



Part 3: God's Story, Our Story Genesis 2:4-25

The creation stories of Genesis are intended to give us a theological understanding of origins and purpose rather than a scientific account of origins.

I. Origin Stories

“Every culture, even every era in a particular culture, develops distinctive and sometimes intricate codes for telling its stories.” Robert Alter

“Mythologies [stories of origins] in the ancient world were like science in our modern world – it was their explanation of how the world came into being and how it worked. The gods had purposes, and their activities were the causes of what humans experienced as effects. In contrast, our modern scientific approach attempts to understand cause and effect based on natural laws.” John Walton, *Genesis NIV Application Commentary*, 27

Two stories of origins: the Bible and philosophical naturalism.

Philosophical naturalism is the philosophy or worldview that alleges science can explain everything about our existence, i.e., everything has a natural cause and organic life is solely the product of random forces guided by no one.

“We are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures. . . We may yearn for a ‘higher’ answer – but none exists. This explanation, though superficially

troubling, is ultimately liberating. . . We must construct these answers for ourselves.” Stephen Gould, Harvard

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
Genesis 1:1

II. Genesis Creation Stories (Reading Clues)

“The complications involved in the receiving end of the process of literary communication is quite simply that while the Bible was written for us, it was not written to us. . . It is absolutely imperative that we remember that the biblical books were written to a specific ancient audience and not to those of us who are reading them in the 21st century. Thus, it is critical that we recover the. . . ‘cognitive environment’ of any passage that we read.” Tremper Longman, *Confronting Old Testament Controversies*, 16

A. Two Creation Stories (2:1, 4)

The narrator signals another creation story (2:4). The creation stories of Genesis 1-2 offer different perspectives on the beginning of all things. The first creation focuses on the cosmos. The second creation story focuses on the creation of human beings as the crown of God’s creation. Both stories are about origins, purpose, and relationships.

B. Review of Genesis One

In the ancient world, people were concerned about functional roles more than material properties. Creation was not viewed primarily as a process by which matter was brought into being, but a process by which functions, roles, order, organization and stability were established. The actual creative act is to assign something its functioning role in the ordered system. This is what brings it into existence. See John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*

C. Lack of Sequence Concord between the Creation Stories

The two creation accounts (Gen. 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-25). Note: Many readers believe that 2:7 begins a more specific account of what happened on day six of Genesis 1 – a recapitulation giving more detail. They draw this conclusion because day six reports the creation of humanity, and they see Genesis 2 as a description of how God formed the first human being (Walton, 63). But there are problems with that reading.

1. The first creation account describes the creation sequence as vegetation first (day 3), followed by animals (early on day 6) and finally humanity (later on day 6).
2. The second creation account describes the creation first of the man, followed by vegetation, the animals, and then the first woman.

Note: If the two stories are sequels, we do not have to worry about fitting Genesis 2 into day six of Genesis 1. If they are sequels, it means the people in Genesis 1 may not be Adam and Eve or at least not the only Adam and Eve. This may explain the reference to other people in Genesis 4:14,17.

- D. The Genesis Two is an Archetypal Story (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6).

“Adam and Eve are presented as archetypes in their formation: they embody all people, and the affirmations of the forming accounts are affirmations made of everyone, not uniquely of them.” John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 199.

1. God’s Names are different in each story.
Elohim (1:1) = common Hebrew name for God emphasizes His supremacy and majesty over all things representing His transcendent relationship over creation.
Yahweh Elohim (2:4b) = God’s personal name for His covenant people (Exodus 3:14-15).
2. God’s Paradigm for Life (the Kingdom of God):
 God’s covenant people (Adam and Eve)
 In God’s place (garden)
 With God’s presence and purpose
 Under God’s rule (Word and Spirit)

“Genesis would not be offering a competing claim to the scientific account of human origins. That does not mean science is right: it means only that the Bible does not offer a competing claim. The Bible’s claim is that whatever happened, God did it. He is the one responsible for our human existence and our human identity regardless of the mechanisms or the time period. The Bible does not say clearly how he did it.” John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 77.

III. Stories Give Identity

“The most powerful of all spiritual forces is man’s view of himself, the way in which he understands his nature and his destiny; indeed it is the one force which determines all others which influence human life.” Emil Brunner
See Psalm 139:13-16.

Back to Jesus and our questions...

“I remember on the way home [Apollo 11], it suddenly struck me that the tiny pea in the window was the earth. I put my thumb up and shut one eye, and my thumb blotted out planet earth. But I didn’t feel like a giant. I felt very, very small.” Neil Armstrong

Recommended Resources:

1. Bibleproject.com (videos and podcasts).
2. American Scientific Affiliation (network.asa3.org).
3. *Origins: A Reformed Look at Creation, Design & Evolution* by Deborah and Loren Haarsma (Faith Alive, 2007).
4. *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* by John Walton (IVP Academic, 2015).
5. *Four Views on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Zondervan, 2017).
6. *Reading Genesis 1-2 An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (2013).
7. *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller (Dutton, 2008).

Discussion Questions:

1. What has been your experience with the alleged conflict between science and the Genesis creation stories? Do you see this as a stumbling block to people and the gospel?
2. What, if anything, have you been taught about the interpretation of Genesis Two? Since the ancient Israelites were a story-telling people rather than a scientific people, does it seem reasonable that God would choose to communicate through story rather than science?
3. What did you hear or read that helps you think about Genesis 2?

4. Having argued for the second creation story as an archetypal story, John Walton states,

“Genesis would not be offering a competing claim to the scientific account of human origins. That does not mean science is right: it means only that the Bible does not offer a competing claim. The Bible’s claim is that whatever happened, God did it. He is the one responsible for our human existence and our human identity regardless of the mechanisms or the time period. The Bible does not say clearly how he did it.” *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 77.

5. Do you think Walton’s statement could be helpful in the debate about science and Christianity?