

Pleasant Springs Church

12-Week Study · A Quantum Case For God

WEEK 11 OF 12

Making Sense of It All — Genesis Reconciled

The order of creation and the harmony of the two books

THE BIG IDEA

The classic objection to Genesis is that its order of creation (heavens and earth, light, sky, dry land, plants, sun, fish and birds, animals, humans) does not match the scientific order (energy, four forces, stars, galaxies, planets, primitive life, and so on). After ten weeks of physics, we can see that the objection is shallower than it looks. Four classical readings of Genesis 1 — *day-age*, *framework*, *cosmic temple*, and *literal six-day* — each handle the data better than the modern critic admits. None requires the believer to surrender either book.

We promised in week three to come back to this. The genuine tension between the Genesis order of creation and the scientific timeline is the single most-cited reason intelligent people claim Genesis and science cannot both be true. The criticism deserves a serious answer.

The first thing to note is that the Genesis 1 narrative is not a textbook of stellar nucleosynthesis. It is a theological text, ancient Near Eastern in its idiom, addressed first to a people leaving Egypt. To read it as if it were a chronological lab notebook is to ignore both the genre and the audience. Augustine warned about this in the 4th century: forcing Genesis into the shape of a modern science text both abuses scripture and embarrasses the church in the eyes of pagans who actually know the science.

But ignoring the question is not an answer either. Honest Christians for two thousand years have proposed several ways to read Genesis 1 that take both books seriously. We summarize the four most influential.

SCRIPTURE

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Genesis 1:1–5 · Day One

Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

¹Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν. ²Ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος, καὶ σκότος ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου, καὶ πνεῦμα Θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος. ³καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Θεός· γενηθήτω φῶς· καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς. ⁴καὶ εἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ φῶς, ὅτι καλόν... ⁵καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ φῶς ἡμέραν...

English Standard Version

¹In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good... ⁵God called the light Day...

Colossians 1:15–17 · The Image of the Invisible God

Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

¹⁵ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, ¹⁶ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα, τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα... τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται. ¹⁷καὶ αὐτός ἐστι πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν.

English Standard Version

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

THE BIBLICAL CASE

Reading 1: Six Literal Days (Young-Earth Creationism)

Holds that Genesis 1 describes six consecutive 24-hour days roughly 6,000-10,000 years ago. The scientific appearance of an old universe is, on this view, explainable by a created universe that began with «mature» features (light already in transit from distant stars; rock strata already laid down). Faithful believers hold this view. The challenge is that the scientific consensus on stellar distances, radiometric dating, and the cosmic microwave background all converge on a 13.8-billion-year age, which the young-earth view must explain as either misread data or supernatural appearance-of-age. Most Christian scientists find that explanatory burden very heavy.

Reading 2: The Day-Age View

The Hebrew word *yom* («day») can mean a 24-hour day, the daylight portion of a day, or an indefinite period (as in «the day of the LORD»). The day-age view reads each of the six «days» as a long epoch, and points to the fact that the seventh day — God's rest — is described as continuing (Heb 4:9-10),

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suggesting at least one Genesis day is not 24 hours. The Genesis order on this reading roughly tracks the scientific order: light, then atmosphere/oceans, then land/vegetation, then heavenly bodies fully visible, then sea/air life, then land life and humans. Plant life on day three before the sun on day four is explained as the sun's heavy cloud-cover finally clearing on day four.

Reading 3: The Framework View

Reads Genesis 1 as a literary *framework* rather than a chronological log. Notice the structure: days 1-3 are *forming* (light/dark, sea/sky, land/vegetation); days 4-6 are *filling* (sun and stars, fish and birds, animals and humans). Day 4 fills day 1; day 5 fills day 2; day 6 fills day 3. The structure is *theological poetry*, teaching that God formed and then filled, with no claim to chronological order. On this reading the question «does Genesis match the scientific order?» is malformed; Genesis was never claiming to give an order.

Reading 4: The Cosmic Temple View (John Walton)

Old Testament scholar John Walton has argued (in *The Lost World of Genesis One*) that Genesis 1 describes the *functional inauguration* of the cosmos as God's temple, not the material creation of physical objects. In the ancient Near East, «to create» (Hebrew *bara*) meant to assign function and purpose. Genesis 1 is the seven-day inauguration ceremony of the cosmic temple, with day seven being the day God takes up his throne in the temple he has built. The material origin of the universe (the Big Bang and billions of years of formation) is not what Genesis 1 was ever about. This reading harmonizes Genesis with science by recognizing they are answering different questions.

What Pleasant Springs Affirms

Pleasant Springs Church takes no formal position among the four readings. We hold, with the church across centuries, that **God did indeed create the heavens and the earth, that he did so by his spoken Word, that humanity is the image-bearing pinnacle of his creation, and that the Genesis account is true.** The mechanism by which all of that happened — six 24-hour days, six long ages, a literary framework, or a temple inauguration — is a question on which faithful Christians disagree, and we make room for that disagreement. What we do not make room for is the claim that the two books contradict. They do not. They speak in different idioms, address different questions, and — when read carefully — harmonize.

THE CONVERGENCE

The classic objection — «Genesis says six days, science says 13.8 billion years» — assumes Genesis 1 is making a scientific chronological claim. Four classical readings show this assumption is questionable. The same Author wrote both books. They cannot ultimately contradict. The honest believer reads each carefully and trusts the convergence.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of the four readings of Genesis 1 did you grow up with? Which do you find most compelling now, and why?
2. Augustine warned that forcing Genesis into a scientific straitjacket embarrasses the church before pagans who know better. Have you ever seen this happen?
3. Why might the framework view be especially attractive to a Hebrew audience that would have heard the parallelism immediately?
4. Colossians 1:15–17 says all things were created «through» Christ and «for» him. How does that reframe the whole question of *how* creation happened?
5. What is one place in your spiritual life where you have been forcing the data of either book and need to relax your grip?

CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, you wrote two books. We have so often read them badly — wresting the one to attack the other, or surrendering one to save the other. Forgive us. Teach us to read both with care, humility, and a long memory. Help us hold our convictions with courage and our uncertainties with grace. Whatever the mechanism by which you formed the heavens and the earth, we worship you as their Maker, and we adore the Son through whom and for whom all things were made and in whom all things hold together. **Amen.***

Week 11 of 12 — A Quantum Case For God, a Pleasant Springs Church discipleship series. The complete 12-week study, and every other lesson, is at ps-church.com/discipleship/quantum-case-for-god