

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of biblical theology today by continuing to look at external evidence that corroborates the Bible. Last time we discussed a few different views of the creation days in Genesis 1.

Dr. Spencer, before we move on to the next topic, I would like to ask a couple of final questions having to do with the Bible's account of creation: first, what do you think of the view commonly called theistic evolution?

Dr. Spencer: Well, to be completely honest, I don't think much of it. First, as I understand it, it assumes evolution to be basically true and simply says that God guided it in some way, or that he created the natural world in such a way that natural processes had the power necessary to produce life. But, I don't think it is at all possible that natural processes can explain the *origin* of life, as we discussed at some length in Session 1. Living beings are simply not produced from non-living chemicals without the introduction of a vast amount of information, which requires intelligence. I also don't think the evidence is there to support evolution as a plausible explanation for the diversity of life, although, as I said in Session 1, I do think that biological organisms are able to adapt, which is often called micro evolution.

Marc Roby: But you do believe that God used natural processes, starting with the Big Bang, to produce our sun and our planet, so why couldn't natural processes also have produced living creatures?

Dr. Spencer: For two reasons. First, because, as I just said and argued at length in Session 1, *life is different!* It is not just quantitatively more complex than inanimate objects, even objects as complex as entire solar systems. No, it is qualitatively different, in other words, there is a radical, fundamental difference between nonliving and living things. Life is not simply the result of having the necessary chemicals around and then allowing the physical laws of the universe to operate on those materials for some length of time.

You will notice in Genesis 1 that most of the history of the universe, at least if the Big Bang theory is at all correct, is covered in the first verse; "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."¹ Then the account tells us, in verse 2, that "the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." I think John Lennox, in his book *Seven Days that Divide the World*, was right when he wrote about this verse that, "reference to the Spirit of God hovering near earth could be understood as a dramatic indication that God's special action is now going to begin. The aeons of waiting are over. The Creator is about to shape his world, to create life and fill the earth with it in preparation for God's crowning final act, the making of man and woman in his image."²

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² John C. Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the World: The Beginning according to Genesis and Science*, Zondervan, 2011, pg. 172

Marc Roby: I will certainly grant that there is a significant difference between the inanimate creation and life. But, you said you had two reasons why the creation of life is so different, what is the second?

Dr. Spencer: The second reason has to do not just with life in general, but specifically with man. Theistic evolution has at least one very serious theological problem when it comes to man. The Bible is clear that Adam and Eve were special creations of God, they were not the result of a long process of evolution. It isn't acceptable, theologically, to say that at some point God gave a spirit to some hominid that had evolved from lower animals. Such a view would require that the creation account for Eve would have to be taken as pure fiction, but the apostle Paul, for example, does not treat it as fiction in his argument in 1 Timothy 2:13. I think John Lennox does a good job of discussing theistic evolution in an appendix to the book I mentioned a moment ago.

Marc Roby: Alright, I have one more question before we leave the creation narratives of Genesis. What about the different order of presentation for the creation events in Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis? Some people claim that Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 present, essentially, two different and incompatible accounts. What do you say to them?

Dr. Spencer: My answer to that is taken directly from the very fine Hebrew scholar E. J. Young and his book *Thy Word is Truth*.³ He points out that the phrase in Genesis 2:4, which in the ESV begins "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth", is a critical phrase. It occurs eleven times in the book of Genesis and always as a heading. Young proposes that it could be translated "These are the things generated ..." and he says that "in these words, there is a clue to the fact that Genesis 2, instead of being a second account of creation, deals rather with the creation of man." If you read that chapter with this thought in mind, it makes perfectly good sense.

Marc Roby: Can you flesh that thought out a bit for us?

Dr. Spencer: Certainly. Genesis 2 is not giving a chronological listing of events, it is focused entirely on man as the creature God made to tend the garden, and it presents us with a picture of a benevolent God who gave man everything he could want or need. We are told in verse 9 that there were "trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food", so man's physical needs and aesthetic desires were satisfied. We are also told there was the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil", there was gold, there were precious stones, and there were rivers, man was giving everything he needed or could possibly want. Then, of course, we also read that man was given the job of naming the animals and, in the process, discovered that there was no suitable helper for him, so God created Eve. Now, when you look at the account this way, you see clearly that there is no conflict at all with the first chapter, there is a very different focus and purpose.

Marc Roby: Alright. You have provided very reasonable arguments regarding the Genesis account of creation. What about the rest of Genesis? Do we have external evidence to corroborate what the Bible tells us about the early history of man?

³ E.J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957, reprinted by Banner of Truth Trust, 2012, pg. 121

Dr. Spencer: There is a tremendous amount of evidence, but certainly not all of it is archaeological evidence. For one thing, the biblical account of the fall of Adam and Eve, as I mentioned in Session 8, must be considered factual by a true Christian. It is treated as factual in the Bible itself and is a very important part of Paul's arguments in the book of Romans. And I think we can clearly see evidence of the fall in the present-day world and in world history. All are sinners. And I don't mean to be at all trite in saying that, I mean it as a profound and depressing truth. And the history of the world, or the daily newspaper, give us ample evidence for the fact, as do our own hearts if we are at all honest. But, we must be careful to define sin biblically, as the answer to Question 14 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." Sin is not the same thing as crime. Societies define what actions are crimes, but God is the only one with authority to define sin.

If the evolutionary view of man were true, we would be seen to be getting better all the time, but world history simply does not show that to be the case.

Marc Roby: I can completely agree with that assessment. Is there any other external corroboration for the biblical narrative between the time of creation and Abraham?

Dr. Spencer: I think so. Let me go back to the headings that E.J. Young notes, which begin with "These are the generations ..." as we saw in Chapter 2 verse 4.

After discussing the creation of Adam and Eve and the fall, the Bible goes on to tell about Cain slaying his brother Abel, which is the first example of the terrible consequences of the fall. Then, in Genesis 5:1 we see the next of these headings, which in the 1984 NIV Bible we are using begins "This is the written account of Adam's line". That is followed by a listing of some of Adam's descendants and a description of the increase in human sin, which culminated in the famous declaration in Genesis 6:5, that "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." This led to God's deciding to wipe out almost all of mankind with a flood. And that account begins in Genesis 6:9 with the third of our headings, "This is the account of Noah".

Marc Roby: And is there external evidence to support the flood narrative?

Dr. Spencer: There absolutely is. There was clearly a massive flood in the ancient world that we call the Near East. I'm not going to get into a discussion of whether that flood was truly global or local, I don't consider that to be an extremely important point; it is much like the age of the earth, it can be a severe distraction and divide Christians unnecessarily. But, it is relatively clear that there was such a flood if for no other reason than it is a common theme in several ancient accounts, not just the Bible.

For example, in Kenneth Kitchen's excellent book, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*,⁴ he cites three Mesopotamian "Primeval Protohistories", as he calls them, from the early 2nd millennium before Christ; the Sumerian King List, the Atrahasis Epic, and the Eridu Genesis. Now I know a lot of people are familiar with the Epic of Gilgamesh, so before we go on I'll point

⁴ K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, see Chapter 9

out that it is not included in that list because it appears to have taken its flood account directly from the Atrahasis Epic.

Marc Roby: I assume that all three of these extra-biblical sources have a story of a massive flood?

Dr. Spencer: Yes they do. And all three accounts share certain key features with the biblical account. In all three accounts the flood is sent as divine punishment, one man is told to build an ark and then he and some group of people, in the biblical accounts his family, and a number of animals survive. But, the differences in these accounts are, as Kitchens explains, “so numerous as to preclude either the Mesopotamian or Genesis accounts having been copied directly from the other.”

I'll let our listeners consult his book for details, but I think there are three points of particular interest to take note of: First, that the Sumerians and Babylonians treated their accounts as historical; for example, they had historical lists of kings before and after the flood. Second, floods in that part of the world were quite common, so this was obviously not just another flood, it was something quite extraordinary, one could say of biblical proportions I guess. And, third, even though these other accounts include their gods and other mythological features, that does not in any way mean that they aren't based on a true historical event, nor does it imply that the Bible's supernatural explanations for the event are wrong.

Marc Roby: Is there anything else of importance that we should know about the Mesopotamian flood accounts?

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. I think they are illustrative of the fact that the Bible is clearly distinct from all types of mythology. In the Mesopotamian versions the gods are angry with man for being too noisy, which is rather silly. Whereas, in the Bible, God's anger is because of the wickedness of man.

Secondly, in the Mesopotamian versions most of the gods hide what they are going to do from man, but one man was secretly told by a friendly god, about what was happening. And the other gods were then angry that some people survived the flood as a result of this warning. This is the kind of petty fighting between gods that is common in mythology; the intent of all but one of them was, evidently, to wipe mankind out, but they didn't succeed.

Whereas, the true and living God who has revealed himself in the Bible had a clear purpose in bringing the flood. He then communicated clearly to Noah what that purpose was and what Noah was to do. And no one can thwart God's plans; he accomplishes what he desires.

Thirdly, the Mesopotamian versions describe a ship that is completely unrealistic and unseaworthy; it is shaped like a giant cube! Hardly a believable account. Whereas, in the biblical account, the ship has perfectly believable and functional proportions.

Marc Roby: Those are pretty significant differences. Of course, you and I both grew up being taught that religion started out as primitive man coming up with explanations for the lightning and thunder and so on – things that scared him, and then – or so that story goes – religion evolved

with man and became more and more sophisticated. Eventually culminating in the development of monotheism.

Dr. Spencer: That is the picture we were given, and not just us. I think that is still the picture many people have in their heads. There may be some truth to the fact that myths were made up by men to deal with things that scared them, and I've always personally thought that the Greek and Nordic mythologies, along with Native American mythologies and so on must have developed as a combination of these kinds of explanations and just plain old-fashioned story telling. But, Christianity is in no way the end result of some kind of evolutionary development of religion beginning with myths.

First of all, the Bible and mythology stand side-by-side historically. Greek mythology is thought to have developed from stories beginning sometime around 2000 BC, which is right about the time of Abraham and probably well before the time of development of Nordic or Native American myths. Secondly, God is never presented in the Bible as merely an explanation for natural phenomena like lightning. Rather, he is presented as the Sovereign Creator of everything and the Genesis account is, in many ways, a polemic against the mythologies that were around at that time.

I think that the theologian and mathematician Vern Poythress put it well in his book *Redeeming Science*.⁵ He discusses some of the ancient Near Eastern creation stories and compares them with Genesis and writes that “In contrast to the crass, immoral, quarreling gods of polytheism stands the majestic, ordered, unopposed work of the one true God. Instead of creating man to serve the needs of complaining gods, God creates man out of his sheer bounty, blessing him and caring for him. Disorder and suffering come from the human fall and apostasy, not from the disorder of gods in conflict.”

Marc Roby: That does summarize the difference quite well. But, returning to extra-biblical evidence to corroborate the early chapters of Genesis, what else do we have?

Dr. Spencer: Well, the next one of our major headings occurs in Genesis 10:1, right after the account of the flood. It reads, “This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons”. This section of Scripture is sometimes called the Table of Nations.

Marc Roby: Do we have external evidence for these descendants?

Dr. Spencer: We do have external evidence that the names are legitimate names from that period and location, which in itself is very strong evidence that the document was written at that time. As we've noted before, someone writing a few hundred, or more than a thousand years later, as the biblical minimalists would claim, would simply not have been able to get these names right. I'll let the interested listeners look in Kitchen's book for the details.⁶

Marc Roby: This is all fascinating evidence for something so ancient. I look forward to getting into more of it next time, but we are out of time for today.

⁵ Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach*, Crossway Books, 2006, pg 72

⁶ Kitchen *op. cit.* pp 430-438