

Making Sense of the Bible

“Science and the Bible”

[Genesis 2:4-7](#)

Inspired by Adam Hamilton’s book, *Making Sense of the Bible*, we are examining some challenging scriptures in our current sermon series. Last Sunday, we wrestled with this question: *“How do we reconcile the loving, compassionate and kind God of the New Testament with the angry, jealous and vengeful God we find in the Old Testament?”* Here is a recap of what we learned:

- The challenging scriptures of God’s violence reveal to us “more about the people who wrote them and the times they were living in than about the God in whose name they claimed authority to do these things.” In the ancient world, people committed acts of violence and justified them in the name of God. It was the way people lived back then.
- Despite the negative images of God we find in those troubling passages, throughout Scripture, God is consistently portrayed as being kind and compassionate, gracious and merciful, forgiving and reconciling. God cares about the least, the last, and the lost. God is with the poor, the neglected, the oppressed, the marginalized, the violated, the displaced, and the suffering.
- The violence we find in the Bible and in history reminds us how easily we, the people of faith, can invoke the name of God to justify our own acts of violence. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ can liberate us from our human condition and lead us to the path of non-violence and peace.

Today, we turn to a second question: *How do we reconcile what we learn in science class with what we read in the Bible? More specifically, how do we reconcile the Theory of Evolution with the story of Creation found in the Bible?*

According to a Gallup Poll conducted last June, 40% of US adults believe that God created them in their present form within roughly the past 10,000 years. This belief is called Young Earth Creationism, and it holds that Creation happened exactly the way the Bible describes it — in six 24-hour days, as recorded in the book of Genesis. Here is the order of Creation found in chapter 1 of Genesis:

Day 1: God created Light and darkness;

Day 2: God created Atmosphere;

Day 3: God created land and plant life;

Day 4: God created the sun and the moon;

Day 5 - God created fish and birds;

Day 6 - God created all other animals and the first two human beings;

Day 7 - God rested from God’s labor.

The argument of Young Earth Creationists is grounded in a literal reading of the Bible. Proponents of this view believe God inspired Moses to record the story of Creation in the book of Genesis. So, every word in it is accurate and true.

However, a careful reading of the Creation story in the book of Genesis, chapter 1 raises some questions. Hear the order of Creation again. Day 1, light and darkness; Day 2, atmosphere; Day 3, dry land and plant life; Day 4, sun, moon and stars. We are told that trees and plants grew even before the sun was created! But, we know this cannot be true because they use a process of photosynthesis to grow in nature. Nothing can grow without the sun. Even elementary school children know this to be true by observation and plain scientific knowledge.

I know from my own experience of growing vegetables. My first vegetable garden looked so pathetic, no matter how much effort I made to keep it going all summer. Because the plot did not get enough sunlight, it failed to produce much of anything in the end. My neighbor felt sorry for me. So, the following year, he created a garden for me in the corner of his yard, which sat in full sunshine all day long. The difference was unbelievable. The garden produced more than my family could eat! Truly, sunlight is essential for plants to grow. Yet, for those taking the Creation story literally, the order found in Genesis chapter 1 would say otherwise. For Young Earth Creationists, trees and plants could grow because God made it possible, even if it goes against what we observe and experience.

While we are on the subject of Genesis and the story of Creation, did you know that there are two accounts of Creation found in the book of Genesis? The first one is in chapter 1, which gives the ordering of creation in 6 days and the final day of rest that we heard before. This is what we usually think about when we hear Creation and the Bible. But if you continue reading, a second Creation story appears in chapter 2. Today, we have read part of the second story. The two stories of Creation are quite different from each other. Yet, as Hamilton points out in his book, *Making Sense of the Bible*, we are so familiar with these stories of Creation that we have merged them in our minds without noticing the differences between the two (p.190)

The first time I learned that there were two different accounts of Creation was when I was a high school student. One day, my friends and I were out on the streets of our church neighborhood. At the end of our Bible study, the youth pastor of our church had asked us to go out and talk to strangers about our faith. It was quite a difficult task, as you can imagine, to go and evangelize out in public. Not many people were willing to stop for a conversation. Finally, a man responded to my invitation. But, even before I began to talk about my faith, he said something that took my words away. He said, "There are two different creation stories in the Bible." I said, "No, it can't be true. There is only one creation story in the Bible." He said, "Believe me. They are in your Bible." As soon as we came back to church, I opened the Bible, and behold, he was right. There were two creation stories!

Here are some of the differences between the two Creation stories:

- In chapter 1, God created man on Day 6, 3 days after creating plant life and after all the other animals on earth were created; But, in the creation story found in chapter 2, God created man before creating any living thing, including vegetation.
 - In fact, because man is created first in the second story, God allows man to name the animals that God creates, giving man an active role in the act of Creation.
- In chapter 1, the work of Creation lasted 6 days; But, in chapter 2, Creation was done in one day.
- In chapter 1, man and woman were created simultaneously in the image of God; however, in chapter 2, God created man first, out of the dust of the earth. It was only when God saw the man's loneliness that God later created the woman, putting him into a deep sleep and creating her from one of his ribs.

- In chapter 1, the Creation story ends with a notion that everything is good. In fact throughout the first creation story, there is a repeating refrain after each thing God creates, "And God saw that it was good." However, in the Creation story in chapter 2, there isn't the same sense of perfection. In fact, the end of chapter 2 leads us to the story of The Fall found in chapter 3.

Perhaps you are wondering, why? Why are there two different accounts of Creation? Well, it's because they came from two different sources. The first Creation story found in chapter 1 came from a source who called God, Elohim, while the second Creation story found in chapter 2 was from a source who called God, Yahweh. However, neither story was meant to give us a fact-based, scientific explanation on how the earth was created.

The first Creation story is "majestic, beautiful, and poetic." Each day begins with "And God said," and ends with "And it was so... And God saw that it was good.... And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day... the second day, the third day." It is not a scientific description of how God created, but rather a work of poetry that reveals to us something fundamental about God, the world, and us. It is a theological proclamation, a creed captured in poetic form that confesses God is sovereign and God is in ultimate control. For instance, it means something when the Creation account says that humans are created last, that we come after all the plants and animals on land and sea have been created. It tells us that we are not at the center of creation. It is reminding us that when God gives us dominion over other life on earth, we must protect the goodness with which God created them, that we are humble caretakers, not prideful owners, of God's creation.

Meanwhile, the second Creation story in chapter 2 and continuing with The Fall in chapter 3 is a story that was likely told from generation to generation around, shared around campfires, perhaps as a grandchild asked a grandparent, "How did we get here?" "Why are things the way they are?" It is a story that taught God's children truths about God, about the world, about us and our responsibility to take care of the mother nature and the role we had in introducing evil into the world. The story of Adam and Eve and their fall from the Garden of Eden is an archetype, the original pattern for all that follows. They represent all of humanity.

So, this ancient old story is your story and my story. It is our story. In it, we see our temptation, our rebellion against God. In it, we find our tendency to blame others, our tendency to run and hide from our guilt and shame, our separation and alienation from God, from each other and the rest of creation, and the pain and suffering that this causes.

And yet, if we look closely enough, the second Creation story is also the story of God. In the story of Creation and Fall in Genesis chapter 2 and 3, we find God's love and compassion, God's care and provision, and God's character and will for us. Along with the story of Creation found in chapter 1, this is not a scientific research paper, but a story of faith. It was told from generation to generation as a reminder of God's role at the center of not only our lives, but all of creation. It was passed down, so that we do not forget our tendency to turn away from God, separating ourselves from each other and all of creation, as we become more knowledgeable and powerful through technological innovation.

In this way, the creation stories were never meant to be in conflict with science. Instead, they were meant to be complementary. They served and still do serve as works of divine wisdom, warning us to be humble and remember who we are even as we celebrate scientific progress and innovation. May we receive and pass on this message today. Amen.