

Series: **BETWEEN THE TREES** - February 28, 2010

**CAN THE CREATION ACCOUNTS BE TRUSTED?**  
**Genesis 1 & 2**

1. In his book, ***The God Delusion***, Richard Dawkins assumes that science in general, and evolutionary science in particular, has made belief in God unnecessary and obsolete. Specifically, Dawkins says that you cannot be an intelligent scientific thinker and still hold religious beliefs.

-In every culture there are beliefs that are **plausible** to an entire society. In other words, they don't actually look **into** them—they just assume, "All intelligent people believe this." In our culture, there are a series of these that make Christianity uncredible. The thought kind of goes like this, "If I believe "A"—and Christianity doesn't believe "A"—then I don't even have to consider Christianity. It simply can't be true!"

-Now, here's the specific issue I want to talk about this morning. So far, in this series, I've been quoting quite a bit from the book of Genesis—or **Beginnings**. We live a culture that, for the most part, is **convinced** that the creation accounts in Genesis directly contradict the scientific discoveries of the past 100 years. I realized that this could be a problem for some of you in moving forward—kind of a **sticking** point. The assumption many people come to is this: ***What the Bible says about the beginning of things—and what scientific research says about the beginning of things can't both be true!*** Has anyone ever heard that?

-And when you read Genesis, there are some parts that seem strangely contradictory.

- a. For example, the first chapter of Genesis indicates that God didn't create the greater light and the lesser light—the sun and the moon—until the **fourth** day of creation. That raises all **sorts** of logical questions, doesn't it?
  - \*How is there light on the first day—with no sun?
  - \*How can there be vegetation on the third day—but no sun—or **heat**--until the fourth day?
  - \*If God created everything in six days—apparently not all that long ago—why does geology and paleontology say something **vastly** different--that our planet—and the life on it—is measured in billions of years—not thousands?
- b. So, do these apparent difficulties—along with evolutionary theory—make Genesis—and the Bible—impossible to believe? I thought to myself, "I really need to address this—because what we see in this book of **beginnings**, Genesis, is critical to our understanding of God's Mission. This book tells us where the mission of God begins—and explains **why** God became a missionary God.

-So—are you ready to take this on? As we move through this material—there may be some places where I will check in with you and make sure we're tracking, okay?

2. First, let's talk about **Macro-evolutionary theory**. Macro evolutionary theory—which is what **most** people think of when they hear the word **evolution**, says three basic things:

\***Everything** we see has evolved—with absolutely no intelligent supervision

\*Every single living thing on this planet—from amoebas to humans—has evolved from the simplest life-form

\*Absolutely everything about us—from love and generosity right on down to our sexual behavior—is the product of this evolutionary process.

a. This is the underlying philosophy behind books like **The God Delusion** by Richard Dawkins which takes the following view of faith in God of any kind.  
\*First, evolution makes God unnecessary. Religion was an attempt by primitive people who didn't know any better to explain things they didn't understand. But now that we have science to explain why things exist, religion and faith is totally unnecessary.

\*Second, the truth of evolution makes the Bible a primitive—pre-scientific book—and therefore, untrue. The Bible says that God created the planet in 6 days, and that every plant and animal only reproduces after its own kind. Science shows that things didn't happen this way.

\*Third, because devoted Christians refuse to believe in evolution—which is a fact—it proves that Christianity is deeply unenlightened and regressive; i.e., fake. And therefore, Christians are idiots—5 cards short of a full deck.

b. But there's a false assumption being made. It's that all followers of Jesus believe in what has been called the **young earth theory**. Simply put, that the earth was created in 6 days approximately 6000 years ago. People who believe this would say that any evidence that the earth has been around for hundreds of millions of years has either been mistaken—or that there are other reasonable explanations for why the fossil evidence is there.

-Now here's the problem. This view has been popularized in the west—particularly by the science community and the media as **THE** pre-dominant Christian view. To the point that **most** people think that **everyone** who believes that the Bible is true—believes that.

-For the record, that line of thought does **not** typify all—or even most believers. My Dad was **very** conservative—and he didn't believe that. **I don't believe that—and never have.** I think the biblical evidence says something else. More on that later.

c. Now, the other assumption that's made here is that science has definitively proved that **everything we see** came from a simple life-form—and explains all life. Case closed.

-There is **clear** evidence on our planet of forms of evolution. But **macro-evolution?** That after the Big Bang, an electrical storm sparked life into existence—and took off from there—branching into **every** form of life we see? That's theory at this point—with **huge** logistical issues facing it—actually, with information directly from scientific research on just how **vastly** complicated **all** life is.

3. Now. My sense is that a lot of the supposed conflict between science and the Bible—Genesis in particular—comes from a misreading of the Bible.

-To understand the Bible it is **critical** to understand what the biblical authors are saying, why they're saying it—and who they're saying it to. This has always been a problem. Centuries ago, scientists like Galileo began to say, "Science is leading us to believe that the earth actually revolves around the **sun**—the sun doesn't revolve around the earth!" Some religious leaders flipped out. **Wait! The Bible says that the earth is set upon its foundations and cannot be moved! That can't possibly be true!**

-Was the Bible wrong? Of course not! The problem is a misunderstanding of statements like this in the Bible. This misunderstanding made it look like the faith was being shaken up by the findings of science—when that wasn't the case at **all**.

-One of the questions that sometimes **doesn't** get asked is, **How do you actually understand Genesis?**

a. Genesis is an incredible book, really. It changed the world with one opening line.

**In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.  
(Genesis 1:1 NLT)**

-Genesis was written by a real person with a real audience in mind—to address questions that were being asked in that day. And these were **not** questions about the Big Bang or natural selection or Darwin's theories. This book was written against a backdrop of polytheism—where, literally, just about everything—from stars to snakes--was being worshipped by someone. They didn't believe that there was **any** connection between these gods and morality, justice or ethics. Humans were simply lackeys; an afterthought.

-So the writer was making affirmations that were totally unique:

**\*There is one God**

**\*This God is the One who made the heavens and earth**

**\*Creation is good, but it is *not* God**

**\*Humans are unique, because they were made in the image of this God**

**\*Something has gone wrong; this rebellion against our Creator is called *sin*. And all of creation—including us—is not as it should be**

**\*God is our *only* hope to set it right; we cannot do it on our own.**

b. Here's the point; the writer of this book is **not** trying to answer questions posed by modern science about how it all happened and came into being.

-I'll give you at least one reason this is true. Have you ever noticed that Genesis 2 is saying somewhat the same thing as Genesis 1—but saying it **very** differently? Genesis 1 is Hebrew poetry. You could call it a **chant**—with 50

different repetitions. And it has a rhythm. God made...saw that it was good...it was morning and evening.

-In contrast to this, Genesis 2 is a narrative. And the order in which creation happens makes more sense. What you realize is that in Genesis 1, the author was not **trying** to give a chronology of creation—he was using a song to express the fact that God is God, and He made everything  
-Genesis 2, the **narrative**, tells us **that** God created everything, but says hardly anything about **how** God did it.

- c. By the way—this is not new post-Darwin thinking. A church father named Origen wrote this around 185 AD:

**For who that has understanding will suppose that the first and second and third day existed without a sun and moon and stars, and that day was, as it were, without a sky? I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things were intended figuratively and not literally.  
(The Fundamental Doctrines 4:1:16)**

-The message of Genesis 1 is **not** that God did it all in 24 hours. The message is, “Don’t worship the sun! Don’t worship the moon! And **don’t go to stars for guidance!** God alone created it all; God alone knows the future; God **alone** is to be worshipped!

- d. The narrative account of creation starts **after** this initial song about creation. Notice how it starts:

**This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth. When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the Lord God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land. Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.  
(Genesis 2:4-7 NLT)**

-Question: Does this account tell us **how** God made things or **how long He took to do it? Could** the whole universe have come into being through the **Big Bang** 14 billion years ago? If God is God—of course! I think so. **Could** God have **chosen** to use a lengthy process, like natural selection, for the development of life on this planet—under his loving guidance? God can do **anything He wants—any WAY He wants—He’s God!**

-Again, we aren’t told **how** God did anything—or **when** it happened—or how **long** it took--just **THAT** it was His power, His idea, and His initiative.

- e. What makes scientists—like Richard Dawkins—angry and offended is when Christians make claims that sound to him like bad science. People who casually

dismiss a lot of scientific research. A Church Father, Augustine, wrote a book entitled *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* around 400 AD. Listen to this quote:

f.

**Often a non-Christian knows something of the earth, the heavens, the motions and the orbits of the stars, and this knowledge he holds with certainty from reason and experience. It is thus offensive and disgraceful for an unbeliever to hear a Christian talk nonsense about such things, claiming that what he is saying is based on Scripture. We should do all we can to avoid such embarrassments, which people see as ignorance in the Christian and laugh to scorn.**

-His point is that it's **very** easy as followers of Jesus to get sucked into dumb controversies over things we don't know a lot about. When we do, we generate a lot of heat and almost no light! Sometimes a little humility is in order!

-Now, when a scientist, like Dawkins, says that science has disproved God's existence and proven the Bible to be false—he's moved from science to philosophy—a very, **very** different discipline. Science does **not** contradict faith!

f.

Know what's interesting about this whole issue of faith and science? Modern science as we know it would have never developed without a Christian world-view. The giants of early scientific development—Newton, Galileo, and Descartes—made it clear that scientific inquiry was only possible because Creation was the product of a rational, orderly God. They said that scientific research was a way to know, love and live in awe of all God had made.

-Here's the bottom line. There are intelligent followers of Jesus who love God, love others and believe the authority of the Bible—who believe that God created the earth in six days not all that long ago. Could God do that? Of **course** He could! Did He? We don't know—because He didn't tell us.

-There are followers of Jesus who love God, love others and believe in the authority of the Bible who believe that God stepped in at different times in the past several billion years—specifically creating all the species of life found here. Is that how God did it? We don't know—because He didn't tell us.

-And there are followers of Jesus who love God, love others and believe in the authority of all the Bible has to say—and who believe that God was the originator of life—and then supervised an evolutionary process for life on this planet before creating men and women in His image. Is that how God did it? We don't know—we are not told specifically **how** God created everything—just that He did.

-Here's the deal. God is God—and He is not obligated to tell us His secrets—or get other people to believe the way we do. Being **right**, friends—telling other people that their doctrine is off because it doesn't match yours, creates **heat**—not light. And the issue of **how** God created all things is not a deal-breaker! In my opinion, this doesn't at all take away from the glory and power of God! And it brings incredible freedom; It helps us, as people who love God, to be free to

let others in their specialties discover what's out there—hidden in paleontology and geology and physics without in **any** way feeling threatened by it.

4. These early scientists—Galileo, Bacon and Descartes—talked about all God had created as a **book** that needed to be read. That's a cool comparison. And when you think about it, it would appear that God has revealed His glory with **two** books. One of them is the Bible. The other is **creation**. The Bible would be **special** revelation—i.e., things we would not know about God unless He told us. Creation is **general** revelation—the open book on God that everyone can see every day of their lives.
- Now, if God is the author of **both** of these books—and He **always** tells the truth and **never** lies...well, that means that we don't have to choose between the books.
  - Listen to these words describe what we know about God by looking at what **is**:

**The heavens proclaim the glory of God.  
The skies display his craftsmanship.  
Day after day they continue to speak;  
night after night they make him known.  
They speak without a sound or word;  
their voice is never heard.  
Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,  
and their words to all the world. (Psalm 19:1-4 NLT)**

-Paul, a leader in the early church, tells people in a letter to the Roman church that by just looking at this evidence, we have insight into the power and divine nature of God. **There is no war between the two!** Christians don't have to be afraid of science—and scientists don't have to be afraid of the Bible.

- a. Know where we struggle? It's our sense that to please God, we need to have everything pretty much figured out and nailed down—and we **don't!** God have given us plenty of space to discover Him, to discover what He's made—and to see things we've never seen before—and to be **astounded** at them! How many of you never realized that you have freedom to be wrong? To **not know?** For there to be mystery about Who God is, what He's up to—and how he's put things together? It can lead to some interesting places!

-Let me give you a 'for instance' on this. When I first read about the **Big Bang** theory, I didn't like it one bit. I guess I felt threatened by it or something. Then I read an article on it in Time magazine where a scientist said, "**It was like looking into the face of God!**" I realized that instead of speaking against God as the initiator of all things—it spoke **for** it. Philosophical naturalists—who to that point believed the universe had always existed—**now** had to deal with a **beginning** point.

-Evolutionary naturalists who speculated that life had an infinite amount of time to self-create and evolve into everything we see—suddenly found an uncomfortable time limit on everything—and were **also** finding out that, given how sophisticated even simple cells are, the time line was virtually impossible.

- b. There are some **amazing** things going on these days in the fields of science and physics. Over the past 35 years scientists have written about something called the **Anthropic Principle**—meaning that it seems like the universe has been fine-tuned to support life. A scientist named Brandon Carter first came up with this. He says:

**The more we learn from science, the more we find out that the universe in general, and the earth in particular, is a remarkably special place, because so many things that would have to be exactly right in order for life to arise are exactly right. So many laws, contingencies in biology and physics that would have to be fine-tuned precisely—are fine-tuned precisely.**

-Let me give you just one of these—and there are tons of them:

**The precise orbit of the earth, its distance from the sun, the existence of the moon, the size that it is, the distance from the earth that keeps our axis tilted at 23.5 degrees, keeps the earth in a particular zone where it is not too hot, not too cold, just right.** (Faith and Science, p. 6)

Know what physicists call that zone? The **Goldilocks Zone!** No kidding!

-One physicist by the name of Freeman Dyson puts it this way: **It is as if the universe knew we were coming.** There are dozens of variables that contribute to life in the universe—and each variable had to be **exactly** the way it was to produce a universe that would sustain life—from the properties of water and carbon to the precise rate of expansion in what has been called the “Big Bang.” Fred Hoyle, the scientist who coined the phrase, “Big Bang” says:

**The probability of life originating on the earth is no greater than the chance that a hurricane sweeping through a scrap-yard would have the luck to assemble a Boeing 747.**

- c. It's important to understand that scientific study itself has pushed **everything** in the direction of something called **intelligent design**. The odds that everything would **just happen** the way it has are, to be honest, impossible—not matter what a person's religious persuasion is.

-Even someone like Richard Dawkins agrees. Know what he says about this in **The God Delusion?** His theory is that our universe is only one in a billion-billion universes—and we just happen to be on one that sustains life.

-Alvin Plantinga, a professor of philosophy at Notre Dame speaks to Dawkins' theory. He says, “Imagine a poker player in the Old West dealing himself 20 perfect hands—four aces--in a row. When the other players call him a cheat and reach for their guns, he says, “I **know** this looks suspicious, but what if there were an infinite number of universes—and **this** is the one perfect universe where what seems impossible actually happens—where I deal myself a perfect hand—20 times in a row?” The other players wouldn't be able to defeat the man's thesis as impossible—but they'd still shoot him!

-Is it **possible** that our universe is only one in a billion-billion universes? It's possible. But is it even **rational** to live that way? I don't think so.

- d. What you find now is scientists looking at the evidence and coming to faith in God. The same year that Dawkins published ***The God Delusion***, claiming that the best scientists don't believe in God, Francis Collins, well-known research scientist and head of The Human Genome project published his book ***The Language of God***. In it, he says that the fine tuning, beauty and order of nature points to a divine Creator—and then describes his conversion from atheism to Christianity.

-In his book, ***There IS A God***, Dr. Anthony Flew, seen by many as the “dean of atheism”—tells how he turned to belief in a Creator God. In the last chapter of his book, Anthony Flew says:

**Such a discovery of the Divine does not come through experiments and equations, but through an understanding of the structures they unveil and map...I must say again that the journey to my discovery of the Divine has thus far been a pilgrimage of reason. I have followed the argument where it has led me. And it has led me to accept the existence of a self-existent, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent and omniscient Being...Some claim to have made contact with this [infinitely intelligent] Mind. I have not—yet. But who knows what could happen next? Someday I might hear a Voice that says, “Can you hear me now?” (Flew, p.155, 158)**

- e. Let me restate the bottom line for the entire morning: The Bible—Genesis in particular—does **not** conflict with scientific discoveries. But it also doesn't answer all our questions. God leaves some of that for us to figure out as best we can. Curiosity is good!

-I'll tell you where the Bible **does** contradict scientists like Richard Dawkins and others; it's when they begin to speculate on a massive, massive question; **Why does anything exist?** See, the “Big Bang” and natural selection and evolution have a plausible explanation for the mechanism of change—how a universe happens and how life, against all odds—springs up into **millions** of different forms. But they have nothing intelligent to say on how **something** springs from **nothing**.

-Creation is one of God's **best** books—and it is doing precisely what the Psalmist said it would:

**The heavens proclaim the glory of God. (Psalm 19:1 NLT)**

Science is the art of studying one of God's **best** books! And it does **not** conflict with or contradict his **other** bestseller that simply states,

***In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1 TNIV)***

5. Now, hang on, because we're going to make a sharp turn here. I realize that in a series like ***Between The Trees***—where we're talking about God's Mission—this talk about science and Genesis has been somewhat of a detour. And I'll tell you ***again*** why I felt we needed to discuss it. I **know** that in our world, there is some sense that ***Genesis and the findings of scientific research can't BOTH be true!*** The ***truth*** is that **there is no real disagreement between science and Genesis or the Bible.**

-I wanted to establish that because Genesis plays a critical part in our understanding of who God is—and who we are. It explains how things began, how they ***used*** to be, and why they now ***are*** the way they are. And the message is a powerful one we would never really understand without an explanation. We can see from creation that God is absolutely brilliant and stunningly powerful.

-But the fact that God ***loved*** us, His creation—and became a ***Missionary God*** to bring us and all of creation back and make ***everything*** new—and make ***all*** wrongs right? That He would take it upon Himself to solve the problem of sin and rebellion ***we*** created? That this Missionary God would take it even further—and love us enough to send His Son to die on our behalf—defeat evil and redeem everything? We would've ***never, EVER*** figured that out.

-And we would have ***never*** guessed that the purpose of life is to glorify God; to love Him and love others—and that He calls us to join Him in His Mission to make all things right. But now we know. And now we have to decide if we will join what God is up to—and ***has*** been up to on this planet for ***thousands*** of years!

## Q & A

Here's the deal. God is On Mission. He is at work ***everywhere*** in this world. And He is at work in ***your*** world. And there will be places where, if you're watching, He will invite you to join Him. Let me give you a clue on this. We have inherited God's word over Abraham—to be a blessing to all nations. To be ***Good News*** wherever we find ourselves. Jesus said we, as His Followers, are the salt of the earth—a flavoring, preserving influence—and the light of the world—bringing color and clarity. God says that He is making ***all things new***.

-Now, there's more to this Mission God has initiated—but think about where you will find yourself this week. Ask: How could I bless—bring the goodness and kindness and generosity and love of God to that place? How could I bring life and flavor? What needs preserved? What needs clarified? What needs to be made new?

-If you ***think*** about your world this way—and that God has sent ***you*** to it—you'll be surprised what happens.