

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of biblical theology today by continuing our survey of extra-biblical evidence, all of which, when properly understood, corroborates the Bible.

Dr. Spencer, last time you claimed that the Bible itself is our best source of information for the times and places about which it speaks; in fact you called it our “greatest archeological document by far.” You then argued against the popular minimalist view that claims that the Old Testament was written just a few hundred years before Christ, rather than at the time it claims to have been written. You showed how this view is false by giving us some examples of details that someone writing at that late date would not have been able to get right. How would you like to begin today?

Dr. Spencer: I’d like to begin by making a very important point. People may take exception to individual pieces of evidence that are presented to corroborate the Bible’s presentation of ancient history, but, most often, they argue from silence, saying that one event or another must not be true because we have no extra-biblical evidence for it. So, I want to emphasize and expand a bit on the point I made at the beginning of Session 7; the Bible itself is the most reliable archaeological document we have. It is completely accurate about all sorts of details that cannot be explained away. And wherever we have clear extra-biblical evidence, it corroborates the biblical narrative. We have absolutely no evidence at all that the Bible is wrong in anything it asserts. And that is particularly amazing when you consider that many people have tried, for many years, to prove the Bible wrong.

Therefore, we should have great confidence that it is also correct when it tells us things for which we have no other evidence. If the Bible did not speak about God, I have no doubt that it would be the most revered archeological document in the world. But, because it does tell us about God, people who do not want to deal with the reality of God are compelled to try and discredit his Word.

Marc Roby: In other words, their atheistic presupposition—that is, their ultimate heart commitment to the notion that there is no God, gets in the way of their properly evaluating the evidence!

Dr. Spencer: Quite right.

Marc Roby: Last time you mentioned the Old Testament prophecies about Christ as evidence to corroborate the biblical narrative. What other evidence would you like to present?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I’d like to give a very brief and selective summary of evidence for the Old Testament as a whole, and I’d like to do it in the order the information is presented in the Old Testament.

Marc Roby: Alright, I presume that means that we’ll start with Genesis.

Dr. Spencer: Correct.

Marc Roby: And, of course, most modern people believe that the Genesis account of creation is completely at odds with what we know from modern science. So, how would you respond to such people?

Dr. Spencer: I would respond by first saying that we need to think a bit about why the Bible says anything at all about the creation of the universe, and then also think a bit about the audience for whom the Genesis account was written. If we think about these questions, we won't come to the account with an unreasonable expectation about what to find.

**Marc Roby: OK, so why does the Bible include a creation account?**

Dr. Spencer: There are multiple reasons, and we won't touch on many of them I'm sure. But what is most important is that these reasons do *not* include two things modern man seems to be particularly interested in. The first of these is that I think it safe to say that *when* the universe was created is of no importance at all theologically, and therefore, is never an issue discussed in the Bible.

**Marc Roby: Now that is a controversial statement that we need to come back to, but first go ahead and tell us the second thing that modern man is interested in, but which is not one of the reasons for the writing of Genesis.**

Dr. Spencer: Alright, the second thing is that at least some modern people are very interested in is a scientific description of how the universe was created. But, that is absolutely not one of the purposes of the Genesis account, nor could it be. So, we must get rid of that notion right up front. Nevertheless, the account given is completely accurate as far as it goes. We just have to be careful to be sure we are interpreting it correctly and we have to approach the subject with a great deal of humility because both the Bible and the science can be difficult to interpret.

**Marc Roby: Why do you say that providing a scientific description of how the universe was created couldn't possibly be one of the purposes of the Genesis account?**

Dr. Spencer: For a reason that becomes obvious the instant you answer the second question I originally said we need to consider; namely, "For whom was the Genesis account written?" The answer is that it was written so that the people at the time of Moses could understand it, and also so that it would be useful to all people at all times. Therefore, the modern vocabulary and scientific understanding necessary for a detailed scientific description simply did not exist. And, you have to think about it, if it had been written to be intelligible to people at the present time, not only would it have been useless to those who have gone before us, but it would most likely still be incomplete or wrong because there are things that we don't know yet.

**Marc Roby: OK, you make a compelling case for why the book of Genesis could not have been intended to be a scientific description of how the universe was created. So, now let's return to the statement you made, that it is not at all theologically important when the universe was created. Given the occasionally very rancorous debate even among Christians concerning how old the earth is, I think that is a statement that will surprise many. How can you defend it?**

Dr. Spencer: I can defend it very simply. First, you never once see any mention in the entire Bible about the time of creation. The Genesis account is referred to many times, but the time of creation is never mentioned once, not explicitly or even implicitly. Second, exactly when the universe was created has absolutely no theological importance whatsoever.

It does not have any effect on the doctrine of creation for example; which in its most basic form simply says that God created the visible universe out of nothing. It also has no bearing on the doctrine of man; which could perhaps be best summarized succinctly by quoting the answer to the 10<sup>th</sup> question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which says that “God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.” The time of creation also has no bearing on the doctrine of God himself, which I will again summarize by quoting from the Shorter Catechism, this time the answer to Question 4, which says that “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” So, we see that when he created the universe is completely irrelevant to his being and his works.

It also has no bearing on the doctrine of redemption, which could be briefly summarized by quoting the answer to Question 20 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which says that “God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.”

We know from the Bible that God the Father planned this redemption, the Son, Jesus Christ, accomplished it, and the Holy Spirit applies it to individuals. The whole purpose of creation and history is the establishing of God’s church, his people, to spend eternity with him in a new heaven and a new earth. I could go on, and on, but I think you get the message, exactly when God began this creative work is irrelevant theologically. The question is also incoherent from God’s perspective, because he does not experience time like we do.

**Marc Roby: Hold on a minute there – what do you mean by that last little comment, that God does not experience time like we do?**

Dr. Spencer: That is a difficult point for us to grasp because we have a very hard time conceiving of any being that does not experience time like we do, as a continual progression of events, one after the other. We only know fully how we feel, or what we think, right at a given moment in time. If I want to know how I felt or what I was thinking even a few minutes ago, I have to conjure it up from my memory, and my memory will never be perfect. And, of course, the further back I go in time, the worse my memory gets. I also don’t know the future at all.

God, however, is completely different. He is not limited to living in the present, remembering the past and wondering and hoping about the future as we are. The Bible hints at this in a number of places. For example, the psalmist declares to God, in Psalm 90, verse 4, that “a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.”<sup>1</sup> And this verse is loosely quoted by Peter in 2 Peter 3:8 also.

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Also, in Psalm 139, verse 4, we read that “Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.” And in verse 16 of that psalm we read that “All the days ordained for me were written in [God’s] book before one of them came to be.” We are also told many times in Scripture that God has seen what we have done, that he knows our thoughts, and our motives, that he has heard our silent prayers and so on. So, it is absolutely clear that God has an immediate experience of everything that what we, from our perspective, consider to be the past, present and future. He knows everything about everyone and about every moment of time. And, he knows it immediately; he does not need to scratch his head and try and remember.

**Marc Roby: Now that is something to ponder. But, getting back to our topic at hand, and assuming that you are right in saying that the time of creation is of no real importance, why do you think it remains such a major issue in many people’s views?**

Dr. Spencer: I think that most people who hold to a young-earth view, whether they hold to Bishop Usher’s mark of the universe being created in October of 4004 BC, or some other date, do so because they believe that is what is taught in Genesis itself and that to hold any other view is to surrender the inerrancy of the Bible. They often have a second reason too, even if they don’t state it, and that is that they think agreeing that the earth is billions of years old somehow lends credence to the theory of evolution as the explanation for life; but, as I pointed out in Session 1, you can have a trillion years and a trillion earths and it doesn’t help the argument for evolution one whit.

So, returning to the first point, we must say up front that we agree whole heartedly with these people that the Bible is the completely inerrant Word of God. We also believe that Genesis is a historical account and not just some kind of creation myth. Where we disagree is in their insistence that there is no other possible way to interpret the Genesis account than the view they hold, which usually includes saying that the six days of creation are literal 24-hour days and that they are consecutive.

**Marc Roby: Well, how do you think the creation days should be interpreted?**

Dr. Spencer: I’m sure that I’m going to disappoint you and our listeners with my answer, but the only honest answer I can give is that I don’t know. But, before people start turning us off or jumping all over me for being non-committal, let me explain myself a bit and then also make my position as clear as I can – although there won’t be time enough to do that today.

I have read many different views on how to reconcile the Genesis creation account with modern science and none of them are fully satisfying to me, which is why I say that I don’t know the answer. But, I do firmly believe that the biblical account is accurate and that it can be reconciled with modern science, at least to the extent that modern science is correct. We must however, be humble enough to say that modern science could be wrong about many things.

We also need to be humble enough as Christians to say that the Genesis account is not quite as obvious as we may at first blush think, and so we should avoid being dogmatic in our interpretation when that is not necessary. We don’t want to say that the Scripture says something it does not say, which is a trap that Christians have fallen into before.

**Marc Roby: What then do you think is essential for a Christian to believe about the Genesis account?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, at an absolute minimum, a true Christian must believe that it is a historical account and that God truly created the universe. We pointed out in Session 2 that this is one of the most important things we must understand; we are just creatures and we must never lose sight of the creator/creature distinction. But, beyond that, a Christian must also believe that Adam and Eve were real people, created directly by God, as opposed to being the result of some evolutionary process, that they were made sinless, but with the capacity to sin, and that they did, in fact, sin against God. We must also believe that they sinned after Eve was tempted by Satan, who appeared to her in the form of a serpent. And all of their natural children, which includes everyone except for Jesus Christ, are born sinners as a result of that fall.

There are also other things we learn from the Genesis account of creation. For example, there was an order and a plan to creation as there is to all of God's activities. He didn't just create energy and the laws of physics and then step back to see what happens, as a deist might say, rather, he imposed his will upon his creation to bring about order and to produce a particular result.

The final thing I will point out today is that man is the focus of creation. This is the point that unbelievers often find the most offensive. They think it is unbelievably arrogant of man to assume a starring role, and so they dismiss the Genesis account of creation as simply man writing a story in which he is the star.

The interesting thing, is that I agree completely that man *would* write a story in which he has the starring role. But, I would contend that Genesis is not at all the story man would come up with. Man would, of course, have to recognize that he wasn't there from the beginning, so he couldn't make himself the creator. But, the story man would come up with is very different than Genesis. He would come up with a story in which human beings, once they did appear, as a marvelous "accidental collocations of atoms"<sup>2</sup>, to borrow a phrase from Bertrand Russell, are able to examine the world around us and understand this whole process. And, of course, we then feign humility by declaring ourselves to be no better or more worthy than any of the other lesser animals, which is patently absurd given the simple fact that none of these other animals are able to understand the science or make such lofty moral pronouncements.

**Marc Roby: Alright, I agree that the Genesis account puts man at the center, but in a subservient role that he would not likely chose for himself. And I look forward to hearing more about how the Genesis account of creation can be reconciled with modern science next time. But, it looks like we are out of time for today.**

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<sup>2</sup> *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, Ed. By R.E. Egner & L.E. Denonn, Simon and Schuster, 1961, page 67