

Know What You Believe!

Part 4: Creation, Angels, and the Church

Sam A. Smith

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1A. Creation

A Brief History of Biblical Cosmology

One of the very interesting areas of biblical studies is creation. Creation didn't used to be a hot topic, but in modern history several things have happened to bring this issue to the forefront. Years ago, prior to the emergence of evolution and modern atheism, most people in western culture believed in God. Naturally, they assumed that God made the world. The biblical account was simply taken at face value and little attention was devoted to any in-depth analysis of the Bible's account of creation. (It's unfortunate that in the absence of controversy some Bible truths are neglected.) The pre-scientific Christian conception of the origin of the universe was very simplistic. Most people just believed that God had created the universe a few thousand years before their time. The emergence of the theory of biological evolution challenged the assumption that the world was recently created. After all, if evolution were true it would have taken long ages for life to evolve from simpler organisms, and longer for the first life forms to have emerged in the first place. With the growing popularity of evolution, investigators began to look for evidence of the antiquity of the earth. Thus was born the modern science of geology. It is imperative to understand that from the very beginning, geology presumed biological evolution. The ages of various rock formations were "dated" based on the assumed amount of time that would be necessary for their evolution (or the evolution of the creatures embedded within them). Evolutionary biologists then used the "findings" of geology to support the evolutionary theory.

Most of this information was difficult for the layperson to digest. Though conservatives—those who tend to understand the Bible objectively (normally)—rejected evolution as incompatible with the Bible, most eventually accepted the proposition that the earth might not be as young as previously thought. In an effort to square this emerging realization that the earth may be old (much older than eight to ten thousand years), with the Bible, some put forth what today is known as the "gap theory." The gap theory proposed that God created the earth (Gen. 1:1), then at Satan's fall, judged the earth and that it lay in ruins for a very long time (Gen. 1:2), until God decided to re-create it (Gen 1:3-2:3). According to this theory, the earth could be any age—since no one knows how long the proposed gap between verses 1 and 2 might have been. This seemed to square the Bible with modern thinking about the age of the earth, while at the same time clearly rejecting biological evolution. This view came to be one of the dominant views among theological conservatives, and remained so until fairly recent times—about the mid-1950s. If you look closely at the writings of some of the leading Bible expositors of the early twentieth century, you will find that many of them held to one form or another of the gap theory.

Other ideas designed to reconcile the Bible and scientific observations were also suggested. One theory proposed that God created the materials of the universe and then waited a very long time before forming them into their present arrangement. This view became known as the "chaos" theory. Theistic evolution was also proposed. This theory not only attempted to square the Bible with the presumed antiquity of the earth, but went a step further and attempted to reconcile the Bible with biological evolution. Theistic evolutionists proposed that God used evolution as the means of creation, at least partially. Another view, "progressive creationism," suggested that the days of Genesis chapter one were actually long geologic ages in which God performed his work

of creation. This view was essentially non-evolutionary in that it did not account for the rise of the various species through evolution; it simply sought to square the Bible with current thinking about geology and paleontology

In more recent time the trend among some biblical conservatives has been to go back to the original conception of a young earth, indeed a young universe. Recent creationism began to gain ground in conservative circles in the 1970s. There were several reasons for this. The gap theory was in serious trouble. Some of its major proponents were beginning to notice serious flaws in the theory (which we will discuss further along). Conservative Christians found their backs to the wall as they saw evolution, with all of its implications, sweep through Western intellectual circles like a firestorm. They desperately needed to mount a serious challenge, and finding support for a recent creation would be the surest antidote for evolution. Time is to evolution what fuel is to fire, take away the fuel and the fire dies; take away time and evolution dies. Other theories seemed to have fallen by the wayside, or clearly had major problems. Perhaps because of its adversarial relation to evolution, recent creationism quickly coalesced into a highly focused and organized movement. Organizations like the Institute for Creation Research have been prolific producers of educational materials, most of which have been distributed in churches, Christian colleges, and seminaries, where they have had a significant impact. Part of the appeal of recent creationism is that it seems to bring together a literal and non-evolutionary interpretation of the Genesis account, and appears to harmonize with the complexities of modern science. According to recent creationism, God created the universe in a mature state perhaps eight to ten thousand years ago. According to recent creationism, the universe appears to be old not because it is old, but because it was created mature—imparting to it an “appearance” of age.

Of course recent creationism has serious flaws of its own. Although the early geological evidence offered for the age of the earth was largely suspect due to its evolutionary bias, in recent years (since the mid-1900s) a growing body of evidence suggests that the universe is much older than the eight to ten thousand years allowed by recent creationism. And recent creationism hinges on the ability of mature creation to fully account for the appearance of the age of the universe; but this explanation is seriously flawed, as will be explained further along.

Just how important is biblical cosmology? It's very important if you happen to be a university student, or if you happen to be a pastor or Sunday school teacher who is sometimes asked how the early chapters of Genesis fit with modern science. Before proceeding, we need to understand three key terms that will be used throughout this discussion. They are: “creation *ex nihilo*,” “immediate creation,” and “mediate creation.” Before proceeding, we need to understand three key terms that will be used throughout this discussion. They are: “creation *ex nihilo*,” “immediate creation,” and “mediate creation.”

Creation *ex nihilo*: The terms “*ex*” and “*nihilo*” are Latin, and when put together mean, “out of nothing.” Creation *ex nihilo* refers to the original creation of time, matter, energy, space, gravity, etc. It does not refer to the subsequent forming or shaping of matter after its original creation.

Immediate creation: Immediate creation is simply another term for creation *ex nihilo*, and the two terms are completely interchangeable. Immediate creation signifies that

God brought something into existence directly—as opposed to forming something that already existed.

Mediate creation: Mediate creation refers to forming (or fashioning) something out of existing materials. The creation of Adam and Eve are examples of mediate creation, since God did not produce man out of nothing, but rather out of the dust of the earth (which he had previously created), and woman out of man.

Now that we have an overview of biblical cosmology, let's take a more detailed look at each of the major creation views: the pre-scientific view, theistic evolution, progressive creation, the literary "framework" theory, the gap theory, classic recent creationism, relativistic recent creationism, and the "chaos," or as I prefer to call it, the "preformative" theory.

The Pre-scientific View of creation

The pre-scientific view of creation, held prior to the modern scientific period, is that the world was created out of nothing about six thousand years ago. The nice thing about this view is that it did not require any elaborate explanations to account for why the universe and the earth appear to be old. To the pre-scientific mind the universe looked to be about six thousand years old, and as they say, "that was that"—neat and simple.

Factors Giving Rise to the Pre-Scientific View

The pre-scientific view was based on a simplistic reading of the Old Testament that gave no consideration to the problem of the apparent age of the universe. By adding up the genealogies and reigns of the Old Testament kings, some scholars thought they could arrive at a fairly accurate date for creation. Using this method, Bishop James Ussher (1581-1656) dated creation at 4004 B.C. (or more precisely, the evening prior to October 23, 4004 B.C.). [Bishop Ussher's chronology was so widely accepted that his dates appeared in the margins of many Bibles until very recently; and while it is no longer considered to be valid by Bible scholars (primarily because of problems with the pre-flood portion of the chronology), it was still an amazing piece of work for its time.]

Problems With the Pre-scientific View

Of course, there were problems with the pre-scientific view. First, it did not entirely fit with the biblical text. The creation account in Genesis does not make the claim that everything recorded from Genesis 1:1 to 1:31 occurred in a six-day period (literal, or otherwise). As we will see when we look at what Genesis actually says, it is virtually certain that the *ex nihilo* creation (*i.e.*, the original creation out of nothing) occurred sometime before the first of the six formative days of Genesis chapter one. Second, the pre-scientific view does not account for the apparent age of the universe. The universe clearly appears to be older—much older—than six thousand years. We will discuss the apparent age of the universe further along. Thus, if the universe were only a few thousand years old, we would need to account for the discrepancy between its actual age and its apparent age (13 to 15 billion years—give or take a few billion).

Reconciliation Theories

Only in the modern period have we become aware of the fact that the universe appears to be much older than a few thousand years. In fact, current estimates of the age of the

universe now extend to about fifteen billion years. Prior to the modern period, there was no need to reconcile the Genesis account with scientific observations. However, with new evidence of the age of the universe, it became necessary to speculate as to how the truth of Genesis and science might be squared. This need gave rise to numerous “reconciliation theories.” A reconciliation theory is a speculative understanding of the Genesis account and how it might fit with modern science. Of course, not all scientific theories are valid. While many Christians are convinced that there is adequate scientific evidence that the universe is old, most conservative students of the Bible reject biological evolution as both incompatible with the Bible and unsupported by the scientific evidence. Nevertheless, there have been those within Christendom who have embraced biological evolution, and that is reflected in at least one of the theories we will examine. Naturally, the degree to which each theory reconciles Genesis and modern science varies. Some of these theories provide for reconciliation between Genesis and science both in regard to the age of the universe and biological evolution. Other theories reject biological evolution (at least at the macro-evolutionary level) and simply attempt to reconcile Genesis with the apparent antiquity of the universe. It is important for the student of the Bible to understand that all of these reconciliation theories are, to varying degrees, speculative. It is essential to make a distinction between what the Bible actually says and reasonably implies, and a theory that attempts to show how that information relates to modern science. A particular reconciliation theory may prove to be unserviceable because it does not do justice to the biblical text, or because it does not do justice to well-established scientific information, or because it’s simply not reasonable. But just because a particular reconciliation theory proves untrue does not mean that the Bible is wrong. Remember, reconciliation theories are simply speculations about how Genesis might fit with modern science. It is also worth pointing out that these theories seem to come and go in terms of popularity. From the early nineteenth century to the nineteen-sixties, the chaos theory and the gap theory were predominate among biblical conservatives, whereas since the nineteen-seventies, recent creationism has become very popular. Just as there was a paradigm shift among biblical conservatives in the nineteen-seventies, we are now on the verge of another shift as inherent flaws in recent creationism are becoming more apparent. For those who might have been taught a reconciliation theory as if it were biblical fact, such a paradigm shift can be disconcerting, to say the least. It is important to keep in mind that Christian teaching on the subject of creation contains two distinct streams of information. One stream is what the Bible actually says about creation (primarily the Genesis text); the other stream is what we think that biblical information means in light of our understanding of—and attitude toward—modern science. Most often both streams are combined and presented as an “interpretation” of Genesis; that’s unfortunate because such a procedure does not distinguish the biblical facts (what the text actually says) from the theoretical component. Most of the theories given below have serious problems, yet it is not difficult to find individuals who subscribe to each of these theories. In fact, there are, no doubt, some whose view of Genesis has not progressed beyond the pre-scientific view. While such laxity is not fatal to our faith, it may be fatal to our witness. If we refuse to acknowledge what others see clearly, we can hardly expect our message to be taken seriously.

Day-Age Theories

The day-age theories state that the “days” of Genesis were not literal twenty-four hour days, but long geologic ages—millions, or billions of years in length. There are two basic forms of the day-age theory: “theistic evolution” and “progressive creation.” While these are both day-age theories, they are very different in that theistic evolution accepts

the concept of macroevolution (evolution from one species to another), whereas progressive creation attributes the origin of species to creative “bursts” spaced out over long geologic ages, rather than macro-evolution. Interesting, much of the current paleontological evidence and much of the modern radiometric dating is consistent with progressive creationism (except, for example, dates for humans extending beyond the range of biblical history.)

a. Theistic Evolution

Theistic evolutionists speculate that God created the materials of the universe and the physical laws, and then used evolution (chance interaction, mutation, and natural selection) to complete the process. They offer the same evidence for theistic evolution that is offered by non-theistic evolutionists. There are varieties of theistic evolution. Some proponents suggest that God created the first life and allowed evolution to run its course; others hold that life arose as a result of natural processes from the materials that God created.

Problems With Theistic Evolution

From the biblical point of view, there are two major problems with theistic evolution. First, it is clearly not compatible with the account of creation given in Genesis 1-2. Genesis states that man is a direct creation of God. Genesis also states that God created all of the animals “after their kind” (Gen. 1:24,25). This statement would certainly seem to preclude the idea that all life has arisen from simpler forms. Secondly, the account of man’s fall into sin and the plan of redemption, of which the rest of the Bible is largely occupied, are based upon a normal/objective understanding of the first few chapters of Genesis. If the creation account is to be regarded as mythical, then the entire message of the Bible would be questionable. Third, there are fundamental scientific problems with the theory of evolution itself (as examples: the problem of irreducibly complex systems, the apparent design of organisms, the problem of biogenesis, and the problem of how non-intelligence produced the information necessary for the pattern of living things). [On the problems with biological evolutionary theory you may want to consult [Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution](#), by Michael Behe. Behe focuses on the inability of evolutionary theory to account for the rise of “irreducibly complex systems” in living organisms.]

b. Progressive Creationism

Progressive creationism suggests that God’s creative activity extended over long period ages. This view, which rejects macro-evolution as the origin of species, regards each of the days of the Genesis account as representing an era of indeterminate (and possibly, variable) length, during which God progressively, in bursts, created new things. According to this theory the species arose in the time frame that modern science claims is indicated in the fossil record, but not as a result of evolution. Accordingly, the days of Genesis are understood as a literary structure representing these epochs. In the past, some proponents of day-age theories used 2 Peter 3:8 as support. (In 2 Peter 3:8, Peter indicated that with the Lord a thousand years is “as one day.”) However, as we will see, 2 Peter 3:8 does not support this use.

Problems With Progressive Creationism

There are several difficulties associated with progressive creationism. First, it isn’t compatible with a purely literal interpretation of Genesis. However, the theory

cannot be ruled out on that basis, because it is possible that the days of Genesis chapter one were intended simply to represent indefinite time periods, not 24 hour days. There are numerous instances in the Bible where the term “day” represents a time period other than a 24-hour day. (Take for example the frequently used expression, “the day of the LORD.”) In this case, the reference to “evening” and “morning” would simply form a kind of literary “inclusio” for each metaphorical “day.” Second, as to the use of 2 Peter 3:8 where Peter says, “. . . *one day is with the Lord as a thousands years, and a thousand years as one day,*” this does not mean that when scripture indicates “a day” we are at liberty to interpret that to mean an indefinite amount of time. Peter was simply saying that God is patient and unaffected by time. He was not saying that when scripture indicates a time relationship we are at liberty to take it figuratively. It is odd that 2 Peter 3:8 would be chosen to support the notion that time references in the Bible are somewhat elastic. Actually, this passage indicates quite the opposite. If “a day” in this passage wasn’t literally a day, and “a thousand years” wasn’t literally a thousand years, this passage would be nonsensical, since that meaning only comes into sharp focus when we understand that Peter is saying a literal twenty-four hour day, and a thousand years are all the same to an eternal (timeless) God. If the terms “one day” and “a thousand years” were interchangeable Peter would be saying that a thousand years is as a thousand years to God, which would make no sense. However, having said that, the fact that 2 Peter 3:8 does not support the day-age concept is not a negative for this view. It is more the lack of positive biblical evidence. Third, progressive creationism would need to be able to explain how the creation of plants preceded the forming of the sun. While this may not be an insurmountable problem, it does require a reasonable solution. (Perhaps the two events actually happened in tandem, with one being relegated to one era and the other to the next era.) Fourth, it is sometimes suggested that Exodus 20:11 seems to preclude this view by stating that everything was created in six days. Of course, if Exodus 20:11 simply reflects the Genesis account, then whatever “day” means in Genesis is also meant in Exodus 20:11. However, moving from a more literal view to progressive creationism in order to reconcile the biblical record to modern science still does not solve all the problems. Even if one accepts progressive creationism, there are still incompatibilities between the record of biblical history and modern science, particularly in the area of scientific dating (for example, the dates of human existence). Unfortunately, the scientific dating process is itself theory-bound (for example, uniformitarian assumptions and the use of calibration curves based on evolutionary assumptions in radiometric dating). Also, as of the present time, no radiometric method has yet to be validated by independent double blind testing. While some radiometric methods correlate with other radiometric methods, such correlations address only consistency among these methods, not their accuracy. Until far more information is available on the validity of the proposed scientific dates, it would be premature to try to accommodate biblical interpretation to these dates.

Several interesting books have been written in the last few years promoting one version or another of the day-age theory. (See, [The Finger Print of God](#) and [The Creator and the Cosmos](#), both by Hugh Ross, and [A New Look at an Old Earth](#), by Don Stoner, and [The Science of God](#), by Gerald L. Schroeder) Unfortunately, while these books correctly point out some of the flaws in recent creationism’s young earth view, they incorrectly assume that the only alternative is some form of day-age view.

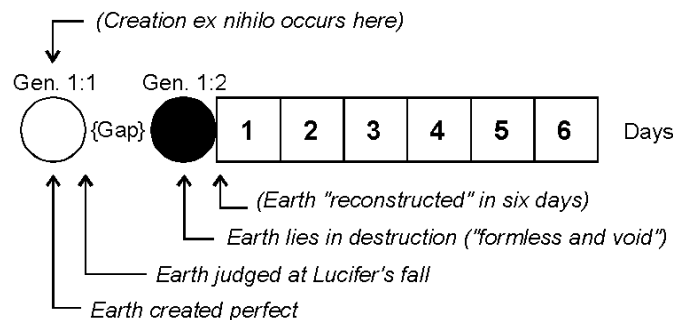
The Literary Framework Theory

The literary framework theory states that the days in Genesis chapter one serve merely as a literary structure in which the creation story is either told, or set. According to this view the six days of Genesis were not six days in which creation took place, but six movements (or chapters) in the creation story. A variation on the literary framework theory is that God revealed the account of creation in six days, and that Genesis contains a synopsis of what was revealed each day. In either case, the six days are not viewed as a time frame for the work of creation, but simply a literary structure for telling the story of creation. This theory does not speak directly to the issues of the age of the universe or evolution, but it could be compatible with either. The literary framework theory can stand-alone as an extremely vague general theory, or as a complement to another more detailed theory, such as progressive creationism or theistic evolution.

The “Gap” Theory (also referred to as, the “reconstruction theory”)

The gap theory proposed that God created the world, but it was subsequently judged with devastating effect when Lucifer fell. This theory proposes that the six-day account in Genesis chapter one is the account of the earth’s reconstruction after its judgment. According to this theory, the original creation is mentioned only in Genesis 1:1. Genesis 1:2 describes the condition of the earth after its judgment, and Genesis 1:3-31 describes the earth’s subsequent recreation. As is the case with most theories, there are variations from one proponent to another. Some gap theorists have even suggested that there might have been a pre-Adamic race of men who lived prior to Genesis 1:2; however, it is not necessary for us to examine all of the variations since the general theory can be shown to be incompatible with the text of Genesis.

The Gap Theory



Several arguments have been offered in support of the gap theory. First, it is assumed that it would have been out of character for God to have created the earth “formless” and “void (Gen. 1:2);” therefore, something must have happened to cause the earth to become formless and void. Second, the terms “*tohu*” (“formless”) and “*bohu*” (“void,” or “empty”) are used together in only one other instance in the Bible (Jer. 4:23) where they clearly indicate judgment. Third, the idea that the original creation was judged by God could fit with the biblical description of the fall of Lucifer, presumably recorded in Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Isaiah 14:12-21. Fourth, the gap theory appears to reconcile the Genesis account with the apparent age of the universe. [A variation that subscribes to a pre-Genesis 1:3 plant and animal kingdom also attempts to square Genesis with modern fossil dating.]

Problems With The Gap Theory

There are three principal problems with the gap theory. First, the grammar of Genesis 1:1-2 does not allow for a gap between verses 1 and 2. Quite interestingly, this fact was first brought to light in the 1950's by one of the foremost gap theorists of the time, Dr. Merrill F. Unger, in an article which appeared in the theological journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*, in January 1958, titled: "Rethinking the Genesis Account of Creation." The reason, as Dr. Unger pointed out, is that "*In the original language [Hebrew] Genesis 1:2 consists of three circumstantial clauses, all describing conditions or circumstances existing at the time of the principle action indicated in verse 1, or giving a reason for that action.*" To put it simply, what Dr. Unger pointed out was that the timing of the main verb of the sentence (v. 1, "created") controls all the circumstantial clauses describing the conditions in verse 2. (Verses 1 and 2 are one sentence in the Hebrew.) What this means is that at the time God created the heavens and the earth, <clause #1:> "*the earth was [at the time of its creation] without form, and void;*" <clause #2:> "*and [at the time of creation] darkness was upon the face of the deep;*" <clause #3:> "*and [at the time of creation] the Spirit of God moved upon (or better, "was moving upon,"-Heb. participle) the face of the waters.*" When read correctly there is simply no way that verse two can be a description of the earth having been judged subsequent to its creation in verse one, because verse two describes the conditions of the earth *at the time* of its creation in verse one. Such an understanding completely rules out any notion of a gap between verses one and two. Interestingly, Dr. Unger remained committed to the gap theory—albeit a modified version. His solution to the problem was to assert that the creation referenced in verse one was not, after all, the original creation, but the recreation of the earth after its original creation and judgment (which must have occurred prior to Genesis 1:1), thus placing the original creation, the earth's judgment, and the "gap" prior to Genesis 1:1. While this was a highly creative solution, it had the unfortunate side-affect of making the gap theory an "extra-biblical" theory, since it pushed the gap right out of the Bible! It took about twenty years for Dr. Unger's observations to take hold, but the shot had been fired, and ultimately the gap theory died—a victim of friendly fire.

Second, the gap theory was never well-supported biblically. The creation passage (Genesis 1:1-31) says nothing about the fall of Lucifer, or the earth being judged. All of that material has to be transplanted into the story.

Third, a great deal of weight is placed on identifying the terms *tohu* (formless) and *bohu* (empty) with judgment. While it is true that the only other place these terms are used together in scripture is a picture of divine judgment (Jer. 4:23), it is also true that one example does not establish a pattern. There simply isn't enough biblical evidence available to conclude that these terms must refer to judgment when used together.

Recent Creationism

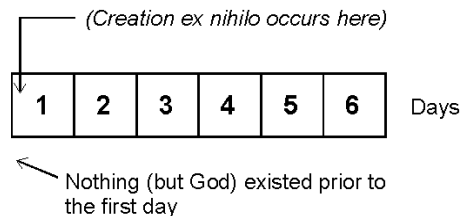
Recent creationism proposes that the universe (*i.e.*, every created thing) was created recently, within the last eight to ten thousand years. There are two forms of recent creationism: classic recent creationism, which incorporates a concept called "appearance of age" to account for the apparent age of the universe, and relativistic recent creationism, which depends upon relativity to account for the apparent age of the universe. In some respects recent creationism is similar to the original pre-scientific view, in that it subscribes to a young creation, with the *ex nihilo* (original) creation occurring on the first of the six days of Genesis chapter one. In other ways it is very

different from the pre-scientific view. It recognizes the discrepancy between the apparent age of the universe and the age limit allowed by the recent creation theory, and it seeks to reconcile the difference. Many recent creationists make extensive use, and sometimes misuse of scientific information in seeking to establish that the universe is young.

a. Classic Recent Creationism

According to classic recent creationism, God made the world in a mature (fully developed) form approximately eight to ten thousand years ago. Because the world was created in a mature state, it naturally appears older than it actually is.

The Recent Creation Theory



Recent creationists claim that either Genesis 1:1-2 is included as part of the first day of creation, or that these verses are nothing more than a summary title to the creation account. In other words, they dismiss the idea that Genesis 1:1-2 could be referring to an original *ex nihilo* creation that occurred prior to the first day. They also see support in Exodus 20:11, which seems to suggest that nothing was created prior to the first day of Genesis. This passage says, “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them....” Therefore, since the first day of Genesis would have been fairly recent (eight to ten thousand years ago—based on a reasonable Old Testament chronology), neither the universe, nor anything within it could be older than about ten thousand years.

While recent creationism claims to be a biblical view, its support is almost entirely from “creation science” observations. The following are some examples of the kind of scientific information used to support this view. 1) Decay of the earth’s magnetic field indicates it is less than ten thousand years old. 2) The amount of He⁴ (helium) in the atmosphere (given that it is generated at a constant rate) indicates that the earth could be not more than about ten thousand years old. 3) The presence of oil under pressure creating “oil gushers” indicates a recent creation, since otherwise the pressure would have been relaxed over long ages through dissipation of pressure in permeable rock. 4) The amount of dust found on the moon suggests that the moon is seven to eight thousand years old (based on assumed levels of annual deposit). Also, the amount of cosmic dust deposited on the earth indicates an age less than ten thousand years. 5) The earth’s rotational velocity indicates that the earth could not be old. Given a constant rate of decline in velocity, if the earth were billions of years old, the original high rotational velocity would have produced a very different looking planet (we would expect the land masses to have formed primarily around the equator). 6) The existence of comets indicates a young universe. Since comets give off particles as they travel

through space, if the universe were billions of years old, the comets would already be completely spent.

The difficulty with using the above, and similar observations as evidence of recent creation is this: Even if we were to assume that the above observations are valid, they still would not prove—nor would they necessarily even support a recent *ex nihilo* creation. The reason is that all of these observations can be fully accounted for by a recent “mediate” creation (*i.e.*, a rearrangement of existing—previously created—materials). In other words, all of these factors can be accounted for if the six formative days of Genesis were fairly recent (less than ten thousand years), even though the original creation *ex nihilo* might have happened eons before. (Remember, mediate creation could involve rearrangement of matter even at the subatomic level—isn’t that what Jesus did when he turned water into wine? He didn’t make the water disappear and the wine appear *ex nihilo*, he turned the water (which already existed) into wine. If we can make magnets without performing *ex nihilo* creation, why should we think that God couldn’t establish the earth’s magnetic field or rotational velocity without performing *ex nihilo* creation?)

This illustrates a key methodological flaw in recent creationism. Since recent creationists assume that all creation, including the creation *ex nihilo*, occurred within the six days of Genesis, they therefore conclude that evidence of recent mediate creation activity, such as illustrated by the above observations, provides evidence of a recent creation *ex nihilo*, and thus a young universe. However, this reasoning is both biblically and logically unsound. It is biblically unsound because, as we will see in the following discussion, the Genesis account clearly places the *ex nihilo* creation prior to the first day of Genesis, meaning that the *ex nihilo* and *mediate* aspects of creation may have been widely separated in time. It is logically unsound because it fails to consider an alternative explanation, such as a remote original creation (perhaps billions of years ago) combined with a recent mediate creation (in which the original materials of creation were formed into their present fashion).

Problems With Recent Creationism

There are three basic problems with classic recent creationism—an observational problem, a logical problem, and an ethical problem.

Albert Einstein in his special theory of relativity ($E = MC^2$) demonstrated the mathematical relationships between energy, matter, and the velocity of light. The unique qualities of light are very helpful in understanding the size and age of the universe. The current scientific estimate of the size of the known universe puts it at a radius of about thirteen to fifteen billion light years—give or take a few billion. If, as astronomers estimate, we are seeing light from galaxies approximately fifteen billion light years distant, this would lead us to the conclusion that the universe must have been in existence for at least fifteen billion years (approximately), because that’s the minimum amount of time it would take for the light from those distant galaxies to reach earth. This naturally leads to an estimate of about fifteen billion years for the age of the universe. We have to be very cautious with these numbers, however, since no one has taken a tape measure out there and gotten an exact figure! Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that it doesn’t do much good arguing over the validity of these numbers because most knowledgeable creationists generally accept the current estimate of the size of the universe anyway, and even if these figures were off by 99% (which no

cosmologist, Christian or non-Christian believes), the universe would still be 150 million light years in radius and have an estimated minimum age of 150 million years—far older than the ten thousand years estimated by recent creationists. D. Russell Humphreys, (a leading recent creationist who holds a Ph.D. in physics) says, *“Some laymen pondering this question wonder if the astronomer’s estimates of the distances might be greatly in error. I don’t think so. Astronomers have dozens of methods for establishing such distances, all of which generally agree with one another. Many of the methods, especially for closer objects such as the Andromeda galaxy, are based on very reasonable assumptions, such as the overall size or brightness of a galaxy. For that reason, I am convinced that the large distances are generally correct, at least within a factor of two or so.”* (From: Starlight and Time, by D. Russell Humphreys, p. 10.))

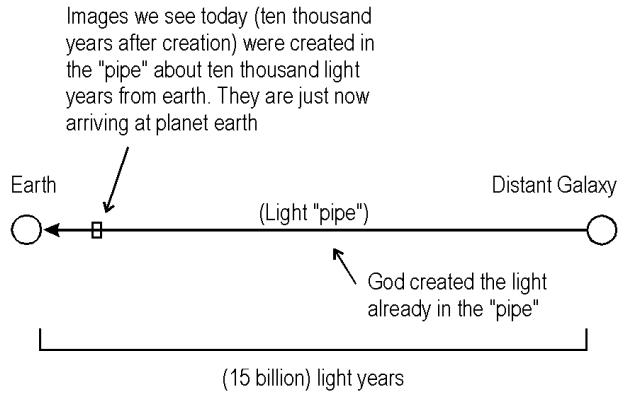
Some have suggested that perhaps the solution to the problem is that the speed of light was faster in the past than it is now, so it really didn’t take that much time for the light to get here. However, such a solution probably isn’t practical given Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity. Occasionally, someone will suggest, *“But couldn’t God make light go faster?”* And of course, the answer is “Yes”—and he could also make elephants fly, but what God “could” do and what the Bible and observation of the universe indicate he “has” done are entirely different things and we won’t make much progress if we confuse the two. So, what are we to conclude? In order to be seeing things that are so far away, light must have been traveling toward us for a very long time. That time frame is certainly longer than ten thousand years, and there is no reasonable way around this conclusion.

Secondly, recent creationism depends upon an equivalent relationship between “appearance of age” and “maturity.” In other words, it requires that appearance of age = maturity. The reason is that recent creationism depends upon the mature creation argument to explain why some things in the universe look old. When recent creationists look at the universe and see features that appear to be millions (or billions) of years old, they account for the apparent age by virtue of the fact that the universe was created mature. So, recent creationists, in effect, take the position that one cannot distinguish between an object appearing to have age, and a newly created, mature object. The problem is that this line of reasoning is easily falsified. Consider the following. Let’s imagine an experiment that demonstrates “mature creation” and “appearance of age” are not the same, and that mature creation cannot account for the universe’s appearance of age. (Remember, if the appearance of having age can be fully accounted for by maturity, logically it should be impossible to distinguish between the two, even in an imaginary experiment.) For our virtual experiment we’ll need a few things. First we need a time machine. We will also need a few volunteers. The first volunteer will be our time machine operator. The second volunteer will need to be a very healthy young man, about twenty years old. This volunteer will be more difficult to find because he needs to be a near perfect specimen of humanity. We will also need a medical doctor and some medical equipment. Now, we’re ready to begin. The first thing we have to do before the doctor arrives is to transport our healthy young man back to the Garden of Eden just moments after Adam’s creation, and have him stand beside Adam. The next thing we need to do is have the time machine operator return to the present to collect the doctor and his medical instruments and take them back to the Garden. Once back at the Garden, the doctor is met by two very healthy looking, mature young men. Remember, the doctor has never seen either of these two men. Now, here is our experimental question: Given the scenario as we have described it, would it be possible for the doctor to distinguish between Adam, who was newly created in a mature state, and the young man who

reached maturity through twenty years of growth and development? Well, let's listen in as the doctor makes some observations. (We chose an old country doctor just for fun.) "Ok, let's look at you first sonny-boy. Now, what's that I see there in your mouth? Is that a filling in your tooth?" (At this point, our very suspicious doctor is pulling a highly miniaturized C.T. scanner out of his bag and moving it over the man's body.) "Well, I'll be! You have a very nicely healed skull fracture. Did you fall out of your crib when you were a baby?" Now, I'll let you guess what other features of growth and injury our doctor will find in his first subject, but he won't find any of these things in Adam—no fillings, no scars, no calcium deposits around healed fractures, no arthritis, no degeneration of cartilage in joints, worn down teeth, etc. Can you guess why? It's simple! "Maturity" and "age" (or, the appearance of age) aren't the same at all. Now when we look at the universe, if what we saw was simply a mature universe, recent creationists would have a valid point, but that's not at all what we see. We see a universe covered in scars—the scars of great age; galaxies that have collided, stars having spent their fuel and having exploded across thousands of light years of space, gravitational interference between galaxies that has distorted the shape of those galaxies across many tens of thousands of light-years of space, light streams in space containing billions of years of history in light images streaming all the way back to their sources. So, if what we see when we look at the universe cannot be explained by a mature creation—and it can't—the recent creationist is left without any explanation of why the universe looks so old, and thus the theory breaks down.

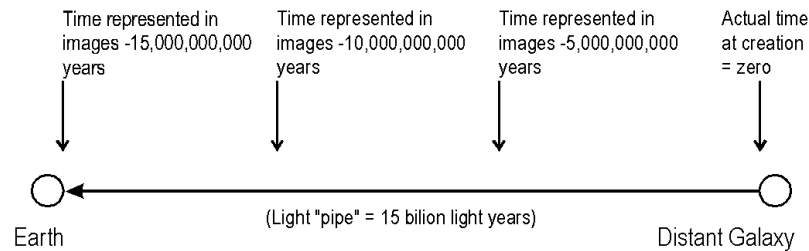
Third is the ethical problem. Suppose I said, "It's alright for God to lie because, after all, he is God and he can do whatever he pleases." Anyone who knows anything of God's character from the Bible would have to disagree, because the Bible tells us that God is holy and true, and therefore cannot lie, nor is there any deceit in him. Yet in an indirect (and I'm sure, unintended) way, recent creationism takes the position that God has lied in creation. Let me explain. Astronomers estimate that we are seeing light from distant galaxies approximately fifteen billion light years away. Now, if we are seeing light from sources fifteen billion light years away, the natural (and reasonable) assumption is that the universe could not be any younger than the distance divided by the maximum speed of light (distance/186,000miles/sec.), because that's how long it would have taken the light to travel to earth from its point of origin. At this point recent creationists suggest a possible solution. They say, "Since God created the universe mature, he must have created the light stream in space so light now reaching us was actually created "in the pipe" (*i.e.*, "*in situ*") such that the light we are presently seeing through our telescopes was created less than ten-thousand light years from earth and is just now reaching us. In other words, light that we are seeing from distant galaxies never originated from those sources. The images we see were "planted" in space at just the right distance from earth to be reaching us at the present time. In fact, according to this explanation, any light image we might see through a telescope of an object greater than about ten thousand light-years distance never actually originated at the source it appears to have come from. (If this were true, the epistemological implications would be staggering.) Such an explanation plants seeds of doubt as to the true nature of the universe and what can be known by observation, and that's highly problematic since God clearly intended that our observation of the heavens should lead us closer to the truth of his greatness and power (Psa. 8:3; 50:6; 97:6).

Recent Creationism's "Light in the Pipe" (or "Creation in Transit") Theory



Now, we haven't yet come to the real ethical problem posed by the recent creationist's "created in transit" explanation. If the foregoing explanation were true, then for a galaxy fifteen billion light years distant from earth, the light stream at the moment of creation would have been 15 billion light-years (minus about 10 thousand light-years). Now, at the moment of creation we have a light stream approximately 15,000,000,000 light-years long. So, what's in that light stream? History, that's right—history, image after image of events in succession are what the light stream contains. Imagine for a moment that we had a spaceship that could fly all the way from earth through the light stream of a distant galaxy—all the way back to the source, and say we mounted a video camera to the nose of our spaceship. As we flew back through the light stream (all 15,000,000,000 light-years), one of two things would happen; we would either hit a discontinuity (a break in temporal {historical} continuity) about ten thousand light years away from earth (due to the fact that there has only been ten thousand years of real history), or we would record 15,000,000,000 years of the history of the source galaxy; but that would be 14,999,990,000 years longer than the universe has existed if it was created about ten thousand years ago! Taking this one step further, this would imply one of two things: Either the universe is discontinuous (more like a stage prop), or that God has recorded a history of the universe that never happened. Either of these explanations implies that God has intentionally misled us about the true nature of the universe. [In the illustration below, notice that the images furthest from the distant galaxy are the furthest (in time) from the "present" time at the distant galaxy. At creation the time at the distant galaxy was zero. Any images created into the light pipe and extending toward earth would have to be images of events prior to time zero, *i.e.*, before creation (clearly impossible), in which case they represent a fictitious history.]

The Creation of Light “In Situ” Would Generate a Fictitious History



If that isn't enough of a problem, it gets worse. We have images of large nebulae, galaxies in collision (some even completely assimilated), and large intergalactic gravitational effects for which only an old universe (*i.e.*, older than ten thousand years) can account. Take the merger of two galaxies as an example. Two galaxies, each with a breadth of about a hundred thousand light-years could hardly merge in the space of ten thousand years. Even if God created them such that their outer edges were already in contact, and even if they were moving toward one another at the speed of light (not really feasible), the minimum time required for a complete merger would be fifty thousand years (you can do the math yourself—one moves fifty thousand light-years to the left, the other moves fifty thousand light-years to the right). Add to that the amount of time required for the image to arrive on earth (*i.e.*, the distance in light-years), and you can see that ten thousand years doesn't even begin to be enough time, even in this greatly oversimplified example. So, recent creationists are forced to suggest that the universe was created (at time zero) with all of these “scars”—scars depicting a history that never was. And to make it all look very realistic, those events that never happened appear to have obeyed the general laws of motion and gravitation! (Astronomers have observed that when two galaxies have merged, or are in the process, their angular momentums and gravity merge also, according to the general laws of motion and gravity, causing the new galaxy to form a shape predictable by the classical laws of physics.) In some cases, nearby galaxies have simply “brushed,” scattering stars in their spirals across tens of thousands of light-years. In the case of the Cartwheel Galaxy one galaxy has passed completely through another, blowing out a huge ring of gas over a hundred thousand light-years from its center that is now condensing into new stars. It is physically impossible that such structures could have been formed in the time allowed under recent creationism. If God put his omniscience to work to devise a plan to thoroughly deceive man about the origin of the universe, he couldn't have devised a better plan than what the recent creationist proposes. Even some prominent recent creationists are beginning to acknowledge this problem. Dr. D. Russell Humphreys, (cited above) states in regard to the appearance of age theory, “...it has disturbing theological and philosophical implications.” (See, Starlight and Time, by D. Russell Humphreys, p. 51.)

b. Relativistic Recent Creationism

In view of the problems associated with classic recent creationism, some have proposed solutions that attempt to reconcile a recent creation with the mounting body of evidence that the universe has passed through billions of years of history. Dr. Humphreys proposes a relativistic solution in which the universe could have aged

billions of years while only six days passed on earth. The theory itself is complex and based on the fact that gravity distorts time. Dr. Humphreys' theory, which could be termed "white hole cosmology," postulates that the universe expanded out of a white hole (a hole with a gravitational event horizon, but from which matter and light can escape, but not re-enter—essentially a black hole in reverse). According to this theory the earth is at the center of the universe, and since an event horizon affects time (making it run incredibly fast), as the universe expanded and the event horizon shrank, the entire universe (with the exception of the earth) eventually passed through the event horizon. Since the event horizon would weaken as it shrank, the greatest aging effects would be seen in the galaxies furthest from earth (since they passed through the event horizon first, while it was still strong). On the surface, white hole cosmology seems to provide an explanation of the age differential between the earth and more distant parts of the universe; however, the specifics, as proposed by Humphreys face enormous problems both with the text of Genesis 1:1-31 and science.

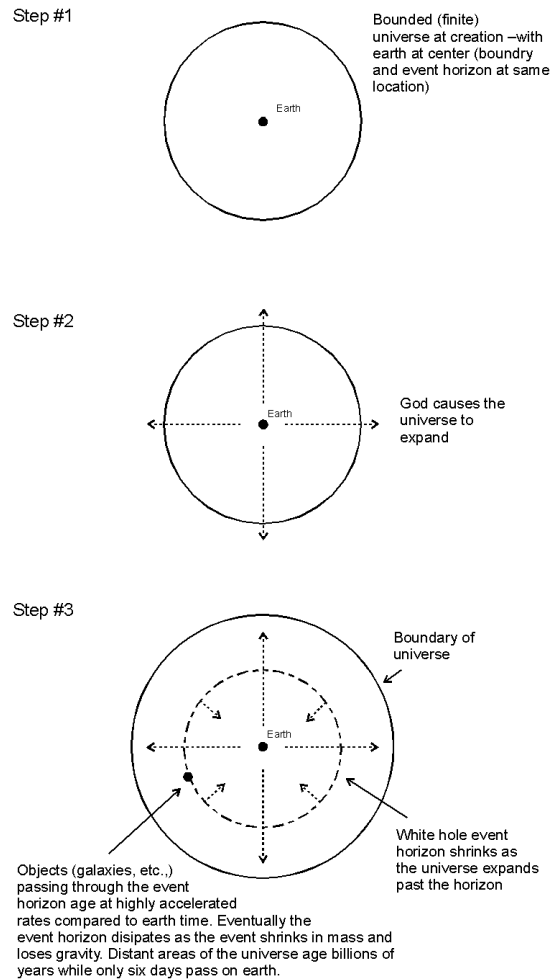
Problems With "White Hole Cosmology"

As is the case with all modern theoretical views, the white hole theory is just that—a theory. Dr. Humphreys has attempted to demonstrate how portions of the universe could have aged billions of years while allowing only a few thousand years (earth time) for these events to transpire. As incredible as it might seem, such a theory (in general) might not be implausible. Relativity, quantum mechanics, and whatever set of relationships, as yet undiscovered, bind them together, are part of the universe God created. Therefore, we should not be surprised to find that the solution to the creation mystery involves such concepts. This possibility notwithstanding, there are several major problems with the white hole cosmology as it has been developed to this point. First, there is no evidence that white holes have ever existed—or could exist. Second, the theory is characterized by strained biblical interpretation. Dr. Humphreys' alignment of this theory with the biblical days of creation is clearly problematic since many of the activities referred to during the six days of creation would have to occur from within the white hole (under incredible gravitational forces). He is forced to identify the water of Genesis 1:2 as the basic stuff out of which the entire universe was made. Likewise, he identifies the light in Genesis 1:3 as the result of thermonuclear fusion resulting from the gravitational implosion of a huge sphere of water approximately one light-year in breadth. Humphreys speculates that this huge sphere of water supplied the material out of which the universe was formed. Since he identifies the light of Genesis 1:3 as originating at the core of this massive ball of imploded water, he is forced to speculate as to the nature of the "day" and "night" referred to in verse 4. He suggests that the Holy Spirit himself became the light source for the rotating sphere of water. While this is interesting speculation, it can hardly be called biblical interpretation, and it is far too speculative to be regarded as science.

The fundamental problem with "white hole cosmology" is its rigid adherence to recent creation chronology, which insists on placing the creation *ex nihilo* within, rather than prior to the six formative days of Genesis, thus limiting the age of the universe to about ten thousand years or less (earth time). In proposing such a cosmology, it is possible that Dr. Humphreys has, unintentionally, sown the seeds for the destruction of recent creationism. According to this theory, 99% of the universe is much older (point of presence time) than even the maximum figure generally allowed by recent creationism (ten thousand years). In other words, this view acknowledges that the bulk of the universe was not created recently. And, if it is acknowledged that the universe does, in

fact, appear to be old (not just “mature”), why postulate such an unlikely theory just so one can contend that the earth is young—a claim the Bible itself never makes.

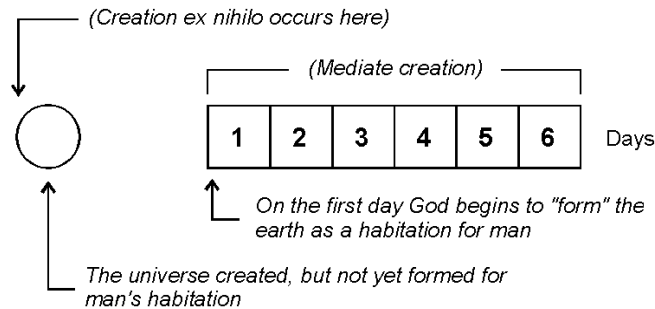
White Hole Cosmology



The Preformative Theory (often referred to as the “chaos” theory)

This view is generally called the “chaos view;” however, the term “preformative” is preferable because it is more descriptive. This view proposes that God created the universe (*ex nihilo*) sometime prior to the first formative day of Genesis (possibly, but not necessarily in the distant past). The six days of Genesis describes God’s subsequent activity in preparing the earth as a habitation for man. According to this view, all of the work done by God during the six days of Genesis was formative, mediate creation, not *ex nihilo*, creation.

The Preformative Theory



The basic preformative theory is based upon a literal understanding of the Genesis account (which will be explored in greater detail further along), and it doesn't impose any age assumptions on creation (whether young or old), nor does it require any corollary theories, as is the case with recent creationism. It simply says that God created the materials *ex nihilo* in verses 1-2, and then, subsequently formed them. The preformative theory should not be confused with the gap theory. Whereas the gap theory depends upon a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 (where no gap is allowed by the grammar), the preformative theory allows for an unspecified time between Genesis 1:2 and 1:3, where the grammar presents no problem. Unlike the gap theory, the preformative view does not suggest any particular events as having happened during this time, nor does it suggest that the length of time between Genesis 1:2 and 1:3 was long or short; it merely observes that the original creation *ex nihilo* occurred sometime prior to the first day of Genesis chapter one. The preformative theory can be held in combination with other compatible theories. For example, one could hold that the original materials of the universe were created in the distant past (perhaps 13-15 billion years ago) and that God subsequently formed and fashioned those materials over long ages, resulting in the eventual forming of man, at which time his creative work was complete. Such a view would be a combination of the preformative theory, progressive creationism, and the literary framework view.

Problems With the Preformative Theory

The preformative theory does not attempt to date creation. It simply states that the original creation *ex nihilo* occurred prior to the first day of Genesis. This fits with what Genesis actually says, as we will see further along, and it has the added benefit of being compatible with current scientific observation—though fitting with the Bible is far more important. Historically, the main objection to this view has been to pose the question: "Why would God create the universe and then allow a period of time to pass before filling it with living things?" (It has been suggested that Isaiah 45:18 implies that the six-day forming and filling activity of God had to be closely associated in time with the *ex nihilo* creation.) The answer to the question is this: "*We don't know.*" "Why" questions involving God are very difficult to address unless we are specifically told the answer in scripture. However, it is possible to venture a response—Maybe the "cake" wasn't sufficiently cooled to be "iced." At this point someone might say, "But why would God need to wait for the completion of physical processes before forming and filling his creation? Couldn't he simply command everything to be instantly ready?" The answer is, "*Yes—he could,*" but that does not mean he did, and there is absolutely no reason why

he should have done so. Remember, he is the one who ordained the physical processes at the *ex nihilo* creation, and God, being eternal (timeless), would not be inconvenienced in the least by the passage of any length of time. Finally, there is nothing in Isaiah 45:18 that implies the forming and filling of the six days of Genesis had to occur “immediately” after the *ex nihilo* creation, only that the forming and filling had to occur at some point because that was God’s ultimate purpose in creation.

Occasionally one sees an objection something like this: If this view is correct, it would mean that God created the world in a chaotic (disordered) state, which would seem to be inconsistent with His character. The flaw in this argument is fairly obvious. Even though the original creation was as yet unformed (or we might say, in a “preformed” state), it was far from chaotic, for all of the ingredients of creation (including time, matter, energy, space, etc.), as well as the physical laws, were present. One can hardly call that “chaotic.” “Incomplete,” “unfinished” —Yes, but chaotic—No. Suppose I went into your kitchen while you were making a cake, and I looked and saw only a bowl of batter on the counter and said to you, “You can’t make a cake that way, why that’s beneath your dignity and character; don’t you know that cakes are orderly, with layers of cake and icing all nicely arranged and decorated?” You would probably suggest that if I would leave you alone for a few more minutes you would produce just such a cake. The same is true in regard to creation. The fact that all of the creative work was not done instantly does not imply that the job was somehow “chaotic” and beneath the character of God. If scripture indicates that God created in this way, what logical, or theological reason would have prevented God from first creating the universe, then forming and filling it as, and when, he saw fit?

What the Bible Actually Says About Creation

The real test of any view is how well it reflects what the Bible actually says. The Genesis record (1:1-2:3) gives the most extensive account of creation contained within the pages of scripture. It tells of the creation of the raw materials of which everything is made, and how those materials were fashioned to make heavenly bodies, plants, animals, and finally man. Since we are approaching this topic from a Christian perspective, we must acknowledge that the Genesis account is factually true in every respect when understood as it was intended to be understood; and although it is not intended as a scientific statement, it is factually correct. The most prominent feature of the account is the arrangement of creation according to six formative days. (I say “formative” because there does not seem to be any indication of *ex nihilo* creation within the six-day period—we’ll discuss this observation in a moment.)

Another feature that should be apparent even to the casual reader is that the first two verses of the passage are not part of the first day. This is clear from the fact that each formative day begins with the phrase, “*And God said. . .*” and ends with, “*And there was evening, and there was morning—the {nth} day.*” Such a formularized opening and closing is a familiar literary structure, called an “inclusio;” and it shows where a segment begins and ends. When these structures are repeated as they are in this passage, they form a mnemonic symmetry—that is, a pattern that makes them easily recognizable, and easy to remember. That’s good, because these highly visible structures can help us to see the natural breaks in the passage. What this structure indicates in Genesis one is that the account of the first day does not begin until verse three, so the first two verses should not be lumped together with the first formative day. This leads to a question of

crucial importance: If verses 1-2, which comprise one sentence, are not part of the first day (and they clearly are not), in what way do they relate to the six-day account? There are essentially two possibilities: either these verses describe events that precede the first day, or they do not. Let's take a look at each of these possibilities.

There is general agreement among interpreters that Genesis 1:1 refers to the original creation *ex nihilo*. If these two verses refer to activity prior to the first day, then the original *ex nihilo* creation (which is not referred to in the remainder of the story) must have occurred prior to the first formative day. The implications of this are of enormous importance, because this would mean that the original creation of the universe could have predated the six day of Genesis one by a very long period of time. If on the other hand these verses do not refer to events prior to the first day, they would likely have to be some sort of summary (descriptive) title to the creation account in vv. 3-31. Such is, in fact, the view held by some recent creationists, since they believe that nothing was created prior to the first day. Remember however, that lumping verses 1-2 with the first day (the usual practice of other recent creationists) is not a valid option, since it ignores the clear intent of the author as expressed in the structure of the passage.

The big question we must answer is this: Can we determine with any degree of confidence which of these two alternatives is correct? The answer is a definite, "Yes." If these verses are a summary descriptive title to the six days (vv. 3-31), then they ought to summarize the activities recorded for those six days. On the other hand, if they refer to events that took place prior to the first day, it should be possible to detect a progression in state from what is described in verses 1-2 to what is described in the following verses. (A change in state indicates a sequential and chronological progression, and thus would establish that the first two verses describe activity *prior* to the first day.)

What do we find when we look at Genesis 1:1-2? The passage says, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 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.*" In order to determine if this is a summary title, we need to ask: Does "formless," "empty," and "dark" summarize the activity of the six days (vv. 3-31)? The answer is, "No." In fact, it describes the opposite. Now, for the next question: Can we see a sequential or progressive relationship between these first two verses and the rest of the creation story? The answer is, "Yes." What is "dark" in verse 2 is illuminated in verse 3, what is "formless" in verse 2 is formed and fashioned in verses 3-31, what is "empty" in verse 2 is filled with living things in verses 11-31. This sequential progression plainly indicates that Genesis 1:1-2 describes activity (v. 1) and a state (v. 2) prior to the first formative day. That being the case, we can say with assurance that the original creation *ex nihilo* (recorded in verse 1) took place before the first of the six formative days began. This is confirmed to us by the fact that there is no indication of *ex nihilo* creation during the six-day period. If we look at the activity of each of the six days, we see this is true. Light was the first thing produced during the six days, but we know that the existence of light presumes the existence of matter (remember Einstein's special theory of relativity), not to mention the fact that space would also have to be present in which the light could travel. Likewise the separating of the terrestrial and atmospheric waters, and the gathering of the terrestrial waters into oceans was a rearrangement of existing space and matter. The stars were "made" (Heb. *'asah*, "formed"—this term is never used for creation *ex nihilo*), and the living plants and animals were made from the pre-existing materials of the earth.

A common objection to the position just given is that according to Exodus 20:11, all of God's creative activity (including the creation *ex nihilo*) was performed within the six-day period. Exodus 20:11 says, "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them...." However, when we examine Exodus 20:11 we find that the word "made" is the Hebrew term *'asah*, meaning "to form"—a term used for mediate creation (*i.e.*, formative action upon existing material). This word would not be the proper term to describe creation *ex nihilo*. The correct understanding of this passage is that the formative activity was six days in duration, but it does not say the original *ex nihilo* creation was part of the six days; in fact, it says nothing about the *ex nihilo* creation at all. Of course, as we have also pointed out, it is not necessary to understand the days of Genesis as literal 24 hour days. They could refer to extended time periods.

The words translated "made" and "created" were very carefully chosen when this account was recorded. *Bara'* is usually translated "create" and has a broad range of meaning, just like the English word "create." It can be used of immediate (*ex nihilo*) creation, or mediate creation (*i.e.*, the forming of existing material into something new). In the creation account in Genesis the word *bara'* occurs in 1:1,21,27 (twice), and in 2:3 (to summarize the entire process). *'Asah* is usually translated to "make," or "create," but has a much more narrow meaning than *bara'*. It is only used of mediate creation (*i.e.*, the forming of existing materials into something new). In the Genesis account it occurs in 1:7,16,25,26, and 31. The usage and relationship of these two words is similar to the relationship between the English words "create" and "make." Now, we come to the tricky part. Whereas *bara'* can be used to substitute for *'asah* (since *bara'* is a more comprehensive term), *'asah* can only be used where *ex nihilo* creation is not intended. So, there is a very limited interchangeability between these words. This explains why several occurrences of *bara'* (vv. 21 and 27 [2x]) and every occurrence of *'asah* in this passage refers to *mediate* creation, even though *bara'* in 1:1 clearly refers to the *ex nihilo* creation. Needless to say, an unclear understanding of this relationship can result in a great deal of confusion over what Genesis One actually says.

Now, when we summarize what the Bible actually says about creation, what are the key points? 1) The original creation of the heavens and earth (*ex nihilo*) is stated to have occurred prior to the beginning of the first day of Genesis One. We have absolutely no way of knowing, from the Bible, how much time might have lapsed between the original creation (1:1-2) and the beginning of the first day (1:3). Hence, we cannot know, from the Bible, the age or even the approximate age of creation. Science may be able to give us an estimate of the age of the universe; otherwise we would simply have to regard it as an open question. 2) The activity recorded during the six days of Genesis was formative in nature—involving *mediate* rather than *immediate* (*ex nihilo*) creation. 3) Even though the original creation of the universe might have been eons ago, the six-day formative activity would have ended only recently (within eight to ten thousand years) in order to mesh with biblical history. 4) Scientific estimates of the age of the universe in billions of years are not averse to a literal understanding of the Bible. However, estimates that place man prior to the limits of biblical history would not be consistent with a normal understanding of the Bible. Obviously a great deal hinges on how much weight one is willing to place on modern scientific dating (which is mostly radiometric, and which should be viewed with great caution, since they are highly suppositional).

In light of this discussion, one might ask, "Which reconciliation theory is best?" The answer would have to be the theory that best fits with a normal understanding of the

biblical text, and the well-established observations of science (but not necessarily every scientific opinion, theory, or set of dates). Based on those criteria we would exclude the gap theory, the evolutionary day-age theory, and recent creationism as incompatible with the biblical account. We would also exclude recent creationism as incompatible with well-established scientific observations. That leaves the preformative theory, progressive creationism, and the literary framework theory, or some combination of these theories.

The History of Modern Scientific Cosmology

While our discussion has been principally concerned with what the *Bible* says about the origin of the universe, it is important to know how this information fits with modern theoretical (scientific) cosmology—since any biblical theory that is seriously at odds with sound scientific observation would likely be problematic.

From the time of Aristotle (c. 300 B.C.) to the early 19th century, the secular view of the universe was that it is infinite and eternal. This was very convenient, since an eternal universe requires no explanation of its origin. However, this theory posed problems. If the universe were infinite in all directions there should be stars at every point in the sky (at some distance), and if it were eternal, there would have been time for the light from all those stars to reach the earth. Therefore, if the universe were infinite and eternal, the night sky should be much brighter. Since the night sky is not bright, it is apparent that the universe could not be infinite and eternal. This realization, in the early 1900s, led to another view called, the “steady state theory.” The steady state theory said that the universe is eternal and that stars are being born and dying in a perpetual cycle. This theory accounted for why the night sky is not bright (stars eventually die out), and it required no Creator and thus fit with purely naturalistic assumptions about reality. The problem with this theory turned out to be the second law of thermodynamics, which says that over time, in any physical system, there is an increase of entropy (spent, or dissipated energy, which has less potential to do useful work). If the universe were eternal, then it would have had eternity for the useful energy level to reach zero; thus, the universe would be very cold and totally dark. In spite of this difficulty, most physicists subscribed to some form of the steady state theory well into the 1950s and ‘60s, because this best fit with naturalistic (monistic, or antiscientific) assumptions shared by most physicists at the time. In the early 1900s a growing body of evidence had begun to point to an expanding universe, but this evidence was largely ignored by science. In 1914 Vesto Slipher presented evidence that several nebulae were receding away from the earth. In 1915 Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity predicted an expanding universe. However, Einstein simply zeroed out this expansion with a purely arbitrary “cosmological constant.” (Einstein later called this the biggest mistake of his career.) In 1922 Alexander Friedman, a Russian mathematician, predicted the expansion of the universe, and in 1929 Edwin Hubble proposed the Law of Red Shifts, based on the observation that the light spectrums of galaxies is more shifted toward the red (long wavelength) end of the spectrum the further they are from the earth. The problem with an expanding universe is that it implied a definite age limit for the universe, since it couldn’t have been expanding forever. (All you have to do to see this is to imagine a film of the universe’s history run backwards—the universe could only shrink until its volume reached zero, which would be the point of its beginning.) Of course if the universe is not eternal, then it must have had a beginning. This is precisely what was penned in the opening verses of the book of Genesis, over thirty-five hundred years ago. Scientists and natural philosophers recognized that a universe with a beginning was highly problematic to naturalism, scientism, and atheism. Obviously, if the universe had a

beginning, it could not have created itself. So, the implication is clearly that something (or someone) outside of the universe—something eternal—must ultimately be responsible for the existence of the universe. What a dilemma; naturalistic science was on the verge of providing a powerful reason to believe in the existence of something eternal which was completely outside the universe—something sufficient to be the cause of all that exists, but requiring no explanation for its own existence! The implications of an absolute beginning to the natural realm would be a stunning defeat for naturalism—a defeat that the naturalistic scientific community absolutely could not allow to happen. In fact, one of the classic arguments for the existence of God, the cosmological argument, said just that—that the existence of the universe implies the existence of something (or someone) eternal, since something cannot come from nothing. So, scientists tried as best they could to avoid the inflationary (big bang) view. However, in 1965 two Bell scientists measured a 3 degree Kelvin excess antenna temperature in all directions in which they pointed their microwave antenna. This figure coincided very closely with the predicted residual temperature that would have been left over from a cosmic “big bang” origin. Later evidence provided by the Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE) satellite in 1990-92, and the Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe (WMAP) 2000-present {2006} have confirmed even more closely the theoretical predictions of a “hot big bang” origin of the universe. Since the mid-1960s naturalistic scientists have found themselves in a dilemma. They cannot, under any circumstance, acknowledge an absolute beginning of the universe (out of nothing), yet all the evidence of a “big bang” origin of the universe is now quite beyond dispute. They have been left with only one alternative: they must either cast doubt on the evidence for the “big bang” (which is becoming increasingly more difficult to do, since each new discovery just seems to confirm the obvious), or they have to continue to argue that some natural process is eternal, and therefore no supernatural cause is required. Of course the perceptive reader will recognize that this discussion crossed over from science to philosophy and theology long ago. The fact that scientific cosmology has landed precisely in the same spot as the Bible has indeed been disturbing to most naturalistic scientists and philosophers (most of whom are atheists and have an obvious interest in the issue far beyond the bounds of science). Since an absolute origin is highly problematic for purely naturalistic thinkers, a number of theories have been put forth to try to get around the implications of the big bang theory. One alternate theory has been the “oscillation” theory. This theory suggests that the universe has gone through an infinite number of expansions and contractions (crunches), and is—after all—eternal, and therefore needs no explanation for its origin. Not surprisingly, the problem with the oscillation theory is the same as with the steady state theory. The second law of thermodynamics says that no physical process can go on forever; it will eventually “wind down.” Two other problems with this theory are that the universe probably doesn’t have enough mass to contract, and if it did contract, its low mechanical efficiency (possibly as low as 0.00000001%) would not result in a subsequent expansion. More recently the Hartle-Hawking model suggests that some eternal phenomenon was in place prior to the emergence of the present physical laws, and this phenomenon accounts for the origin of the universe. Stephen Hawking calls this phenomenon, “imaginary time”—and, as you will see, it is quite appropriately named. Given “imaginary time,” Hawking hypothesizes that the universe could have emerged out of nothing, all by itself, with no need for a Creator. In his book, *The Universe in a Nutshell* (Bantam Books, 2001), Hawking assures his readers that imaginary time does exist (see chapter four). This assertion has confused many people—including some scientists—who simply assume that someone as brilliant a Hawking wouldn’t make such a statement if it were not provable—yet that is exactly what Hawking does. One of the fundamental concepts of big bang physics is that no scientific statements can be made

about anything prior to time zero. Why? Because we can't make any scientific statements about anything prior to the existence of the present physical laws upon which science is based. So, how does Hawking "know" that imaginary time exists? In the first three chapters of *The Universe in a Nutshell* he delicately weaves an assumption into his discussion; that assumption is that science demands a natural (*i.e.*, non-supernatural) explanation for everything. (This is, of course, the bedrock of all natural/monistic philosophy.) Given the compelling evidence for an inflationary "big bang," any natural explanation of the origin of the universe would require a quantum event (since, at its beginning, the universe would have to be infinitely small), and since quantum events require time, Hawking hypothesizes that some kind of time must have existed (*i.e.*, "imaginary time") before the emergence of real time (which began at the moment of the big bang). With this, Hawking proceeds to explain how the universe might have emerged out of nothing (that is, "nothing"—other than "imaginary time"). The problem, of course, is that this isn't science at all; it's just more naturalistic philosophy—the same naturalistic philosophy that blinded most scientists to the truth of an inflationary universe to begin with. Has Hawking proven a purely naturalistic origin of the universe? Emphatically not! He has done nothing more than a very clever job of concealing his naturalistic starting assumption and hoping the readers would get lost in so many details of post time-zero physics that they wouldn't notice it was all based upon a mere unproven—indeed *unprovable* assumption.

The present state of scientific cosmology is this: The universe, as we know it, as described by the laws of physics, had a beginning. That beginning encompasses everything we know, including: time, matter, energy, and all physical law (which includes quantum mechanics as well as relativity and any, as yet undiscovered unification principles). Science can make no authoritative statements about what might have preceded the universe's creation, since such statements would have no basis in physical law. As far as theoretical cosmology is concerned, we have finally reached a roadblock. While scientists will undoubtedly continue to suggest what might have happened "if such and such were true," they cannot go back further than the moment of creation—actually a few moments *after* the creation when physical law originated. Therefore, science will never know any more about conditions prior to creation than it knows right now—which is absolutely nothing. This is a permanent limitation. Needless to say, some will undoubtedly claim to find a way to ascertain the unknowable starting conditions of the big bang, but such attempts must always be based upon assumptions, no matter how cleverly hidden. Science is simply at the end of the road, it can do no more than theorized, and confirm or deny, what might have happened *after* the moment of creation; any claim beyond that can only be an intellectual hoax in scientific garb. Having already seen that many in the scientific community have shown themselves willing to disregard fundamental physical laws in order to maintain their naturalistic assumptions, as is the case with both the steady state theory and later the oscillation theory, we shouldn't be surprised to hear assurances that they now "know" the initial starting conditions of the big bang—and that those initial conditions do not require anything supernatural.

2A. Angels

Terminology

The word “angel” appears over two hundred and eighty times in the English Bible (AV). The principal words from which it is translated are: *malak* (Hebrew), and *angelos* (Greek)—both meaning, “messenger.” While it can refer to any messenger, it is most frequently used of spirit beings (Heb. 1:13-14) of various classes who are intelligent and powerful non-human creatures, some of whom inhabit heaven—the place of God’s throne—and some of whom inhabit the physical universe (Rev. 12:12). They are referred to as: “sons of God” (Job 1:6 cf. 38:7), “watchers” (Dan. 4:13,17,23), “holy ones” (Ps. 89:7), “sons of the mighty” (Ps. 89:6), God’s “host” (Gen. 32:1-2), “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14), “princes” (Dan. 10:13), “principalities and powers” (Eph. 6:12), and by individual names (Dan. 9:21; 10:21; 12:1).

The nature and appearance of angels

Angels are created beings (Ps. 148:1-5) who were present before the earth was formed (Job 38:1-7); however, they do not predate the original creation *ex nihilo*, since they are not eternal and therefore could not predate time. Like human beings, they are personal beings. They are intelligent, they engage in worship, and they rejoice, and praise God. They are wholly distinct from men (Heb. 2:6-7; 12:22-23). Angels are not born, and do not marry or procreate (Matt. 22:30), neither are they subject to death (Lk. 20:35-36). Thus, every angel is, and always will be, alive. When appearing to men, they usually appear in human form (Gen. 18:2; Rev. 21:17 cf. Deut. 2:11). However, in heaven they may appear differently (Rev. 4:6-9). In the Bible angels always appear in masculine form, and sometimes (if not always) are youthful in appearance (16:5). On occasion they appear in such a way as to indicate their supernatural status (Mt. 28:3-4; Acts 6:12). Angels are highly intelligent (2 Sam. 14:17,20) and possess supernatural power, though both their power and intelligence is finite (Mt. 24:36; 2 Pt. 2:11). They are able to transport themselves quickly (Dan. 9:21), though they can be hindered (Dan. 10:1-21, esp. v.13); and they can appear suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere (Lk. 2:13-14; Acts 1:10).

The moral character of angels

The Bible refers to both “elect” (“holy”) angels (Mk. 8:38; 1 Tim. 5:21), and to fallen angels, or “angels that sinned” (2 Pt. 2:4). It is often taught that the angels were created “holy,” and that some became unholy by virtue of their fall into sin. However, that theory is problematic, since holiness is a positive quality (not the mere absence of sin). Adam was not created holy, but he was created without sin. Had he obeyed God, he would have become holy, but instead he disobeyed and became sinful (unholy). Given that angels, as well as men, are free moral agents responsible for their choices, it seems likely that angels, like Adam, were created sinless, and that they became either holy or unholy by virtue of their choice of obedience or disobedience to God (2 Pt. 2:4). Angels were individually created and do not comprise a race, therefore there is no transmission of sin from one angel to another. The only way that one angel’s sin could affect another is through influence.

The classes, number and organization of angels

The Bible refers to only two classes of angels: seraphim (Isa. 6:2—mentioned only here) and cherubim (Gen. 3:24; Ezek. 10:1-22; 28:14). However, we are unable to determine from scripture what this distinction means, and there is no particular reason why there couldn't be any number of classes of angels, all or some with distinct attributes and functions. The angels are virtually innumerable (Rev. 5:11), and both the holy and the unholy angels are organized into various hierarchies (Rev. 9:11; 12:7; Eph. 6:11-12). The Bible refers to "archangels" (*i.e.*, chief angels, cf. 1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 9) and to "chief princes" (Dan. 10:13), and indicates that some, in their positions, are closer to the throne of God (Lk. 1:19); and of course, there are differences of rank among fallen angels also (Jude 8-9).

The function of the holy angels

The angels are engaged in various ministries both to God and man. They praise God (Ps. 148:1-2; Rev. 5:11-14) and serve him (Ps. 103:20), and at least some, perhaps the archangels, appear before him at certain times (Job 1:6; 2:1). The angels observe earthly affairs (Dan. 4:13; 1 Cor. 4:9) and serve as "ministering spirits" to the elect (Heb. 1:13-14). On occasion they bring answers to prayer (Dan. 9:21-23; Acts 12:5-7), aid believers in their ministries (Acts 8:26), offer encouragement in times of danger (Acts 27:22-24), protect and preserve the saints (Acts 5:19; 12:7-10), transport believers after death (Lk. 16:22); and they will gather the saints at the second coming (Matt. 24:31) and presumably they will be involved in gathering the saints at the rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:13-18, note v.16). With respect to the unrighteous, angels inflict judgment (Acts 12:23; Rev. 16:1-22), they will gather the unrighteous for punishment at the second coming of Christ (Matt. 13:39-40), and they will bind Satan and confine him in the abyss at the close of the present age (Rev. 20:1-2).

The function of the unholy angels

The unholy angels, of which "demons" seem to be a subgroup, oppose the work of God, God's holy angels (Dan. 10:13), and his people (Eph. 6:12); and they support the work of Satan (Rev. 12:7).

Satan

The existence of Satan, God's chief opponent, is taught in the Old Testament (Genesis, 1 Chronicles, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah), and by every New Testament writer. Jesus referred to Satan on numerous occasions. He is called by various names, including: "Satan," meaning "adversary" (52 times), the "Devil," meaning "slanderer" (35 times), the "Evil One" (Eph. 6:12), the "Serpent" (Rev. 12:9), the "Dragon" (Rev. 12:9,12), the "Tempter" (Matt. 4:3), and "Beelzebub," the "Prince of Demons" (Matt. 12:24 cf. v.26). If Ezekiel 28:14 refers to Satan, as seems to be the case, he is there classified as "the anointed cherub that covers," and possibly of greater rank than any of the other angels. He fell through pride (Isa. 14:12-14; 1 Tim. 3:6), and thus sin entered into the creation. As a result, he became the enemy of God and the adversary of God's plan and people (Matt. 13:24-43; 1 Pt. 5:8). Jesus characterizes Satan as "a murderer" and "a liar" (Jn. 8:44), and the Apostle John refers to him as a confirmed

“sinner” (1 Jn. 3:8, cf. Jn. 8:44). Satan’s life can be divided into six periods: on the “holy mountain”—in the angelic governance of the creation (Ezek. 28:14); in the heavenlies, *i.e.*, in the physical universe (from his fall to his imprisonment at Christ’s return, Eph. 6:11-12); confinement to the earth (during the future day of the Lord, Rev. 12:9); confinement in the abyss (during most of the millennial portion of the kingdom of Christ on earth—approximately one thousand years—Rev. 20:1-3); a brief period on earth near the close of the millennium (Rev. 20:1-3); and finally, eternity in the Lake of Fire—Hell (Rev. 20:10). As a creature, Satan is a finite being. Though he is powerful, his power is limited by the cooperation given to him (Jam. 4:7), and by God (Job 1:12; 2 Cor. 12:7; 2 Tim. 2:26). Thus, as seen in the case of Job, there are some things that Satan can only do by divine permission.

Demons and demon possession

In the “enlightened” modern age in which we live, demonism is often dismissed as primitive religious belief, and thus there are three views in addition to the biblical view that need to be considered.

1. The mythical theory

The mythical theory says that accounts of demon possession are symbolic—not literally true, and they depict in symbolic terms our Lord’s triumph over evil. Obviously such an explanation is not consistent with the verbal inspiration of scripture.

2. The accommodation theory

The accommodation theory says that when Christ and the disciples referred to demons it was not because they believed that such things really existed, but because their contemporaries believed in demons, and thus they accommodated their language to those beliefs. (Hum...I guess we should also suppose that the swine in the story of Matthew 8:28-34 were very “accommodating” too, plunging off the cliff!)

3. The psychological theory

According to the psychological theory emotionally unstable people who believed in demons fancied that they were demon possessed and acted accordingly. Then, believing that Jesus had power over demons, they believed that they were delivered at his command. (Need it mention the pigs again?)

4. The Biblical view

Obviously all three of the views above are inconsistent with the verbal inspiration of scripture. The biblical view is that demons are real, personal, malevolent spirit beings. Though it does not seem to be their chief work, demons do have the power to control people, either partially or completely eclipsing the human will under certain circumstances. The reason for the onset of demon possession is not stated in scripture, but it is at least possible that some individuals have opened the door to demon possession by their personal choices, or interest in the occult or false religion (which the Bible views as demonic, cf. 1 Cor. 10:20-21; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 9:20). While it is difficult to know how much of this description might be characteristic of demon possession in general, the demon possessed man of Gadara (Matt. 8:28-34, cf. Mk. 5:1-20 and Lk 8:26-40) displayed these qualities: 1) wildness, violence, and persistent antisocial behavior (Mt. 8:28; Mk. 5:4);

2) a preference for nudity (Lk. 8:27); 3) avoidance of community (Lk. 8:27, 29); 4) possibly a preoccupation with death (Lk. 8:27); and, 5) self-mutilation (Mk. 5:5).

It is important to recognize that Jesus did not “exorcise” demons; he simply commanded them to come out. Exorcism makes use of conjurations, incantations, or religious or magical ceremonies in an effort to expel demons (Merrill Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, p.101). In other words, in exorcism the power is assumed to reside in the right formula or ceremony. However, in Jesus’ case, and in the case of the apostles, the power was divine authority (Matt. 10:1—note that the word “power” (AV) is the Greek word “*exousia*,” which should be translated “authority”). There is no evidence that believers today are given the authority to expel demons, though we can and should pray for people we believe may be under demonic influence or control.

A3. The Church

The word “Church” is translated from the Greek word *ekklēsia*, which means “congregation.” In the New Testament, this becomes a designation for invisible, universal “Body of Christ,” of which all believers in this age are part. The term is also used to designate a local congregation.

The universal (invisible) Church

The universal Church is composed of all redeemed people living between Pentecost (A.D. 33) and the removal of the Church from the earth at the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-17). Reformed theologians differ on the definition of the Church. They view the Church as all redeemed people. However, the view taken here is that the Church began its existence on the day of Pentecost, A.D. 33. “The Church” is simply another name for “the Body of Christ” (Col. 1:18,24), and Spirit baptism is the operation that makes a believer a member of the Body of Christ (1Cor. 12:13). Since Spirit baptism did not begin until Pentecost, A.D. 33, the Church could not have existed prior to that time. There are numerous reasons for believing that Pentecost A.D. 33 marks the birth of the Church.

- 1) The disciples recognized that Pentecost marked the beginning of the Church (Acts 11:15-16).
- 2) Jesus indicated that the Church was a future reality from the standpoint of his earthly ministry (Matt. 16:18—note the future tense, “I *will* build my Church”).
- 3) The Church age is parenthetical to God’s program for Israel. This can be seen from the complete absence of any mention of the Church, or the Church age in the Old Testament. Looking from the Old Testament perspective, one would never know that the Church (or the Church age) would exist. The Old Testament discusses in great detail the coming of Messiah, the day of the LORD, and the establishment of the kingdom of God, without so much as a hint that of the future existence of the Church or the Church age (Eph. 3:1-10). For example, consider Isaiah 61:1-3, where Isaiah prophesies first advent Christ (vv. 1-2a) and the second advent (vv. 2b-3) in the same sentence, without so much as a hint of the Church age. Consider also Daniel 9:24-27, in which the angel Gabriel revealed to Daniel the outline of God’s prophetic program for Israel, from the decree to restore Jerusalem in 444B.C. to the end of the tribulation period—with absolutely no hint of the Church or the Church age. Israel and the Church are distinct entities, and this is seen nowhere more clearly than in Paul’s discussion of this subject in Romans 11:11-32. Sadly, Paul’s warning to the church at Rome not to become haughty in thinking that the Church has replaced Israel in the divine program, has gone unheeded; for this is precisely what has happened. In the second century the Church had become predominately Gentile, Jerusalem had been destroyed in A.D. 70 and the Jewish people scattered. To many Christians it no longer seemed feasible that God would fulfill his promises to Israel, since Israel has ceased to exist as a nation; therefore, in true Greek fashion, ignoring the clear revelation of God in scripture, they reasoned that it must be God’s intention to fulfill those promises to the Church. Of course, many of the promises God made to Israel are ethnic and geo-political in nature, and could not be

fulfilled to the Church in a literal fashion; thus, interpreters began to “spiritualize” (allegorize) those promises—that is to say, they began interpreting them non-literally, applying them to the Church. This resulted in a great distortion of scripture and a redefining of the Church as a continuation of the one people of God, rather than as a parenthesis entity, as indicated by Paul (Rom. 11:11-32). This shift in the defining of the Church and the Church age as a continuation of Israel (in spiritual form), rather than as a distinct and parenthesis entity, has resulted in great theological error. For example, viewing the Church as a continuation of Israel (in spiritual form), or a replacement for Israel, is the basis for many errors, including: replacement theology, realized eschatology covenant theology, and even infant baptism.

It is of paramount importance for the student of biblical theology to know that Israel and the Church are distinct entities, and that the Church does not pre-date Pentecost, A.D. 33.

Just as membership in the Church, the Body of Christ, had a beginning at Pentecost, its membership will be closed at the rapture when Christ comes to claim his Bride (I Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:13-17), for the Church is the Bride of Christ. Thus, the extent of the Church age is from Pentecost A.D.33 to the rapture.

The local (visible) church

Local churches are geographically local manifestations of the one, universal Church. Of course, it is always the case that some unsaved people attach themselves to the local church, and it is also true that local churches have a tendency to apostatize over time (usually within a few generations); thus we can expect in any local church to have a mixture of saved and lost people, depending on the degree of apostasy.

The mission of the local Church

The mission of the local church is the same as that of the universal Church: it is the twofold purpose of evangelism and discipleship (edification) of believers. That purpose was clearly delineated by Christ in his great commission prior to his departure (Matt. 28:19-20).

The resources of the local church

God has given the local church resources by which to accomplish its mission. Those resources include: the scriptures, leadership, spiritual gifts, and discipline.

Local church leadership

Biblically, local church leadership is to be exercised through three primary avenues: elders, deacons, and the congregational body. An imbalance or failure in any one of these areas results in dysfunction within the local church. In the discussion that follows, we are not defining the roles in accordance with the practices of any particular denomination, but as defined in scripture.

a. Elders (the presbytery)

With respect to the local church, the highest spiritual authority outside of Christ and his apostles, resides in the elders of the local congregations. In the beginning, an apostle, or the representative of an apostle, often appointed elders. However, apostolic appointment was a practical consideration, not a requirement. There were occasions where churches sprang up apart from apostolic ministry and appointed their own leadership, and there is no indication from the New Testament that the apostles challenged the validity of such churches or their leadership. Thus, we do not find the Bible teaching either apostolic succession, or any form of succession of spiritual authority, though under ordinary circumstances that is the best method. We must bear in mind that Paul's direction to Timothy, that he appoint elders in the churches under his charge, should not be taken as normative, for these were newly planted churches, which in their infancy lacked the ability to select qualified leaders. Much has been made over "ordination" in the past nineteen hundred years, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, and while the commissioning of leaders is vitally important, from a biblical perspective, ordination conveys no powers or prerogatives not vested within the local congregation. Additionally, in the early churches the eldership in each congregation was to be constituted by multiple elders of equal authority, though perhaps not of equal giftedness or influence.

Paul laid out the qualifications for elders to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:1-7) and to Titus (Tit. 1:5-9). We must be careful not to confuse elders with deacons, as these are two distinct offices, each with its own qualifications. Elders occupy the highest office in the local church, and deacons serve as "ministry extenders" under the general oversight of the elders.

Qualifications of elders:

Paul gives the following qualifications for elders (also called "bishops," or overseers ")

1. First, it should be observed that the New Testament makes no provision for the appointment of female elders. This is not simply a first century cultural phenomenon as is sometimes claimed. Paul stated in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 that the woman is not to exercise authority over the man because of the dignity imparted to the man by virtue of the order of creation (*i.e.*, that man as the head of the race was created first, and hence that the woman was created to serve in a support capacity, rather than a leadership capacity over men). The fact that Paul points to the order of the creation of the first man and woman clear makes his reason is universal and transcultural, and thus binding even today. (Note also that having just made that point, Paul, in giving the qualifications of elders, uses only the masculine pronouns, cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7.)
2. They are to be monogamous (1 Tim. 3:2).
3. They are to be temperate (not given to drunkenness), prudent, respectable, and hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2).
4. They must hold fast to the word in their own personal lives, and be able to teach and exhort in sound doctrine, and to refute error (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9).

5. They should not have an addiction to alcohol (1 Tim. 3:3). (We may assume this would apply to other harmful addictions as well.)
6. They are not to be quarrelsome, and self-willed, but gentle and uncontentious (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7).
7. They are not to be lovers of money (materialistic) (1Tim 3:3).
8. They must be good managers of their own households, with believing children. (1 Tim. 3:4; Titus 1:6).
9. They should not be new to the faith (1 Tim. 3:6).
10. They must have a good reputation outside the church (1 Tim. 3:7).

b. Deacons (and deaconesses)

The word “deacon” comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, meaning, “servant.” This office was introduced into the early Church in order to free the elders from more mundane tasks that did not require a high level of spiritual knowledge and insight or teaching ability. That is not to say that individual deacons did not possess those abilities, only that such was not a requirement of their office. Many vocations benefit from partnerships between those who are highly qualified and helpers with lesser qualifications, so that a service (or, a ministration) can be extended to more people. The deacons were, in a sense, “leadership extenders,” in that their service to the local church allowed the limited number of elders to serve a larger congregation than would otherwise be possible. While deacons were generally not responsible for the spiritual direction and teaching of the local church, they could be used in any way as a leadership extension, as the need in the local church may warrant. Clearly this was a very broad category of service, and how, and at what level an individual deacon might be used would vary with their individual ability.

Qualifications of Deacons

1. 1 Timothy 3:11 seems to allow for women to serve in this role, though in view of Paul’s prior teaching regarding women not exercising authority over men in the church (1 Tim. 2:9-15), it seems likely the role of deaconess would be focused on either service in general to the local body, or to ministry to and discipleship of other women.
2. They must be dignified and forthright—not “double tongued” (1 Tim. 3:8).
3. They must not be addicted to wine, or materialistic (1 Tim. 3:8).
4. They must hold fast to the faith, not only outwardly, but inwardly—*i.e.*, “with a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9).
5. They should be proven by first serving on a trial basis (1 Tim. 3:10).
6. They should be above reproach—*i.e.*, of good reputation (1 Tim. 3:10).

7. Women who serve should be dignified, not gossips, temperate, and faithful in all things (1 Tim. 3:11).
8. Men should be monogamous, and good managers of their households and children (1 Tim. 3:12).

In comparing the qualification of elders and deacons, it is apparent that both offices have the same personal and moral qualifications. The difference in these sets of qualifications is that an elder must be able to teach, exhort, and to refute error—and that is no small distinction, since it presumes considerable spiritual development, knowledge of the truth (scripture), and wisdom on the part of the candidate for elder, which can only be acquired over time. Thus, it is evident why an elder should not be a new Christian.

Spiritual Gifts

We discussed spiritual gifts under the work of the Holy Spirit, and that information will not be repeated here. However, it should be noted that the gifts given by the Holy Spirit in this age (beginning at Pentecost), although exercised by individuals, are actually gifts to the Church as a whole (1 Cor. 12:1-31, esp. v.28); and they were given for the edification of the Church (1 Cor. 12:4-27). Although similar abilities were occasionally given in the Old Testament, such manifestations of the Spirit of God there were highly selective (rather than universal in the Church age in which every believer possesses some gift), and unlike gifts in the present age, special supernatural endowments of ability in the Old Testament were not necessarily permanent.

Discipline

The local church in the New Testament was a body under discipline. Being under discipline is the essence of discipleship. In associating with a local church, an individual placed himself, or herself under the authority of that local body, to be disciplined. Obviously such power can, and undoubtedly was, abused. Nevertheless, without discipline the local church could not carry out the great commission of making disciples (Matt. 28:19-20); and as an institution, it could not have survived. The New Testament churches exercised discipline at several levels. The primary level of discipline was instruction (1 Tim. 4:1-16; 6:2; 2 Tim. 4:2). At this level the local church was responsible for imparting the fundamental truths of the faith, and exhorting its members to adhere to truth, both in principle and in practice. When instruction with exhortation failed, the next level of discipline was rebuke. Rebuke involves a verbal warning to a member that they are not adhering to the faith. Although there is little information on how this was actually practiced, it seems safe to assume that there were also levels of rebuke, fitting to the circumstances. Paul directed Timothy to use rebuke judiciously in accordance with the circumstances (1 Tim. 5:1-2,20; 2 Tim. 4:2). The highest level of discipline in the local church was excommunication (Matt. 18:15-17). This level of discipline was reserved only for offenses where lesser forms of discipline had failed. Of course excommunication has no bearing on a person's salvation, only on their participation in the fellowship and function of the local church (2 Thess. 3:6-7,14). Those excluded were not only cut off from the fellowship of the local congregation and regarded as unbelievers (for so they acted), they were also severed from the close personal fellowship of individual believers. It is important to understand that this most extreme level of church discipline was not intended as punishment, for punishment is not a legitimate function of the local church;

rather, it was intended to prompt repentance, and restoration to the fellowship of the church (1 Cor. 5:1-13 cf. 2 Cor. 2:1-11).

The Church in prophecy

The Church, which began at Pentecost, is composed of both Jews and Gentiles, but it should not be confused with “Israel,” nor should the promises God made to the Church be confused with the promises previously made to Israel. The promises God made to the Jewish nation included a homeland forever, and a kingdom (not a “spiritual” kingdom, but a physical, geo-political kingdom) forever—with Messiah, David’s Son, ruling on the throne of Israel forever (Ps. 89:19-37, esp. vv. 34-37; Isa. 9:6-7). God also promised Israel spiritual redemption and regeneration, both individually and nationally. The fountainhead of those promises is the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3,6-7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18); and those promises were further expanded in the Palestinian Covenant (Deut. 29:1-30:20), the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:12-17), and the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), as well as numerous other prophetic passages in the Old Testament (Ps. 98:1-9; Isa. 11:1-12:6; 25:1-12; 32:1-8; 35:1-10; 40:3-11; 66:1-24; Jer. 33:10-26). Paul states quite emphatically in Romans 11:11-32 that God still intends to fulfill those promises, for as Paul said concerning those promises, “...the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (v.29) [NASB]. Thus, it should be apparent that Israel and the Church are distinct entities. The Church’s expectation concerning the future is that the redeemed of the Church age will be raptured (caught away) from the earth prior to the day of God’s wrath (the “day of the LORD) which is to come upon the earth prior to Christ’s second coming (1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:51-53); and the Church age saints will be taken to heaven (Jn.14:1-3) to stand before the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:10-15), from which they will return with Christ (at the conclusion of the tribulation period), as his bride, to enter the millennial kingdom on earth in which God will begin to fulfill all of the promises made to a purified and redeemed nation of Israel (Rev. 20:4-6). At the conclusion of the millennium the present heavens and earth will be destroyed and the lost of all the ages will receive their final judgment (Rev. 20:10-15). After that judgment the new heavens and earth will appear, and the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, will descend to the earth (Rev. 21:1-22:5); this marks the beginning of the eternal phase of the kingdom. In God’s eternal kingdom, all of the promises he made to both Israel and the Church will be fulfilled.

Study Questions

Creation

1. Define the following terms: creation *ex nihilo*, immediate creation, mediate creation. (5)
2. Describe the pre-scientific view of creation and note any problems with this view. (5)
3. What is a “reconciliation theory?” (5-6)
4. Describe theistic evolution and discuss any biblical or theological problems. (You do not need to address the scientific problems.) (7)
5. What are the two forms of the day age theory? (6-8)
6. Describe progressive creationism and discuss any problems with this view. (7-8)
7. Describe the literary framework view and discuss any problems with this view. (8)
8. Describe the gap theory and discuss the support for this view. (8-10)
9. Discuss the problems with the gap theory. (8-10)
10. Describe the recent creation theory and discuss the evidence used to support this view. (10-16)
11. Explain how the constant velocity of light (in a vacuum) can be used to determine the size and age of the universe. (13-14)
12. Explain the “observational problem” with recent creationism. (12)
13. Explain the “logical problem” with recent creationism. (12-13)
14. Explain the “ethical problem” with recent creationism. (13-16)
15. Explain the problem of the “light created in the pipe” theory. (13-16)
16. Explain the “appearance of age theory” and how it relates to recent creationism. (12-13)
17. What are the problems with the appearance of age theory? (12-13)
18. Describe, in your own words, the “white hole cosmology” proposed by Humphreys and discuss the problems associated with this view. (16-17)
19. Describe the preformative view of creation and discuss any problems associated with this view. (18-19)

20. Explain the usage and relationship between the Hebrew words *bara'* (to create) and *'asah* (to make). (19-22)
21. What do we learn about ultimate origins (ex nihilo creation) from an examination of the creation account in Genesis Chapter One? (19-22)
22. Has modern science been able to explain creation without the need of a Creator? Explain your answer based on observations made in the text. (22-25)

Angels

23. Describe the nature of angels. (26)
24. With respect to moral character, what are the two types of angels? (26)
25. What are the two classes of angels mentioned in scripture? (27)
26. Describe the functions of the holy angels (27)
27. What are some of the names applied to Satan? (27)
28. What are the six periods of Satan's existence? (27-28)
29. Name three incorrect theories of demon possession. (28)
30. Discuss the biblical view of demon possession. (28)

The Church

31. What is another name for the universal Church? (30)
32. When did the Church begin? (30)
33. At what point will the Church age close? (31)
34. What is the mission of the local church? (31)
35. What are three resources of the local church? (32-35)
36. Describe the New Testament pattern of local church leadership. (32-34)
37. Discuss the differences in the functions of elders and deacons. (32-34)
38. Briefly discuss discipline in the local church. (34-35)
39. Briefly discuss the distinction between the Church and Israel, and why this distinction is important. (35)