or even implied. Is it not reasonable for the original version in Genesis 1 does the same?

It is noteworthy that, in the early church, there was no consensus among the church fathers as to whether or not Genesis 1 or 2 should be taken literally. For example, Origin of Alexandria pointed out the apparent contradiction that the sun, which gives daylight, was created on the fourth day, after “day” was created on the first day. This led him to conclude that the account is not literal. The early church fathers also did not insist that there should be a consensus on whether the creation account was literal. This is in contrast to, for example, the virgin birth. For this reason the historical creeds do not address the subject beyond “God, creator of heaven and earth”. The early church did not think that interpreting Genesis 1 and 2 allegorically would compromise the historical integrity of other parts of the Bible. It is only relatively recently that we have seen such a fervent insistence by some that Genesis 1 and 2 should be taken literally.

The story of Genesis 1 and 2 is not a story about what happened in time and space. Instead, it is a gospel story. Imagine the following: three thousand years ago, a group of people from different near-eastern nations are travelling together. Perhaps they are sailors2, or traders, or mercenary soldiers. Whatever the reason that has brought them together, they are all far away from home. The group is sitting around a camp fire, settling down for the night. They pass the time by telling each other stories from their respective cultures. Particularly, they are sharing stories about how the world was created. They are not arguing or trying to convert each other; after all, their stories and culture are as much part of their identity as their skin or eye colour. They understand that, however the world was created, no-one was *there* to witness it; the story had to have been revealed by the divine. First the Egyptian told of how Atum was birthed from the earth which emerged from the receding chaotic, primeval waters. He caused, through something likened to masturbation, the gods Shu and Tefnut to be produced. The offspring of these two gods then created the pantheon of gods, through which life

on earth became possible. Next the man from Nineveh told his story of the first gods who brought forth new gods. This led to a conflict with the other gods (including the creation of monsters to fight as proxies), and they warred it out, until Marduk was proclaimed to be the supreme god. Marduk then created the whole world, and lastly mankind, to serve the gods. After him the Greek tells the story of the god Eros, and his union with the goddess Gaia, through which the cosmos came to be. The long story then became even more lurid with gods committing incest, eating their own children, their jealousy of and revenge on each other, until the prevailing pantheon had been established. Finally, the Hebrew tells his story. His God, Yahweh, spoke the world into existence. He brought order to chaos. He spoke, and the light, the sun and moon, the rivers and sea, earth and sky, plants and animals came into being. He looked at what he did, and He declared it good (it's goodness did not come from a standard or measurement outside of God, but was bestowed on creation by God). Then He created man and woman, *in His own image*, as the peak of His handiwork. They were to *represent* God in His creation. He gifted to them the rest of His creation to steward.

The contrast of the Hebrew's story to the stories of his geographic neighbours could not be more stark. There was no copulation, no competition, no violence. There was unchallenged, supreme authority, which was also kind, compassionate, and generous. Similarities (such as the waters of chaos) were superficial.

To think that the creation story exists to satisfy the modern Western obsession with stories rooted in time and space is arrogant. Before Jesus came to reveal Kingdom of God, before Moses and the prophets showed Israel God's grace and kindness, before God blessed Abraham, the creation story in Genesis could be used to show who God really is in contradistinction to how the notion of God and nature of creation had been perverted. According to Paul:

> For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, "But the righteous shall live by faith." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known of God is revealed in them, for God revealed it to them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity, that they may be without excuse. Because knowing God, they didn't glorify him as God, and didn't give thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened.
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> Romans 1:17–21

Creation itself reveals the nature of God to us. But because our hearts are hard, we need more direct revelation from God. God has always engaged with humanity, though, as we see in the opening chapters of Genesis. By telling people the creation story *as God Himself revealed to us*, we are not imparting a set of facts. Instead, the hearer is faced by a choice: are their hearts warmed by the character of the true and living God, and do they choose to emulate their true Creator, or do they reject Him, and continue to pursue their own ideas of reality?

There are other reasons that people have put forward for why the creation account in Genesis is not literal history. See, for example, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* by John Walton. I won't go into the details of Walton's arguments here, but will say that these reasons are not necessarily mutually exclusive with what I have proposed.

Those who are in Christ should follow their conscience. But by restricting the creation story to a mere historical retelling of facts is to miss it as a gospel tool. It needs to be viewed in the context of *other stories* being told at the time to appreciate its impact and power. The creationist could say that this could be true and Genesis 1 and 2 could still be literal history. That might be so, but not necessarily. Here, following the wisdom of the early church, I conclude the article.

- 1. Bluey is a popular kids cartoon from Australia. Described by some as "the children's show for adults [5]", it's subtle treatment of relatable and difficult subjects in parenting have made

it popular across generations and continents.
- 2. Cf. Jonah 1:5.

Categories:

- Theology [6]
- Bible Study [7]

Tags:

- creation [8]
- myths [9]
- john walton [10]
- douglas adams [11]
- bluey [12]

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