

THE CREATION

A Brief Outline Study



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NOTE

The following outline is not intended to be exhaustive on this somewhat complex doctrine. For further, more detailed information readers are encouraged to examine this topic in the resources listed in the bibliography.

THE CREATION

A. GOD CREATED THE UNIVERSE OUT OF NOTHING

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. Hebrews 11:3

1. *Ex nihilo* creation
 - a) *Ex nihilo* → the Latin phrase meaning “out of nothing” (see also 2 Macc. 7:28)
 - b) *Bara* (Hebrew) in Genesis 1:1, 21, 27; cf. 2:3-4; 5:1-2; 6:7 means to create—while the expression “out of nothing” does not appear here (but cf. Heb. 11:3), most scholars accept this as the nuance behind the creation story, namely, that God did not use any previously made material in order to create (Mounce)
 - c) This *creatio ex nihilo* has important theological implications, for among other things it precludes the idea that matter is eternal (materialism)
 - d) To say created “out of nothing,” does not mean that “nothing” was some kind of invisible, immaterial something that God used to make the material universe (Geisler)
 - e) Before God began to create the universe, nothing existed except God himself (Grudem)
 - f) The only source of creation is God, he alone can create something from nothing (Augustine)
 - g) The phrase “heavens and earth” includes the entire universe, all things (Rev. 4:11)
 - h) An initial way of identifying God is to say that he is the one who created all things
 - i) Man was not created *ex nihilo*, but out of the dust of the ground (H. *adamah* Gen. 2:7)
 - j) The beasts of the field and the fowls of the air were also formed out of the ground (Gen. 2:19) --this has been called secondary creation (Bavinck)
2. The creation of the invisible spiritual universe
 - a) When God created the entire universe it included the creation of an unseen, spiritual realm of angels, and other heavenly creatures, as well as animals and man (Rev. 4:6-9; 10:6; cf. Acts 4:24; Neh. 9:6)
 - b) Paul points out that in Christ all things were created—both visible and invisible (Col. 1:16)
 - c) Though God is omnipresent he created heaven where his presence is most fully known
 - d) All religions recognize such a spiritual realm even though their understanding is based on incorrect views—gods, demigods, human-like deities, spirits, souls, etc. (Bavinck)
3. The direct creation of Adam and Eve
 - a) The Bible reveals that God created Adam and Eve in a very special, personal way—he formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostril the breath of life so that man became a living being (Gen. 2:7)
 - b) After that, God created Eve from Adam's body (Gen. 2:21-22)
 - c) It would, therefore, be very difficult for someone to hold to the complete truthfulness of Scripture and still hold that human beings are the result of a long evolutionary process (Grudem)
 - d) When Scripture says that the Lord formed man of dust from the ground it does not seem possible to understand that to mean that he did it over a process that took millions of years and used the random development of thousands of increasingly complex organisms.
4. The creation of time

- a) Another aspect of God's creation is the creation of time (the succession of moments one after another)
- b) God is timeless in his own being—he has no beginning or end (Psa. 90:2; Rev. 1:8; cf. 4:8)
- c) God's timelessness is also revealed in Jesus' bold use of a present tense verb that implies continuing present existence when he replied to Jewish adversaries, "Before Abraham was, *I am*" (John 8:58)
- d) Before God created the universe, there was no "time" at least not in the sense of a succession of moments one after another
- e) When God began to create the universe, time began, and there began to be a succession of moments and events one after another (Grudem)
- f) God operates apart from time and is not controlled by it (Job 36:26; Psa. 90:2, 4; John 8:58; 2 Pet. 3:8; Rev. 1:8)

B. THE WORK OF THE TRINITY IN CREATION

1. The work of creation is variously attributed to all three persons of the Trinity: to the Father, as in Gn. 1:1; Is. 44:24; 45:12; Ps. 33:6; to the Son, as in Jn. 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16; to the Holy Spirit, as in Gn. 1:2; Jb. 26:13.
2. God the Father was the primary agent in initiating the act of creation; but the Son and Holy Spirit were also active
3. The Son, Jesus Christ, is described as the one "through" whom creation came about (Psa. 33:6; 104:30; John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:12); these passages describe the Son as the active agent carrying out the plans of the Father.
4. The Holy Spirit was also involved in creation, being pictured as completing, filling, and giving life to God's creation
5. Genesis 1:2 states, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters," indicating a preserving, sustaining, governing function" in the creation (Grudem)—literally, *continued brooding over it*, as a fowl does, when hatching eggs (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown)
6. Just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided; in its unity it is still rich in diversity (Bavinck and Bolt)
7. This is not to be taken to mean that different parts of creation are attributed to different persons within the Trinity, but rather that the whole is the work of the triune God (Packer)

C. WHY DID GOD CREATE?

1. God did not need to create, and the universe does not exist for our sake—creation reveals God's attributes and proclaims his praise (Psa. 8; 19:1; Rom. 1:19; Rev. 4:11)
2. The words 'by thy will they existed and were created' (Rev. 4:11), cf. 'created through him, and for him' (Col. 1:16), indicate the purpose and goal of creation.
3. God created the entire universe 'for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom and goodness' (*Westminster Confession*).
4. Creation, in other words, is theocentric, and intended to display the glory of God; to be, as John Calvin says, 'the theatre of his glory'
5. God did not create because he needed the world but because he delighted in his own will to create and in his act of creating (Bavinck)

6. God brings things into existence in order that his goodness may be communicated and manifested (Aquinas)

D. MEANING OF "IMAGE" AND "LIKENESS" IN GENESIS 1:26

1. Both the Hebrew word "image" (*tselem*) and "likeness" (*demuth*) means "similar to, but not identical to"
2. We are like God morally (Matt. 27:3-5; Rom. 1:18-20)
3. We are like God spiritually (Rom. 8:16; Gal. 5:18)
4. We are like God mentally (Mark 12:30; Isa. 1:18)
5. We are like God relationally (John 14:23; Rev. 3:21)
6. Describing a quality of God in human terms so that we can better relate to him is called an anthropomorphism (See Ps. 18:6; 37:31; Isa. 40:11)
7. Humanity is made after God's image and for his glory (Gen. 1:26; Isa. 43:7; Eph. 1:12)...it is of him, through him, and to him are all things (Rom. 11:36)
 - a) The first purpose of the creature is to glorify the Creator (Isa. 43:7)
 - b) The second purpose of the creature is to enjoy creation (Psa. 103:5)
 - c) Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever (Westminster Larger Catechism)

E. GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO HIS CREATION

1. God is independent of his creation (transcendent) but he is also actively involved in his creation (immanent)
2. God's transcendence
 - a) The teaching of Scripture about the relationship between God and creation is unique among the religions of the world (Grudem)
 - b) The Bible teaches that God is distinct from his creation...he is not part of it, for he has made it and rules over it because he is Sovereign
 - c) The term often used to say that God is much greater than creation is the word *transcendent*
 - d) Very simply, this means that God is far "above" the creation in the sense that he is greater than the creation and he is independent of it
 - e) Even though God is transcendent he is still knowable (Geisler)
3. God's immanence
 - a) God is also very much involved in creation, for it is continually dependent on him for its existence and its functioning.
 - b) The technical term used to speak of God's involvement in creation is the word *immanent* meaning "remaining in" creation.
 - c) The God of the Bible is no abstract deity removed from, and uninterested in his creation...the Bible is the story of God's involvement with his creation, and particularly the people in it (Grudem)
 - d) Job affirms that even the animals and plants depend on God (Job 12:10)
 - e) In the New Testament, Paul affirms that God "gives to all men life and breath and everything" and that "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:25, 28).
 - f) Indeed, in Christ "all things hold together" (Col. 1:17), and he is continually "upholding the

universe by his word of power" (Heb. 1:3).

- g) God's transcendence and immanence are both affirmed in a single verse when Paul speaks of "one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6).
- 4. Three major contrary views of God's relationship to his creation:
 - a) Deism: God created the universe but he is not actively involved in it ("Clock maker" view)
 - b) Pantheism: God is actively involved in his creation but he is dependent on it ("Everything is God" view)
 - c) Materialism: the material universe is all that exists, therefore, God does not exist (atheistic view)

F. THE UNIVERSE GOD CREATED WAS "VERY GOOD"

1. When God finished his work of creation, he took delight in it
2. At the end of each stage of creation God saw that what he had done was "good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25)
3. Then at the end of the six days of creation, "God saw everything he had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen. 1:31)
4. Even though there is now sin in the world, the material creation is still good in God's sight and should be seen as "good" by us as well (Grudem)

G. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCRIPTURE AND THE FINDINGS OF SCIENCE¹

1. At various times in history, Christians have found themselves dissenting from the accepted findings of contemporary science
2. In the vast majority of cases, sincere Christian faith and strong trust in the Bible have led scientists to the discovery of new facts about God's universe, and these discoveries have changed scientific opinion for all of subsequent history²
3. On the other hand, there have been times when accepted scientific opinion has been in conflict with people's understanding of what the Bible said
4. For example, when the Italian astronomer Galileo (1564–1642) began to teach that the earth was not the center of the universe but that the earth and other planets revolved around the sun (thus following the theories of the Polish astronomer Copernicus [1472–1543]), he was criticized, and eventually his writings were condemned by the Roman Catholic Church
5. Scientific investigation has helped Christians reevaluate what earlier generations thought about the age of the earth, for example, so that no evangelical scholar today would hold that the world was created in 4004 B.C.--yet that date was once widely believed to be the date of the creation because of the writings of Irish Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656), one of the great scholars of his day, who carefully added together the dates in the genealogies of the Bible to find when Adam was created³
6. Today it is widely acknowledged that the Bible does not tell us the precise date of the creation of the earth or of the human race
7. On the other hand, many people in the Christian community have steadfastly refused to agree with the dominant opinion of scientists today regarding evolution--on this matter, thousands of Christians have examined Scripture again and again in great detail, and many have concluded that Scripture is not silent on the process by which living organisms came into being
8. Careful observation of the facts of the created universe has produced widespread disagreement regarding theories of evolution (both from scientists who are Christians and from a number of non-

Christian scientists as well)

9. So on both biblical and scientific grounds, theories of evolution have been challenged by Christians
10. We should also remember that the question of the creation of the universe is unlike many other scientific questions because creation is not something that can be repeated in a laboratory experiment, nor were there any human observers of it
11. Therefore pronouncements by scientists about creation and the early history of the earth are at best educated speculation
12. If we are convinced, however, that the only observer of these events (God himself) has told us about them in the reliable words of the Bible, then we should pay careful attention to the biblical account

H. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCRIPTURE AND SCIENCE

Bible scholar Bruce K. Waltke offers four differences between scripture and science⁴

1. Genesis and science discuss essentially different matters—the transcendence of God is beyond the scientific grasp
2. The language of Genesis and science is entirely different—the creation account is formed in everyday speech, non-theoretical terminology rather than mathematics and technical terminology
3. The purposes of Genesis and science also differ—Genesis answers the questions of who and why, whereas science attempts to answer what and how
4. Science requires empirical testing for validation, while Genesis requires the validation of the witness of the Spirit to the heart (Rom. 8:16)

I. ARE THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION TWENTY-FOUR HOUR DAYS?

1. Does the word “day” (H. *yom*⁵) in Genesis 1 mean a 24-hour day, or a much longer period of time?
2. Both views have valid supporting arguments—God has chosen not to give us enough information to come to a clear decision on this question⁶

J. CREATION/ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE THEORIES

Following are some very brief theory descriptions of the origin of the universe. Readers are encouraged to examine other sources for more detailed descriptions, arguments for, and arguments against each one

1. Darwinism: the body of theory dealing with biological evolution in general and evolution by natural selection in particular⁷--Darwin never ruled out the possibility of God⁸
2. Theistic Evolution theory: The theory that living organisms came about by the process of evolution that Darwin proposed, but that God guided the process so that the result was just what he wanted it to be (Grudem)
3. Big Bang Theory: The universe began in a fantastic explosion that happened 15 billion years ago--in a secular form this theory excludes God
4. Myth Theory: The account in Genesis 1 is only symbolic—even though God created, the account is not historically correct; it is a myth
5. The Gap Theory: The initial creation in Genesis 1:1 was complete and perfect but a catastrophe involving the fall of angels must have occurred during the time-gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2--the six days of creation took place after this time-gap and all geological ages took place between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2

6. Day-Age Theory: Since the Hebrew word for day (H. yom) can be interpreted as a 24-hour day, or a much longer period of time, this theory holds that God created everything in a series of acts over longer periods of time than 24-hour days--each of the six "days" of creation would then equate to the six major geological ages (Paleozoic, Mesozoic, Cenozoic, etc.)
7. Literary Framework Theory: This theory (also called the "Pictorial-Day" theory), suggests that either God's revelation to Moses came in a series of six pictures, or the author arranged them by logical literary thought rather than in a chronological sequence--this would explain the parallels between the first and fourth days, the second and the fifth days, and the third and sixth days
8. Two-Phase Theory: This theory, also called the "prior creation theory," holds that there were two distinct phases of creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, with a long period of time in between.⁹ With this view, the duration of "day" can be of any length. The problem with this theory is that the humans in chapter 1 could not have been Adam and Eve, and could not have been morally responsible.
9. Ideal-Time Theory (Mature Creationism): This theory, supports the "young earth" theory, holds that God created the earth in a literal six-day period but made it as if it were billions of years old. In other words, it was created at its "ideal time" -- Adam was not created as a baby but was created at his ideal time, as a mature man. If God created trees at their ideal time, rather than as seeds, they would have had growth rings indicating a longer previous period¹⁰
10. Flood Geology Theory: This theory holds that the earth is actually only a few thousand years old and that the six days of creation took place over six 24-hour days--during the flood various forms of life were solidified into rock under great hydrostatic pressures--the various rock strata represent various enormous waves of the flood.

K. THE AGE OF THE EARTH --OLD EARTH, YOUNG EARTH

1. There are two views concerning the age of the earth--following is a brief summary of these two views (Grudem)
 - a) Old-earth view: The earth is about 4.5 billion years old
 - b) Young-earth view: The earth is approximately 10,000 to 20,000 years old
2. "Old Earth" Theories of Creation
 - a) While current scientific estimates say that man appeared on earth about 2.5 billion years ago, it should be remembered that dating methods used for earlier periods are very approximate with results that often conflict
 - b) Theories which could support the old earth view include the Day-Age Theory and the Literary Framework Theory
3. "Young Earth" Theories of Creation
 - a) Young-earthers take the "days" of creation to be six successive, literal, solar days of 24 hours each, totaling 144 hours of creation (Geisler)
 - b) Theories that could support the young earth view are the Ideal Time Theory, and the Flood Geology Theory
4. Conclusions
 - a) Both "Old Earth" and "Young Earth" theories are valid options for Christians who believe the Bible today (Grudem)
 - b) We are not told in how much time and in what manner God created heaven and earth, or how long the unformed state of the earth lasted (Bavinck and Bolt)
 - c) There is a danger that Christians will spend too much time arguing over the age of the earth and neglect to focus on much more important and much clearer aspects of the teaching of the Bible

5. What about dinosaurs? (Grudem)
 - a) Current scientific opinion holds that dinosaurs became extinct about 65 million years before human beings appeared on earth
 - b) Those who hold to six twenty-four hour days of creation and a young earth view would say that dinosaurs were among the creatures created by God on the same day he created man (sixth day)—they would therefore say that dinosaurs subsequently became extinct, perhaps in the flood
 - c) Those holding the old earth view would say that dinosaurs were created on the sixth day of creation, which was millions of years long, and that they became extinct by the time Adam was created

L. SUMMARY: AMAZING FACTS ABOUT CREATION

1. There is clear purpose in God's creation
 - a) Purpose No. 1: Creation is for God's glory (Rev. 4:11; Isa. 43:7)
 - Creation reveals God's eternal power and divine nature (Rom. 1:20)
 - We are to give God glory by thankfully praising and honoring him as our creator (Rom. 1:21)
 - b) Purpose No. 2: We are to enjoy God's creation (Psa. 103:5; Acts 14:17; 1 Tim. 16:17; Psa. 84:11)
2. God didn't create out of pre-existing physical matter
 - a) God simply spoke—he brought creation into being by his power (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, et. al)
 - b) God did not take existing matter and reshape it
 - c) Matter did not always exist as some atheists insist
3. All three persons in the Godhead were actively involved in the creation
 - a) The work of creation is attributed to all three persons of the Trinity
 - To the Father who was the primary agent (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 44:24; 45:12; Psa. 33:6)
 - To the Son "through" whom creation came about (John. 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16)
 - To the Holy Spirit who completed, filled and gave life to God's creation (Gen. 1:2; Job. 26:13)
 - b) God the Father was the primary agent in initiating the act of creation
 - c) The Son, Jesus Christ, is described as the one "through" whom creation came about
 - Psa. 33:6; 104:30; John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:12
 - These passages describe the Son as the active agent carrying out the plans of the Father.
 - d) The Holy Spirit was also involved in creation, being pictured as hovering over the waters," indicating a preserving, sustaining, governing function" in the creation (Grudem)
 - Literally, *continued brooding over it*, as a fowl does, when hatching eggs (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown)
 - e) Just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided; in its unity it is still rich in diversity (Bavinck and Bolt)
 - f) This is not to be taken to mean that different parts of creation are attributed to different persons within the Trinity, but rather that the whole is the work of the triune God (Packer)
4. Everything God created was good
 - a) "Good" meaning beautiful, morally upright, valuable, pleasant to look at
 - b) God created the dry land and seas and saw that it was good (Gen. 1:10)
 - c) God created plants and trees and saw that it was good (Gen. 1:12)
 - d) God created day and night and saw that it was good (Gen. 1:18)
 - e) God created all kinds of animals and saw that it was good (Gen. 1:21, 25)

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5. God didn't have to create us
 - a) God was not forced to create us.
 - b) He wasn't lonely
 - c) God created us simply because it was his will...he wanted to create us according to his good pleasure (Rev. 4:11; Eph. 1:9)
 - d) God did not create us because he was lonely--the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have perfect fellowship within himself.
 6. God is above and beyond his creation (transcendent)
 - a) Gen. 1:1; 1 Kings 8:27; Job 11:7-8; Psa. 8:1; 57:5)
 - b) He is not part or all of creation (pantheism)
 - c) God's sovereignty controls his creation, no part of it controls him (Col. 1:16-17)
 7. God is actively sustaining his creation (immanence)
 - a) Creation, including humans, is completely dependent upon God
 - b) All things hold together by God (Col. 1:17)
 - c) In him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28)
 - d) Every good and perfect gift is from God (Jas. 1:17)
 - e) God not only feeds birds, he provides for our needs (Matt. 6:28-34)
 8. Creation itself gives clear evidence of God's existence
 - a) Man cannot say, "I never knew God existed (Rom. 1:20)
 - b) The size and vastness of the universe reveals God's glory

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End Notes

- ¹ The author is indebted to Dr. Wayne Grudem's "Systematic Theology" for a large part of this section
- ² Isaac Newton, Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, Blaise Pascal, Robert Boyle, Michael Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell, and many others are examples of this (Grudem)
- ³ Ussher failed to take into account the gaps (missing individuals) that exist in biblical accounts. See Grudem, p. 290 for an example.
- ⁴ Bruce Waltke, "Genesis," pp. 74-75.
- ⁵ For additional more detailed meanings of the word *yom*, see Geisler, pp. 1527-1528.
- ⁶ See Grudem, pp. 293-297, and Geisler, pp. 1526-1533, for arguments supporting both the "24-hour" and the "longer periods of time" views.
- ⁷ Darwinism: Probably the greatest difficulty of all for evolutionary theory is explaining how any life could have begun in the first place. The spontaneous generation of even the simplest living organism capable of independent life (the prokaryote bacterial cell) from inorganic materials on the earth could not happen by random mixing of chemicals: it requires intelligent design and craftsmanship so complex that no advanced scientific laboratory in the world has been able to do it. Johnson quotes a now-famous metaphor: "That a living organism emerged by chance from a pre-biotic soup is about as likely as that 'a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials therein.' Chance assembly is just a naturalistic way of saying 'miracle.'" (Grudem 284)
- ⁸ Darwin felt that science should be objective in nature, and was careful to keep any reference to God or a creator out of his earlier work. However, in his 6th edition of the "Origin of Species" he used the word "creator" nine times, and the word "God" twice. Of greater importance is what he said about life and the Creator's role in it. Michael Bargo Jr., "What Darwin Said about God" <www.americanthinker.com> accessed August 14, 2015.
- ⁹ John H. Walton, Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 97.
- ¹⁰ Ideal-time theory is also called "Creation with an Appearance of Age," or "Mature Creationism."