

How to Interpret Scripture ***Creation: Genesis as Foundation - Part 2***

Lesson #9 for May 30, 2020

Scriptures: Job 26:7-10; Genesis 1; 2; 5; 11; 1 Chronicles 1:18-27; Matthew 19:4-5; John 1:1-3; Psalm 19:1.

1. Before the days of evolutionary theory and Darwin, many great thinkers were inspired by the Scripture's explanation of the creation of our world. Some of those who recognized this were Johannes Kepler, Isaac Newton, John Ray, Robert Boyle, and many other great scientists of the past.
2. However, the French Revolution led to people thinking that they did not need God, and, in fact, that they would be better off without God. This atheistic worldview led them to look for some explanation for origins other than creation by God. These ideas got a great boost when Charles Darwin wrote his book, *The Origin of Species*, in 1844 and, finally, published it in 1859. Someone else was ready to publish similar ideas if he did not! Does 1844 remind you of anything? Does the fact that many people were looking for the second coming of Jesus suggest that Satan needed to do something to try to counterfeit?
3. So, what does the Bible actually teach about the origin of our world? Is it possible that Moses in writing Genesis was simply expanding on pagan ideas about creation? Or, was Moses, perhaps, culturally conditioned and just expressing ideas that were common in his day? These are issues we want to deal with in this lesson by exploring some background.
4. Does the Bible teach that the earth is flat? Many believed that idea until relatively recently. Does the idea that there are "four corners" to the earth suggests a "flat earth." See Revelation 7:1 and Revelation 20:7-8. These verses should be understood in a metaphorical sense, suggesting the four directions of the compass. This is not to suggest that there are actually corners on our world. There are many modern equivalents to these ideas. We talk about the sun rising and setting, when, in fact, that appearance is just a function of how our earth spins. There are many other similar expressions and metaphors in the Bible and in modern writings.
5. What does the Old Testament teach us about the nature of this earth?

Job 26:7-10: ⁷ God stretched out the northern sky

and **hung the earth in empty space.**

⁸ It is God who fills the clouds with water
and keeps them from bursting with the weight.

⁹ He hides the full moon behind a cloud.

¹⁰ He divided light from darkness

by a **circle** drawn on the face of the sea.—American Bible Society. (1992).
*The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Job 26:7-10). New
York: American Bible Society.†

Isaiah 40:21-22: ²¹ Do you not know? Have you not heard?

Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?

Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

²² It is **He who sits above the circle [vault] of the earth,**

And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,

Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain

And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.—*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*.^{*} (1995). (Isaiah 40:21–22). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.^{††}

6. In these two passages, we see that the earth is hung or suspended in space and that it is a circle or sphere. (Job 22:7, 10) Isaiah 40:22 says that God dwells above the circle of the earth.
7. Try to imagine yourself as a person living thousands of years ago. What evidence would you have to suggest that the earth is moving? Would you have any evidence to suggest that the earth is spherical?

The earliest documented mention of the spherical Earth concept dates from around the 5th century BC, when it was mentioned by ancient Greek philosophers.^{[1][2]} It remained a matter of speculation until the 3rd century BC, when Hellenistic astronomy established the spherical shape of the Earth as a physical fact and calculated the Earth's circumference. The paradigm was gradually adopted throughout the Old World during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.^{[3][4][5][6]} A practical demonstration of Earth's sphericity was achieved by Ferdinand Magellan and Juan Sebastián Elcano's circumnavigation (1519–1522).^[7]

The concept of a spherical Earth displaced earlier beliefs in a flat Earth: In early Mesopotamian mythology, the world was portrayed as a flat disk floating in the ocean with a hemispherical sky-dome above,^[8] and this forms the premise for early world maps like those of Anaximander and Hecataeus of Miletus. Other speculations on the shape of Earth include a seven-layered ziggurat or cosmic mountain, alluded to in the Avesta and ancient Persian writings (see seven climes).—https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spherical_Earth [retrieved on May 17, 2020].^{††}

8. Around 500 B.C., Pythagoras suspected that the earth was round because the sun and the moon were round and other planets seemed to be round. Aristotle also thought so around 200 years later. In 240 B.C., Eratosthenes, the director of the museum at Alexandria in Egypt, calculated the circumference of the earth as about 40,000 km. To see the story look at the YouTube video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mw30CgaXiQw-YouTube>
9. Somewhat similar to those thinkers who lived more than a thousand years after Moses, when Moses wrote the book of Job around 1500 B.C., he called the earth a “circle.”
10. Review what you know about Genesis 1:1-2:4 regarding the creation of human beings.
11. Compare these excerpts from the *Atra-Hasis* epic recorded close to the days of Abraham:

“When the gods instead of man / Did the work, bore the loads, / The gods’ load was too great, / The work too hard, the trouble too much / . . . ‘Let the womb-goddess create offspring, / And let man bear the load of the gods!’ . . . Geshtu-e, a god who had intelligence, / They slaughtered in their assembly. / Nintu mixed clay / With his flesh and blood. . . .”—Stephanie Dalley, *Myths From Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and*

Others (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 9, 14, 15.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, May 25].^{‡§}

Atra-Hasis is the title of an 18th-century BC Akkadian epic recorded in various versions on clay tablets. It is named for its protagonist, Atrahasis, whose name means "exceedingly wise". The *Atra-Hasis* tablets include both a creation myth and a flood account, which is one of three surviving Babylonian deluge stories.—<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atra-Hasis> [retrieved March 21, 2020].^{‡§}

12. So, what are the similarities and what are the differences between the biblical account and the *Atra-Hasis* account?

1. In *Atra-Hasis* man works for the gods so that the gods can rest. In Genesis, God creates the earth and everything in it *for* humans as the apex of Creation, and then He rests with them. In Genesis, humans also are placed in a garden and invited to commune with God and care for His creation—a concept not found in *Atra-Hasis*.

2. In *Atra-Hasis*, a minor god is killed and his blood is mixed with clay to form seven males and females. In Genesis, first Adam is “formed” intimately by God, who breathes life into him, and woman is “made” later to be his “helper” (NKJV). God didn’t create Adam and Eve from the blood of a slain god.

3. There is no sign of conflict or violence in the Genesis account, as found in the *Atra-Hasis* story.

The biblical account is sublime in depicting an omnipotent God who provides humanity with dignified purpose in a perfect world. This radical difference has caused scholars to conclude that, in the end, these are very different creation accounts.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, May 25.[§]

13. It should be very obvious that the role of God and His relationship to human beings in the biblical story is very, very different from that depicted in *Atra-Hasis*.

14. So, what are we to assume? **Is it possible that the *Atra-Hasis* epic was a corrupted story handed down from the times of the flood while the account given to us by Moses is the divinely-inspired record and the version handed down through the faithful descendants of Adam and Noah of what actually happened?**

15. What other differences do we find in the Genesis account versus paganistic accounts?

Genesis 1:14-19: ¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the **greater light** to rule the day and **the lesser light** to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.—*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*.* (1989).[†]

16. It is very interesting to notice that Moses, who was very familiar with the pagan worship of the sun and the moon, chose not even to use those words lest someone misunderstand

what he was saying and think he was honoring the sun god or the moon god of pagans. Thus, Moses used the terms *greater light* and *lesser light* and showed that they were created by God and were not gods themselves. God created them for the specific functions: “To rule over the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness.”

17. Review again the specific details of how God created men and women.

Genesis 2:7,18-24: ⁷ Then the LORD God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it; he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live.... ¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him.” ¹⁹ So he took some soil from the ground and formed all the animals and all the birds. Then he brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and that is how they all got their names. ²⁰ So the man named all the birds and all the animals; but not one of them was a suitable companion to help him.

²¹ Then the LORD God made the man fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the flesh. ²² He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him. ²³ Then the man said,

“At last, here is one of my own kind—

Bone taken from my bone, and flesh from my flesh.

‘Woman’ is her name because she was taken out of man.”

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one.

²⁵ The man and the woman were both naked, but they were not embarrassed.—*Good News Bible*.*

18. Some people claim that man is superior to woman because man was created first and the first woman was taken out of man. But, remember that every man since then has been taken out of a woman.
19. By contrast, what do the pagan ancient Near Eastern myths suggest? Often, it was suggested that humans were created to do the work because the gods got tired!
20. Imagine living in a world created by the pagan ideas of gods being angry with humans and, thus, foisting upon them their work. Contrast that with the true story of God creating men and women to dominate our world and then “walking” with them in the cool of the evening.
21. It is interesting to note that there was a huge contrast between the pagan ideas and the God-given biblical idea even in ancient times, just as there are contrasts between what we read in the Bible today and what fallible human beings are saying today. We know God’s side; who came up with these contrasting ideas? God’s enemy!
22. Read Genesis 5 and Genesis 11. It is very interesting to note how the histories of these early beings who lived before the flood is actually recorded. Later chronogenealogies from 1 Chronicles 1:18-27 corroborate these early accounts.

There is one element that makes these genealogies unique in the Bible: they contain the element of time, causing some scholars to correctly call them “chronogenealogies.” They contain an interlocking mechanism of descent information coupled with spans of time, so that “when *Person 1* had lived *x* years, he fathered *Person 2*. And *Person 1*, after he fathered *Person 2*, lived

y years, and he fathered other sons and daughters.” Genesis 5 adds the formula phrase, “And all the days of *Person 1* were z years.” This interlocking system would have precluded deleting certain generations or adding them. Genesis 5 and Genesis 11 contain a continuous line of descent, as corroborated by 1 Chronicles 1:18-27, in which there are no added or missing generations. In this way the Bible interprets itself.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, May 27.[§]

23. What have modern critics done with this ancient historical record? There have been numerous attempts to find ways to extend these time periods into much longer ages. How should we respond to those efforts? If we are going to take the Bible seriously, we must recognize that Genesis 5 and 11 are:

“both historical and theological, linking Adam with the rest of humankind and God with man in the realm of the reaches of space and time. Genesis 5 and 11:10-26 provide the time framework and human chain that link God’s people with the man whom God created as the climax of the six-day creation event of this planet.”—Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” *Origins* 7/2 (1980), p. 69.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, May 27].^{‡§}

24. However, we must not make too big a deal out of chronologies because Paul himself said:

1 Timothy 1:4: Tell them to give up those legends and those long lists of ancestors, which only produce arguments; they do not serve God’s plan, which is known by faith.—*Good News Bible*.*

Titus 3:9: But avoid stupid arguments, long lists of ancestors, quarrels, and fights about the Law. They are useless and worthless.—*Good News Bible*.*

25. In the *Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, May 28, we are asked to read the following passages: Matthew 19:4-5; Mark 10:6-9; Luke 11:50-51; John 1:1-3; Acts 14:15; Romans 1:20; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:12-15; James 3:9; 1 Peter 3:20; Jude 11,14; and Revelation 2:7; 3:14; 22:2-3. What do these passages teach us? Why do we have the genealogies given in Matthew 1 and Luke 3? It is likely that Matthew’s list was the line of Joseph while Luke’s list was the line of Mary. The Creator God made human beings, male and female. He then married them and said what God has joined together, let no man put asunder. Human history is said to have started with the creation of the world. Through Him, that is through God, all things were made; not one thing in all creation was made without Him. He made heaven, earth, sea, and all that is in them. God not only created our world, but also out of darkness, He created light. Adam was created first and, then, Eve. Eve was deceived and, then, Adam intentionally joined her. They were made originally to be in the likeness of God. In that early garden, there was the tree of life growing in the Garden of Eden. It bore fruit 12 times a year. Enoch was the seventh direct descendent from Adam. In the days of Noah, eight people were saved by God in a boat.
26. Notice that New Testament writers supported the idea that Genesis 1-11 is an accurate record of what actually happened.
27. Read Romans 5:12-19. In this detailed description of the plan of salvation, Paul repeatedly contrasted the fall of the first Adam with the salvation that is provided through Jesus Christ, whom he called the *second Adam*.
28. So, how does that sound to you so far? If Jesus Himself and the New Testament writers felt that the Genesis account was a reliable history, would it not be foolish for us—based on

the claims of fallen, fallible human beings—to refuse to follow their example?

The Bible is the most comprehensive and the most instructive history which men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and a divine hand has preserved its purity through all the ages.... Here only can we find a history of our race, unsullied by human prejudice or human pride.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 5, 25.1.†

I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Relics found in the earth do give evidence of a state of things differing in many respects from the present. But the time of their existence, and how long a period these things have been in the earth, are only to be understood by Bible history. It may be innocent to conjecture beyond Bible history, if our suppositions do not contradict the facts found in the sacred Scriptures. **But when men leave the word of God in regard to the history of creation, and seek to account for God’s creative works upon natural principles, they are upon a boundless ocean of uncertainty.** Just how God accomplished the work of creation in six literal days he has never revealed to mortals. His creative works are just as incomprehensible as his existence.—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*,* Book 3, 93.1.†

29. Let us remind ourselves that *science* to the modern mind means something that can be handled, heard, seen, tested, and repeatedly retested to prove that it is correct. This, of course, leads to controversies and debates. So, **why should many people believe the theories of evolution about events which allegedly happened millions or even billions of years ago when those theories of origins cannot be tested scientifically?**
30. By definition, science has to deal with natural events. It has no way of testing supernatural events; creation and the flood were supernatural events. So, if you choose to rule out anything that is supernatural, of course, the Genesis account will have to be thrown out.
31. Once again, we need to remind ourselves not to be caught up with an argument from some evolutionist suggesting that he is arguing from science and that all we have is religion. If the discussion is to be about evidence, we need to point out plenty of fallacies in their “scientific” arguments. We both have the same evidence; we interpret that evidence to support our ideas of God, creation, and the flood; that is just as valid as their “science.” But, if we are to argue about religion, then, they have no grounds to stand on at all.
32. George Smith a volunteer researcher in 1872 found in the basement of the British Museum an ancient Babylonian tablet that contained references to *Utnapushtim*, the survivor of the worldwide flood, and to *Gilgamesh*, who sought to attain from him the secret to eternal life. This was reported in newspapers around the world. Since then, scholars have documented worldwide flood stories from cultures of many places. Creation stories have also been found. This has raised several questions. Could the biblical account of Genesis 1-11 simply be borrowed from the ancient Near East? Are there mythical elements in that account? How do we explain the differences between the biblical account and any of those pagan accounts?
33. Think of some of the times when science has been in direct conflict with the teachings of the Bible.

Galileo Galilei concluded that the sun was the center of the solar system, with the earth and the other planets revolving around the sun (**heliocentric worldview**). But there were others in the Catholic Church who taught that the earth was the center of the universe (**geocentric worldview**). This led to a

trial by the Inquisition, in which Galileo was forced to recant and was placed under house arrest until his death in 1642. The Galileo affair has often been cited as an example in which the Bible holds back science. But this raises several questions. Did the church's interpretation, which was used to condemn Galileo, really derive from the Bible? Was Galileo opposed to the Bible in favor of science? In fact, the Catholic Church had adopted a cosmology based on Greek Aristotelian philosophy and Ptolemy's mathematics, which it then tried to defend on the basis of the Bible. Galileo responded by defending his interpretation on the basis of the Bible, as well. First, he asserted that God is the author of both nature and the Bible. If properly understood, they would be in harmony. Second, Galileo pointed out that later interpreters can err. Then he stated that the language used in the Bible is adapted to the common person and should not always be taken in a literalistic way. Finally, he argued against the consistency of the literal reading of Joshua's insistence that the sun stand still over Gibeah (*Josh. 10:12*), in light of the prevailing Ptolemaic view that the earth always was still and stood in the center of the universe, because in that case the day would have been shorter, not longer (Richard J. Blackwell, *Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible* [South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1991], pp. 68, 69). Today there is no doubt which interpretation was correct. But it took the Catholic Church more than 350 years to exonerate Galileo, which it did in 1992.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 119-120.^{†§}

34. So, what should we conclude?

Does the Bible contain an antiquated view of cosmology? For centuries, critical scholars thought that Genesis 1 reflected the ideas of the ancient Babylonians. Thus, they insisted that the term *těhôm*, “deep,” derived from the name *Tiamat*, the goddess of the primeval ocean world in the *Enuma Elish* epic. The epic depicts the Babylonian god Marduk slaying Tiamat in mortal combat. Today it is recognized that *těhôm* is simply a term for a large body of water that is completely non-mythical. In fact, it is “impossible to conclude that *těhôm* ‘ocean’ was borrowed from *Tiamat*.”—David Toshio Tsumura, “Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Genesis and the Flood: An Introduction,” in *I Studied Inscriptions From Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, eds. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), p. 31. To suggest that Genesis 1 reflects a pagan conflict between the gods is to read into the text something that the text actually combats. The description of the passive, powerless, and unorganized state of the “deep” in Genesis 1:2 reveals that the term is non-mythical in content and anti-mythical in purpose.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 120.[§]

The term *rāqîa'* is sometimes translated “firmament,” from the term *firmamentum* in the Vulgate Latin translation of the Old Testament, which gives a false impression that the firmament is a solid metal dome. However, the term *rāqîa'* is better rendered “expanse,” as can be seen in Psalm 19:1 and Daniel 12:3. Likewise, does rain literally come through the “windows of heaven” (*Gen. 7:11, Gen. 8:2*)? In other passages, barley (*2 Kings 7:1, 2*), trouble and anguish (*Isa. 24:18, 19*), or blessings (*Mal. 3:10*) come through

the “windows of heaven.”—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 120-121.[§]

35. So, what is the relationship between God and human beings? Bible writers repeatedly in both Old Testament and New Testament made it clear that their stories were not like the pagan mythical ideas, blending the realm of gods and humans. See Psalm 19:1; Daniel 12:3; Genesis 7:11; 8:2; 2 Kings 7:1-2; and Isaiah 24:18-19. These verses should make it clear that when Bible writers talked about things like the windows of heaven, they were simply writing figuratively with metaphors such as rain pouring from the sky.
36. Notice a couple other differences between the biblical story and one of the ancient Mesopotamian stories known as the myth of *Enuma Elish*. In that story Marduk created mankind by murdering Taimot and splitting her in half and making humans out of her. As we have already noted in the creation account of *Atra-Hasis*, humans were created by mixing clay with the flesh and blood of a slaughtered god.
37. In ancient Egypt, it was believed that life and death were a continuing cycle in which humans were self-generating or possibly emanations from the gods. In the Bible we are told that creation week consisted of seven literal days. And on that seventh day, God rested from all the work that He had done. Ancient Egyptians believed that the death of the sun god was repeated daily, and that was considered to be a pattern for human life as well.

A Twenty-First Dynasty funerary papyrus shows a winged serpent with the caption “death, the great god, who made gods and men”—a “personification of death as a creator god and an impressive visual realization of the idea that death is a necessary feature of the world of creation.”—Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 81.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 121].^{§†}

38. In light of all of this, isn't it surprising that many moderns believe that the Bible is an antiquated book with little relevance to the major questions of the 21st century? Such people believe that there is no major difference between the creation and status of animals and the creation and status of human beings! They think we are all just part of a line of evolution.

In Hinduism, we evolve through reincarnation into another life-form when we die. God is in all and is all. According to Hinduism, there are 33 million gods as personified through nature. This concept goes back to ancient Egypt where there were 22,000 gods and where death and life were perceived as part of the great circle of life.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 122.

39. So, do you think it is important for us to recognize that the God we worship created Adam and Eve in a perfect, sinless state at a time when death did not exist anywhere in the universe even though sin and rebellion had previously started in heaven with Lucifer?
40. What do the ideas of evolution suggest precedes the creation of the first human beings? Were there millions of years of pain and death before humans even existed?
41. If God did not create humankind in the beginning as Adam and Eve, will He be able to re-create us at the time of the resurrection?

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Last Modified: May 17, 2020

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