

In the beginning

Part 2 – How and why the book of Genesis became part of the Bible

So how do we come across as **credible Christians** in the world we find ourselves in? Our hope is that people are drawn to God because of us, but we're up against the disturbing reality that we're living in a 'post-Christian age' in which the religious beliefs of Christianity have been rejected or forgotten. Where would you start, for instance, in answering your High School children or grandchildren (or other non-Christian family members) about what you believe as a Christian and not sound like a quaint religious oddity, or an out-of-date dinosaur from a distant past?

The **first two verses** in Genesis illustrate the challenge we Christians are up against. We live in an age, first of all, where Science is 'God' and only scientific explanations for how our world began and developed are accepted. The idea that there is **another** source of knowledge and explanation for our world, the one we Christians believe in - namely **revelation from God** - is not being taught anywhere, it seems, other than in our own Christian colleges and congregations, and by Muslims and Jews. But as Christians we then make an unfortunate mess of God's revelation as well, because in just the first two verses of the Bible we're already arguing as to what they mean. So now we face a second challenge, in how we must look to other people when we can't even agree among ourselves, or even be willing to reason together. It's embarrassing.

So, here are the two verses: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (verse 1). Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (2)."

For **Young Earth Christians** these verses are saying the Earth was created by God in a formless state about 6,000 years ago, and in the next six days God filled the Earth and the skies above with life and light, and this was the time when the first humans were created, and so were the sun, moon and stars. **Old Earth Christians**, however, believe there was a **gap** between verses one and two that could be billions of years in length. They read verse 1 instead, therefore, as the Earth starting off in great shape, but something dreadful happened in verse 2 that left this planet empty and useless. Some time later God then set about restoring the Earth with new life and new inhabitants in six days.

So now we have Young Earth Christians and Old Earth Christians at odds with each other, and neither group willing to budge or even bend. Both groups have a convincing supply of Scriptures to support their case, and they both resort to convincing facts of Science as well - BUT - they both interpret Scripture and Science differently. So the battle rages on, Christian against Christian. Trenches are dug, debates rage, the internet is hot with criticisms going both ways, neither side is the least bit interested in hearing the other out, and the credibility of Christianity takes another well deserved hit. No wonder people reject Christianity because of Christians. It really is embarrassing.

And I realize that no matter what I say next, it probably won't change a mind that's fixed on justifying its own position, but I'll take a shot at it anyway. So let's start off by saying something good about the Young Earth Christians, first of all, that they have a point, and a very good one - that the main topic in Genesis Chapter 1 is the six days of creation, not what happened **before** the six days of creation. So the Young Earth Christians have got us concentrating on what Genesis concentrates on first and foremost, to which I say 'well done to them'.

But I can't ignore the Old Earth Christians either, because if there is a gap between verses one and two - be it thousands, millions or billions of years - it allows room for all those geological ages taught in Science classes in school. And since it's our children and grandchildren who'll be carrying the banner of Christianity into the future, it should be them we are concerned about so that **they** can be credible Christians in their world and culture.

We old-timers probably won't be challenged on what we believe Genesis is getting at, but the upcoming generation of Christians will be, so 'the gap theory' is jolly handy for university and college students seeking a career in the Sciences. All that tricky stuff presented in class about evolution, the fossil record, the Ice Age, when dinosaurs lived, and the Earth being billions of years old, can all be placed in **The Gap**. It really helps our kids and grandkids if the Bible itself provides the possibility of an Old Earth going back billions of years as well.

The Gap is also jolly handy for finding a place in Earth's history for Lucifer's rebellion, because there's no mention of Lucifer rebelling in Genesis, so if he didn't rebel **after** the six days of creation, at what point in Earth's history DID he rebel? Well, that can handily be placed in **The Gap** too. It's not surprising, then, that 'the gap theory' has gained momentum, to the point now that all sorts of explanations for what happened **before** Adam are being accepted.

One explanation goes like this - that in the gap **between** verses one and two God filled this Earth with another fully functional and perfect paradise full of plants, animals, birds, fish and human-like creatures, that either evolved over time or were created that way from the beginning. God then put this creation, and maybe our entire solar system, under the rulership of Lucifer, an incredibly beautiful and powerful angel, perhaps the most gifted and perfect creation God had yet made (Ezekiel 28:12, 15).

Some have suggested, therefore, that during Lucifer's early rule great cities and civilizations emerged, ruins of which can still be found in many places on our planet, and so are drawings on rocks and walls - and in other strange phenomena - that hint of a highly advanced society.

The story then continues, that to begin with under Lucifer's rule, all was well, and the dinosaurs during this time were harmless, non-violent vegetarians, not predatory killers and eaters of meat. Perhaps, as one Christian author wrote, God even gave Lucifer the gift and the chance to create animals, birds and fish that reflected the beauty and perfection that God had placed in Lucifer himself.

So here was Lucifer, king and (possible) creator of all he surveyed, with one third of the angels under his command. That's a lot of angels, because Revelation 5:11 speaks of ten thousand times ten thousand (100 million) angels circling God's throne, so one third of that number would be 30 million, meaning Lucifer ruled a mighty empire - with all the power and skill of millions of angels too. No wonder people believe that civilizations far more advanced than ours today existed in Earth's distant past.

It's also not surprising that Lucifer got to thinking he was a 'God' too. What else could have got him and millions of angels thinking they could charge up to God's throne and topple him? Lucifer clearly considered himself God's equal - and millions of angels thought he was too. And why shouldn't they, when God had given Lucifer the same power he had to create life forms? Was God actually testing Lucifer, though, to see what he'd do when given such power?

The fossil record seems to support that too, because the dinosaurs became a lot bigger and more violent. Huge predatory dinosaurs with teeth for ripping appeared, so did dinosaurs with massive destructive tails, armour plating, spikes and clubs, all hinting at an increasingly violent and vicious world, and all suggesting a sinister change in Lucifer himself.

Did Lucifer create such animals as power went to his head? Did he enjoy creating violent creatures and watching them fight and destroy each other, like some mad Roman Emperor entertaining his people with blood sports and combat? And did the angels become so attuned to such violence and combat that on Lucifer's decision to attack God (Isaiah 14:13-14) they followed him willingly into battle, truly believing they could win with Lucifer in command?

The battle did not go well for Lucifer and his angels, however. God sent them packing back to the Earth (Luke 10:18) and their home base was shattered. The entire solar system was pummeled, destroying whatever civilizations and beauty existed. One planet collapsed and exploded under the bombardment, huge scars appeared on all the other planets and their moons, and the Earth took a direct hit from one or more gigantic space rocks that very quickly enveloped the Earth in a dust cloud that blocked out the sun and brought on an Ice Age. Dinosaurs and other life forms were instantly killed, buried or frozen, and some were so well preserved that soft tissue can still be extracted from their bones. And there are hints in the fossil record and ice cores (and in ocean creatures that may have survived the darkness through to our creation today) that this happened only a short time before the six days of creation in Genesis.

This, then, becomes the explanation for the Earth becoming "tohu and bohu," or empty and ruined, in Genesis 1:2. The Ice Age was probably already receding, leaving in its wake a barren landscape and layers of buried plant and animal life as the melt waters swirled and swished over the entire planet - an appropriate picture of Lucifer and his angels being called "raging waves" in Jude 1:13. The Earth that God had originally designed to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18) - that also made the angels shout for joy in Job 38:7 - was now a dark, lifeless wreck. It was God's way of bringing down judgment on Lucifer's rebellion. With sin comes death. God allowed Lucifer time, yes, but there comes a point when he acts with devastating power and consequences.

And that, according to **one** explanation from Old Earth Christians, is how and why Genesis opens as it does in Genesis 1:1-2. In verse 3, God then begins the process of making this dysfunctional planet become functional again. It's a handy explanation for Christian kids in school and college for maintaining God as Creator, as well as the latest observations of Cosmology, Archaeology, the dating of fossils, the layering of the rocks, the Ice Age, and the existence of massive and violent dinosaurs. It also provides a handy place in Earth's history for Lucifer and his rebellion. So I say 'well done' to the Old Earth Christians too.

But I also have to say it's still only a **theory** based on the latest findings of Science combined with a sprinkling of scriptures that seem to support those findings. It's also been thoroughly challenged by Young Earth Christians using both Science and Scripture as well. So how can we reconcile these two groups of opposing Christians, especially when our credibility as Christians in the eyes of people we hope to attract to God is at stake here too? What do non-Christians see in **how we treat each other as Christians** when we have differences?

Well, hopefully what they see is a humble and genuine attempt by both sides to find agreement. Surely both sides agree, for instance, that THIS era of Earth's history that began with Adam and Eve is the most important. And surely both sides can also agree that the most important statement in Genesis 1:1-2 is the bit in **Genesis 1:2**, that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." In other words, GOD was directly involved in what was happening, so isn't the primary focus of both groups to get down to **what God made this creation in Genesis for** - not on whether the Earth is young or old?

And in seeking to understand God's purpose for this world, surely both sides can also agree on the best way of going about it. We ask ourselves the obvious questions, like "To whom was Genesis written?" and "Why was it written that way?" And can both groups then agree that Genesis wasn't written in 21st century terms to a 21st century audience, it was written to Israel in the 15th century BC (or thereabouts) by the Israelite Moses, because it was through ISRAEL that God's purpose was primarily being revealed by the Holy Spirit?

Hopefully, then, there are three points already that Young and Old Earth Christians can agree on to ease the tension between them, that:

- 1) It's THIS era of the Earth's history that we're interested in most of all.
- 2) It's GOD'S PURPOSE for this creation that we seek to understand most of all.
- 3) It's through ISRAEL that God revealed his purpose most of all.

And there's a fourth point that Young and Old Earth Christians can hopefully find agreement on as well, and that's when - and why - this story in Genesis **officially became part of the Bible**. Moses probably wrote Genesis and the story of creation in the time between 1446 and 1445 BC when Israel was camped at Mount Sinai, but the Bible wasn't put together until a long time later. So is there any relevance, or even importance, in **the timing** of Genesis being included in Scripture? Is there? It's a question that both Young and Old Earth Christians could benefit greatly from in seeking an answer. So let's take a look and see.

At heart and core the story of the Old Testament is the endless state of crisis that Israel, and then the Jews, were in. The height of that crisis came 700 years (or so) after Moses wrote the Creation story, when Israel was ripped out of their land by the Assyrians and taken into captivity, followed by the Jews also being removed and taken captive by the Babylonians a century or so later, and their beloved city of Jerusalem and its temple left in ruins.

These two events became the most traumatic and tragic time in Israel's history. As one author wrote: 'The Israelites understood themselves to be God's chosen people: they were promised the perpetual possession of the land, the glorious temple as a house of worship, and a descendant of David sitting perpetually on the throne. With the exile (of both Israel and the Jews) all of this came to a sudden and devastating end. Israel's connection with God was severed: no land, no temple, no sacrifices, no king. Rather than prompting the other nations to acknowledge the true God, which was Israel's national calling, Israel was humiliated by these nations. Rather than the nations streaming to them, they were slaves in a foreign land. Israel was estranged from God.'

Everything that had connected them to God as God's people in the past was now gone - **except one thing**. They still had the memory of their history tucked away in their heads from oral traditions passed on faithfully from generation to generation, as well as a patchwork of written documents they carried with them, the most important of which were the five books written by Moses (or mostly by Moses) from Genesis to Deuteronomy.

Those five books were all they had left to remind them of who they were. They were like treasured photo albums keeping the memory alive that the great God who made the world had made a covenant **with them**. It was **to and through them**, Israel, that God was revealing both his character and his plan as an immense blessing to the rest of humanity. In those five books, therefore, were all the secrets of God and the universe contained.

But they also contained **a fearsome warning** in Deuteronomy 29 and 30, that the great Creator God who had chosen Israel to represent him would react with "furious anger" (29:28) if Israel forgot what he'd chosen them for. Terrible calamity would result if they strayed from their calling, including being ripped out of their land. And then, only hundreds of years later too, **it actually happened** - they lost their land. God had warned them and they hadn't listened. Suddenly, those five books, including Genesis, became more important than ever.

The importance struck so hard that this is what stirred **the making of the Bible**. Up to this point, nine hundred years after Moses had written Genesis, no actual Bible existed. There was no formal book as yet that had put all the oral and written stories of Israel's history into one sacred text. The Israelites and Jews had kept the memories of their past alive by telling and retelling the stories of their history through the centuries - but now, suddenly, their history had come to an abrupt and horrible halt. They'd lost everything. There was nothing left anymore that identified them as God's special people.

They'd been in trouble in the past too, and God had bashed them around a bit, but never had he deserted them like this. Were they still the Israel of old and the people of the covenant, therefore, or had they pushed God too far?

With no temple to seek God's counsel in, but with eyes opened to their dismal failure, the Jews turned to the only solid and reassuring evidence they had of God's promises to them. It was those five books that God had spoken to and through Moses. It was their beloved **Torah**, the five books from Genesis to Deuteronomy, that they clung on to. It was all they had left as reassurance that God had not deserted them.

And this is how the Old Testament began to take shape as one book and one sacred text. It began in the depths of despair while the Jews were in captivity in Babylon, having lost everything that identified them as God's people. They were in desperate need for assurance that God was still with them, and that assurance came in the first five books of what we now call 'the Bible'. It was in response to God's clear judgment on the Jews for deserting their post as God's people, therefore, that the Bible began to be formed.

Every time we turn to Genesis, then, this is what we are reminded of: It's how and why it became part of the Bible. Can we add that, then, as a fourth point that Young and Old Earth Christians can agree on? The fourth point being, that **it's why Genesis became part of the Bible** that we concentrate on most of all.

It means putting ourselves in the shoes of the people it was written to in the first place. It was written to Israel, the one group of people through whom God decided to reveal his purpose in this era of the Earth's history. Genesis was also one of the five books that would remind and reassure Israel many years later that God was still with them and his promises still stood as true as ever, despite the embarrassing mess that Israel and the Jews had made of their calling.

The putting together of the Old Testament, therefore, started during the Jews' exile in Babylon, and it continued for some time after the Jews returned to their homeland, with other books of prophecy, wisdom and poetry being added, and new books written.

But the motivation behind it all remained the same, to **go back to the beginning** and rehearse their story, this time with their eyes opened to what it all meant. Who made this planet and humans, and what did he make them for? What went wrong, and how did God deal with it? And why did God set up such a specific line of people from Seth through Noah to Abraham to the formation of Israel as a nation and God choosing them of all nations as his solution to what went wrong? And again, what went wrong with that plan too, and was God still working with and through Israel to reveal himself and his purpose, despite Israel having conclusively failed him?

To seek an explanation for all these things the Jews looked to the past. Somehow they'd lost the plot and allowed themselves to be captivated by the idols and ideas of the world they were living in. But that's not surprising when we're experiencing the same thing happening in the Christian church today. The Jews weren't the only ones to be captivated by their culture, because here we are today as Christians being captivated by Science when reading Genesis, either to support a gap theory or to counteract evolution, **when Genesis isn't the least bit interested in either subject.** They weren't what Genesis was written for.

Looking back to the time when the Bible was put together, we find it was **stirred by God's people realizing they'd lost the plot**, who then did something about it, which is reassuringly relevant for us Christians today who've also lost the plot when using Genesis to prove whether our planet is young or old.

To a Jew our arguments over Genesis must seem ridiculous and trivial, and serve (rather embarrassingly) as further proof to Jews that Christianity really is a splinter group from Judaism that jumped the rails in its pathetic understanding of the Old Testament. Perhaps, then, we can learn from the Jews' own experience of jumping the rails in **their** understanding of the Old Testament, **that they did something about it.** They woke up to the state they were in and they went back to the beginning for answers, as to who they were and why God had called them.

And that's the context in which Genesis came to be part of the Bible. It's in the Bible to remind those God has called to represent him - to do their job.

It also reminds us of how God reacted to those who **didn't** do their job. Look what happened to Adam and Eve. And look what happened to Israel later on too, when it was their turn to represent God and they too failed in their duties. God let Israel become powerless, irrelevant and a public embarrassment (Daniel 9), and that has to be slightly unnerving when Christianity today is also being called out-of-date, irrelevant, and an embarrassment.

Young and Old Earth Christians, then, could make Christianity a lot more credible by getting back to why Genesis is in the Bible. It's ironic that Genesis became part of the Bible because the Jews realized God had judged them for failing to represent him properly, when here we are as Christians living in a 'post-Christian age' in which young people are finding it hard to accept the God of Christianity because of our odd views of Science and our divisive attitudes toward each other over the meaning of Genesis. Could it be, then, that we too are experiencing a taste of God's judgment in Christianity being rejected and forgotten?

But like the Jews we can do something about it. We can go back, like they did, to the book of Genesis, recognizing, as one Christian author wrote, that Genesis "underscores the fact that the people of God are not the product of natural human developments, but are the result of God's sovereign and gracious intrusion in human history. He brings out of the fallen human race a new humanity consecrated to himself, called and destined to be the people of his kingdom and the channel of his blessing to the whole earth."

That's who we are. That's who Adam was supposed to be too, and so was Israel. We've all been called to be the People of God, because that's the real story of the Bible. It's about people who lived and/or failed in their duties as God's image-bearers and representatives. Paul takes us right back to Genesis too when writing about Jesus, calling him a 'second Adam'. Jesus, in other words, did what the first Adam should have done, and what all the People of God after him are supposed to do, which is shine forth GOD'S love, goodness and wisdom. It's all there in the book of Genesis, thanks to the Holy Spirit in Genesis 1:2 hovering over the waters ready to do his duty "in the beginning" too, in bringing life and God's love and wisdom into our world.

In discussing Genesis, then, we'd do well as Christians to stick to how and why Genesis came to be part of the Bible in the first place. That's our area of expertise, because in that lies our credibility and service to the world we live in.