

January 28, 2012

We want to know our beginnings, all religions want to know. Richard Dawkins – *The God Delusion* Alister McGrath - *The Dawkins Delusion* Richard is a geneticist – *The Selfish Gene*. Science can only happen in one way, by observation. You observe effects, and you make inferences back to the top. We run into troubles when we apply this to ourselves. The gene project is trying to determine why we are like we are, why we behave like we do.

The Story of Creation

Genesis 1:1-2:3

Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984; Robert Culver, *Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government*, Chicago: Moody Press, 197.

There are three different issues involved in understanding the message of Genesis one:

- i. Literary genre
- ii. Linguistic and exegetical questions
- iii. Scientific implications (other than as applied to hermeneutical questions)

1. The Role of Science in Understanding Genesis

As far as the Old Testament theologian is concerned, natural science must play a somewhat subsidiary role. "We have the right to bring our prior knowledge of reality to bear only as far as we can presuppose it in the human author of the biblical text" (Blocher 1984, 26).

2. The Determination of Literary Genre

Culver says of the Genesis story,

The reader's predilections may incline him to interpret it literally, parabolically, metaphorically, typically, by a mixture of these methods, or even mythologically. In any case, treated fairly and taken seriously as a revelation of truth, his interpretation must conclude that man has evil at his heart, that nature has disorder, but that man and nature have not always been so. (1974, 32)

Certain things may be taught best by symbolic language, especially when literal language would lead us to certain misconceptions about those things outside the power of our observation.

The Bible makes repeated reference to the conquest of Rahab/Leviathan as the enemy of God. There is a distinct development of the motif.

- i. The defeat of the enemy of creation:

Job 26:12-13

Ps 74:13-17

Ps 89:5-12

Leviathan is the monster of the deep conquered by God in his creation of the world. This certainty of God's absolute control of the world is an assurance for God's people in the worst times of crisis. The allusion in these verses is to the greatest possible threat to the world, as known in the ancient myth. If God has conquered the greatest threat there is nothing to fear.

ii. The defeat of the enemy of Israel:

Isa 30:7

Isa 51:9-10

Though creation is in the absolute control of God there is not yet complete redemption for the people of God. The enemies of God's people may be compared to the great monster that threatened the world. God conquers the deep for his people just as he did at creation.

iii. The ultimate defeat of the enemy of God:

Isa 27:1

Rev 12:1-18

Ultimately the enemy of the world is personal, the great twisting serpent, Leviathan that God will destroy. This is the completion of redemption.

The Theology of Creation

Bernard F. Batto, "The Sleeping God: An Ancient Near Eastern Motif of Divine Sovereignty." *Bib 68* (1987) 153-177.

Earth as Home for Mankind

The creation story has eight creative acts in six creative days. There is a distinct emphasis on the movement of creation from that of separation of the primeval chaos (vv. 3, 6, 7, 14, 18) to the preparation of the earth a place fruitful for life. The conclusion comes with day seven.

I Form for the Earth

Day 1 Creation of light (separation of light from darkness)

Day 2 Creation of the firmament (separation of the waters)

Day 3 The dry land (the waters are gathered)
The production of the land

II Function of the Earth

Day 4 The function of light (separation of day and night)

Day 5 The habitation of the waters
(The firmament of the sky as the habitation of the birds is associated with the waters, according to the separation of day 2, those above and those below.)

Day 6 The animals of the earth
The creation of man

Note the focus on earth, which each time is a double creative act. The earth, however, is finally the place prepared for man who is specially blessed and given dominion.

III The goal of creation

Day 7 The rest of God

The observation that this day is unending (note the absence of evening and morning) is significant of the eternal purpose of creation. It is this eternal rest which is the constant goal of creation. This is certainly the underlying premise of the argument of Jesus in John five.

The rest of God is a very significant theological statement about the relation of God and creation. The resting God is a motif common in the Bible as well as ancient near eastern literature. An examination of this concept in all the literature by Batto (1987) demonstrates two significant motifs. "The divine rest which follows creation is, as it were, a statement that the creative

activity is complete and that the work of the creator is perfect” (156). Further, “the explicit portrayal of the creator sleeping functioned as a statement of the deity’s status as the supreme ruler of heaven and earth. The ability to sleep undisturbed was the symbol of the deity’s absolute dominion over the heavens and the earth and the underworld” (164). It is significant that the rest of God as a true Sabbath is before the fall. After the fall the Sabbath in scripture becomes a sign of the restoration of that rest. In the Old Testament it is a sign of the promise of the redemption of God.

The sanctification of the seventh day indicates that creation is set apart for God himself. The created universe belongs to God under his absolute control and authority.

Mankind as the Image of God

The statement that man is in God’s image is tantalizing in its brevity. For this reason there is always a tendency to find in Gen 1:26-27 much more than they actually say. God and man have a distinct relationship to creation:

God		
		Creation
Man		

The fact that man is only in the image of God also is indicative of limitation. God is indeed distinct from all creation:

		Creation
God		
		Man

Man is subject to the sovereignty of God, he cannot be his own god. The fact that he is like God makes this attempt possible. Man has dignity and worth next to that of God as long as he knows the sovereignty of his creator. Ironically, when man denies this sovereignty he elevates himself to a state of self-divinization (since he would be independent, serving himself), but reduces himself to being nothing more than a part of the material universe (since he is bound to the dust), with the result that he is of very uncertain worth.

The Story of Mankind

Gen. 2:4-6:8

The account begins as a history (*tw/dwt*), which marks it as the introduction to a history of man (cf. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10). The title suggests that this account is to be regarded as telling us about the events of man on earth. This is not to suggest that the story may not have symbolical elements, if there is good reason to regard them as such, but it does suggest that man in this story is not simply some “symbol” of the end process of evolution, or the general representation of the situation of all men and women. This story is the history of an actual man, as he is regarded elsewhere in scripture (Rom 5). This tablet “. . . invites us to place Genesis 2-3 at the beginning of a sequence of events that are in principle localizable and datable (Blocher 1984, 162-3). This is history in the more usual sense of the term, and certainly not myth as described by Barth.

Man at Home in the Earth (Gen 2:4-25)

The location of this story is within the cosmos that is already known (Gen 2:4). The creation account tells us what we need to know about God, the world and man in order that we may understand the story of man in the world, and the condition of man in the world as we know it.

1. The Garden of God

The garden of God is a concept known elsewhere in the Bible (Gen 13:10). The earth begins as a desert without water and without a man to work the ground (v. 5). The flood of waters (v. 6 *'ed* = Akkadian *edu*) did not yet serve as suitable irrigation for the garden.

It is probable the author did have in mind an actual location indicated by the rivers. Cush may be Kassu of Assyria, and Havilah has several possible locations. The garden may be located at the source of the great rivers (Armenia), but more likely it is to be thought of as the mouth where the great rivers join, somewhere near the Persian Gulf.

The garden is Eden, the place of delight (2 Sam 1:24; Gen 18:12). God's garden leaves nothing to be desired.

2. The Conditions for Life

Life for mankind is conditioned by two trees: life and knowledge.

The expression “good and evil” indicates totality in some fashion, the entire range of possibility, as in our expressions “rich and poor” or “young and old” (Isa 7:11; Gen 24:50; 31:24; Deut 6:7). God (Zeph 1:12) or an idol (Isa 41:23) may be challenged as to whether he can do anything at all. In Genesis the range is applied to knowledge. This may be total knowledge, which God reserves for himself, and gives him total power to act. “Knowledge” often means the ability to do something (Gen 25:27; 1 Sam 16:16; 1 Kgs 5:20). The result of knowing something is the ability to carry it out. God is the only one who possesses this knowledge and power absolutely (Isa 43:10-11). In this case the temptation was to have the absolute power of God (Gen 3:7). Knowing good and evil may refer to the power to choose, as seems to be indicated by other

passages using this particular expression. An old man can no longer choose between foods (2 Sam 19:35); a wise king may make right decisions (2 Sam 14:17; 1 Kgs 3:9); a young child must arrive at the age where he can make responsible decisions (Isa 7:15; Deut 1:39). In this case the attempt to be like God is the attempt to know right and wrong apart from God, the attempt to have moral autonomy. The quest for moral autonomy has occupied the best efforts of the world's philosophers who live under the illusion that it may be attained.

3. The Mandate for Life

God's command for man must not be seen as a narrow stipulation. The stipulation (*Verbot*) simply prescribed the limits within which man's life was to be lived. Man is the created being; he can live only in total dependence upon God, as indicated by the commands in relation to the two trees.

God's command for life (*Gebot*) was the entire potential of what man could become as the king of the earth. Man had begun to exercise that dominion (2:19), but his proper function in the image of God is not possible apart from true personal community. It is not true community for man to have another just like himself, it must be a partner specially suited to him. Woman is the true complement of man, and only together, the two of them as "man" in the image of God, is the fulfillment of the creation mandate possible.

The creation command includes a cultural mandate. This is a description of the relationship men and women have with each other. The sexual relationship is not satisfactory simply as a fulfillment of sensual desire. A sex crazed society has little ability to appreciate the true beauty of sex. Sex is the most intimate of human relationships, and as such the relationship is explicitly initiated by a public (communal) commitment of two individuals to each other. Anything less than this is the use of sex for sensual desire, and the abuse of the person we use (true of any form of promiscuity, seen worst in prostitution). It must be noted that procreation is not given as the primary purpose for the relationship. Only one reason is given: "it is not good that man should be alone."

Man a Slave to the Earth (Gen 3:1-24)

1. The Attempt to be God

The sin of man has often been linked to sexual offense in some manner. The "knowledge of good and evil" may be thought of as that achieved by the sexual knowledge of adolescence, but this is hardly germane to the story. It may be the knowledge that attempts to steal the secret of fertility. The serpent, who has this knowledge, is sometimes a symbol of fertility. However no link with sex is particularly indicated by the knowledge of good and evil.

The sin of man is clearly that of seeking autonomy from God, the attempt to be his own God. If knowledge of good and evil is taken as total knowledge, the ability to act with unlimited power, then the reference is to an explicit effort to assume the prerogatives of God. This may be suggested by the fact that "their eyes were opened." Elsewhere this expression has the significance of the restoration of strength (1 Sam 14:27, 29). The eye is the organ that indicates

strength of life (Ps 38:10), a knowledge and strength which only God has absolutely (Job 10:4). The tree is desirable to provide success (*lshskyl*, v. 6) in one's endeavors (cf. 1 Sam 18:30). On the other hand the attempt to be God may be described in terms of moral autonomy.

The result of the fall is said to be that man has become as God knowing good and evil (3:22). This verse expresses the paradox of life under sin. Man must be his own God, but his autonomy is an illusion; he is in fact alienated from God.

The act of the first Adam is in complete contrast with the second (Phil 2:6-11). The Second Adam who was God accepted the humility of dying as a man; the first Adam tried to be God when he was not and returned to the earth from where he came.

2. The Conditions of Life

The immediate effect of disobedience is a sense of shame. Guilt and shame are related. The shamelessness of a child is a sign of his innocence, he does not yet recognize his guilt. The shamelessness of an adult is an insensitivity to guilt. As adults we feel a sense of shame when we know our guilt. We all have things to hide. The condition of sin is described very well by the Jo Hari window. The craftiness of the serpent (*rwm*) leads to the recognition of nakedness (*rwm*).

3. The Provision for Life

Man (*dm*) taken from the ground (*dmh*) and created to prosper from it now finds that ground resistant to his efforts. The woman is now Eve (*hw*) for she is the means by which life (*hy*) may continue, though it be through pain. Her new name fits the new circumstances. The name of Eve is not to be linked to the serpent (through and Arab cognate), as often argued, nor is it a reference to an underworld deity (thought to be suggested by Punic *tabella* as a "mother goddess"). Though man is driven from the garden, evil shall not finally have dominion over him (3:15).

Man is now barred from the resource for revival and continuance of life (3:22-24). The new provisions for life have a distinct link with the original conditions created by God for life, indicating the unity of these chapters.

The Reversal and Restoration of Creation

Genesis 6:9-9:29

From Creation to Chaos

The earth God created for man became uninhabitable by reason man's rejection of his creator. The earth did not serve its intended purpose for man, and creation its intended goal for God. Though indeed man did become fruitful and multiply (Gen 5), it was impossible for him to continue.

1. The Violence of Natural Order

The story of mankind is one of violence (Gen 4:1-16; 23-24). God judges the earth for violence (*hms*, 6:11, 13). This is virtually a technical term for the violation of the weak by the strong, a breach of a just order, an order provided for by God. This is reflected in the song of Lamech, for he makes a deliberate parody of the divine order laid down for Cain. This is also true for the sin of Cain, for the blood of Abel cries out to God from the ground; blood and life belong to God alone.

2. The Reversal of Creation Order

The story of creation told of how God had brought order into the watery chaos (*bdl'*, separate), so the earth became habitable and functional for life. That order is now reversed, so chaos has come again, and the earth is an unseparated watery mass (Gen 1:2). The deep bursts forth and the firmament breaks down (Gen 7:11). Water covers the earth, then the birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures and finally man (Gen 7:19-21). The creation of man was the climax of creation (Gen 2:4-8), but man is to be blotted out (Gen 6:7). His every thought is evil (Gen 6:5); he now directly receives the punishment that was to come for disobedience (Gen 2:17).

Sin also brings the division of that which belongs together. Man belonged to God, but his attempted autonomy made him defendant against God as judge (Gen 3:9 ff.). Man (*'dm*) belonged to the earth (*'dmh*), but now struggles against it (Gen 3:17-19); he now struggles with the animals (Gen 3:15). The most fundamental union was that of the breath of life (Gen 2:7); this was what made him man, and distinguished him from the dust of the earth. Now that fundamental union is broken (Gen 6:7).

The Commitment to Creation

The reversal of creation does not mean that God has abandoned his work. Rather, God affirms his obligation and makes provision for life.

1. The Renewal of the Creation Covenant

God's instructions to Noah were the establishment of a covenant with creation (Gen 6:18). The flood story concludes with the sign of the bow as an eternal promise that God will maintain his covenant with creation (Gen 9:8-17).

The flood story is the first encounter with the word covenant (*bryt*) of some 290 occurrences in the Old Testament. Just what is “my covenant” which appears here without any introduction? What is included in the covenant? Is this occasion a special use of the word?

The divine announcement (Gen 6:18) appears to point to a one-sided arrangement, and there is no indication as to what may have called it into being. Covenant arrangements are known in Genesis as a means of ordering relationships.

2. The Provision for Natural Order

The creation relationships are renewed in reverse order (Gen 9:1-7; mankind, the remainder of living things and the world itself in general terms). However this is no simple return to the way things were at creation. The ordinances remain, but with provision for life under changed conditions of permanent sin. Violence is a part of this natural order, reflected even in the relationships of man and animals. Man has dominion, but in brutal conditions.

In a violent world there must be respect for life. Man may have the right to kill (v. 4), but he must remember that life is God’s property. This fact must be especially recognized in the case of man. God retains his rights for the life of man. An assault on God’s image is an assault on God. Man, as God’s representative in his image, must act for God. Earlier this had referred in particular to the dominion of man over animals. In a violent world this has implications for the dominion of man over man. The avenger and executioner are both in God’s image (Gen 9:6).

These provisions must be taken as principles and not legalistic mandates for religious and civil order. Man must have respect for nature and the life of nature, even in a violent world where nature often attacks man. The New Testament does not call us to a particular consciousness about blood, but this principle does not change. It would be pure hypocrisy to refuse to eat blood, but plunder creation. Man must have respect for the life of man, and every murder must be treated in accordance with its circumstances so this is known. The Old Testament never prescribed death for every murder, there was always a city of refuge for certain circumstances. The authority of man over man (civil government) is recognized in every society, and everyone recognizes some circumstances when life must be taken by civil authorities in the interests of the sanctity of life (as when a James Huber enters a Macdonald’s shop and begins to shoot everyone in sight).

The world stands under divine mercy. The same reasons for the flood still exist, but God has provided for the continuance of creation in the interests of the redemption of creation. God has committed himself to creation, we exist by his favor.

3. The Spread of Sin Spread of Grace Theme

As indicated in the sin - punishment pattern, the picture of man in this primeval history is that of an intensifying expression of his hubris. God’s grace is provided correspondingly, so human life continues to be possible. However to this point no solution has been found. Each manifestation of grace has only intensified the rebellion and the seriousness of the problem.

A major break occurs at this point in Genesis. God has made it possible for life to continue, but he also takes action to break the cycle. The promise to Abraham is a new beginning to restore a lost and fallen world. This is a promise of redemption, universal in its scope, a direct response to the final attempt of man to rule himself independently of God.