

Frequently Asked Questions About the Old Testament

SESSION 1 – GENESIS 1-11

Are the two accounts of creation in Genesis in conflict with one another?

Genesis 2 does not present a creation account at all but presupposes the completion of God's work of creation as set forth in chapter 1. The first three verses of Genesis 2 simply carry the narrative of chapter 1 to its final and logical conclusion, using the same vocabulary and style as employed in the previous chapter. It sets forth the completion of the whole primal work of creation and the special sanctity conferred on the seventh day as a symbol and memorial of God's creative work. Verse 4 then sums up the whole sequence that has just been surveyed by saying, "These are the generations of heaven and earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh God made heaven and earth." Having finished the overall survey of the subject, the author then develops in detail one important feature that has already been mentioned: the creation of man. As we examine the remainder of Genesis 2, we find that it concerns itself with a description of the ideal setting that God prepared for Adam and Eve to begin their life in, walking in loving fellowship with Him as responsive and obedient children. From the survey of the first fifteen verses of chapter 2, it becomes quite apparent that this was never intended to be a general creation narrative. Genesis 1 is the only creation account to be found in the Hebrew Scripture and it is presupposed as the background of Genesis 2. . . . Quite clearly, then, chapter 2 is built on the foundation of chapter 1 and represents no different tradition than the first chapter or discrepant account of the order of creation.

–Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties

How do we reconcile the creation account of Genesis 1–2 with modern science?

No one can read these early chapters of Genesis and miss the fact that modern cosmology and evolutionary biology make strikingly different claims about how the universe came into being. Here are two considerations to keep in mind as you explore this issue further. First, up until recent times heated scientific debates raged around the question of whether the universe was eternal and infinite (never had a beginning and went on forever) or whether it had a beginning and was finite. Philosophically, those are the only two options. Many scientists were reluctant to acknowledge a beginning to the cosmos because of the theological implications: if there was a start to the universe, no explanation exists for why it started, and what brought it into being. Yet in the last century, the scientific community has come to accept the fact the universe *did* have a beginning and is not eternal. This of course was never an issue for those who read in the Genesis 1:1 that “In the beginning, God created” space and time. Second, in the field of biology the Intelligent Design movement is pointing out the deficiencies in the prevailing evolutionary explanations for life. Within all life forms are biochemical as well as mechanical features that are “irreducibly complex”—that is to say, they cannot be simplified any further and still function. Therefore because no mechanism exists to explain how they arose from a more simplified form—but here they are anyway—they must have had this complexity from their inception. The hard facts point to design by intelligence and irreducibly complex systems that no known natural process can account for. Again, for those who read in Genesis that there is a Being who has the power to simply declare things into existence (“Let there be ... and it was so”) this scientific discovery comes as no surprise.

—Judson Poling

What was the big deal about one of Noah’s sons seeing him naked (9:22)?

The reason Noah cursed his son Ham was that he had derided and dishonored his father after he found him naked, sleeping off a drunken stupor. Ham should have treated him respectfully, even though his father (who had apparently never tasted liquor before) had made a fool of himself.

It should be noted that it was Noah, and not God, who cursed his son and his grandson. Also, some scholars believe the act of Ham could have been a repudiation of his father’s religion, marked by his joy and satisfaction at finding his “righteous” father naked in a drunken state. Thus, he reveled in his father’s sin! By contrast, Ham’s brothers grieved for their father and did what they could to remove the indignity.

—*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*

Who wrote the book of Genesis?

Historically, Jews and Christians alike have held that Moses was the author/compiler of the first five books of the OT. These books, known also as the Pentateuch (meaning “five-volumed book”), were referred to in Jewish tradition as the five fifths of the law (of Moses). The Bible itself suggests Mosaic authorship of Genesis, since Ac 15:1 refers to circumcision as “the custom taught by Moses,” an allusion to Genesis 17. However, a certain amount of later editorial updating does appear to be indicated (see, e.g., notes on 14:14; 36:31; 47:11).

–*NIV Study Bible*

What does it mean that we are created “in the image of God” (1:27)?

God’s image does not refer to anything physical but rather to something spiritual. Most point to the human spirit by which individuals can communicate with God and have a relationship with their Maker. Some expressions of the human spirit may be the conscience, personality and will – aspects also seen in God’s character. The Bible later speaks of other characteristics that we can have in common with God such as righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24).

–*The Quest Study Bible*

Why did God say, “Let us make man in our image” (1:26)?

Many attempts have been made to explain the plural forms: “Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness” : e.g., (1) the plural is a reference to the Trinity; (2) the plural is a reference to God and his heavenly court of angels; (3) the plural is an attempt to avoid the idea of an immediate resemblance of humans to God; (4) the plural is an expression of deliberation on God’s part as he sets out to create the human race. The singulars in v. 27 (“in his own image” and “in the image of God”; cf. 5:1) rule out explanation 2, since in the immediate context the creation of man and woman is said to be “in *his* image,” with no mention of them in the image of the angels. Explanations 3 and 4 are both possible, but neither explanation is specifically supported by the context. Verse 27 states twice that “man” was created in God’s image and a third time that man was created “male and female.” The same pattern is found in Ge 5:1-2. The singular “man” is created as a plurality, “male and female.” In a similar way the one God (“And God said”) created humankind through an expression of his plurality (“Let us make man in our image”). Following this clue the divine plurality expressed in v. 26 is seen as an anticipation of the human plurality of the man and woman, thus casting the human relationship between man and woman as a reflection of God’s own personal relationship with himself.

–*NIV Bible Commentary*

If God created man and woman equal at the beginning, at what point in time did this change to make “women lower than men”? And, why did God do this?

First, a comment about the unique creation of woman. Prior to the fall, God himself concluded it was not good for the male to be alone. While the animals and other creatures had been created in pairs, the Lord allowed Adam to come to the self-realization that he needed fellowship, friendship, and intimacy from a creature corresponding to himself. Thus God made him a *helper*. This does not mean that women are inferior to men or that they are designed merely to be assistants to men. The word *helper* may more accurately mean a *strength* or a *power*, and thus women are comparable to men. Often God himself is designated by the term *helper* or *strength* (see, for example, Psalm 33:20). God, therefore, made woman for the man as his equal and his match as a partner in life. She was taken from one of the man's *ribs*, probably to show an interdependence. She was dependent on the man; men are dependent upon a woman to give birth to them. Some observe that the earliest language of Mesopotamia, Sumerian, has a word for *rib* that also means *life*.

The first question with regard to the consequence of the woman's choice to sin is, “What do labor pains have to do with sin (Genesis 3:16)?” Perhaps nothing. The conception and birth of children would remain a blessing from God (Genesis 1:28). The emphasis here may be on the sorrow of raising children in a sin-tainted world, rather than on the pain of childbearing itself. However, some believe the consequences of sin ruined creation not only by introducing pain into childbirth but by opening the world to all sorrow, pain and illness.

The second question with regard to Genesis 3:16 is, “What is meant by, ‘Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you’?” Some see this as a warning that women will turn (from God) to their husbands, who, in turn, will rule over them. Others see *desire* as a source of conflict between husbands and wives, just as sin *desires* to dominate and control (Genesis 4:7). Finally, others argue that the woman's sexual attraction for the man, and his headship rule over her, will become intimate aspects of her life in which she experiences trouble and anguish rather than unalloyed joy and blessing.

—*NIV Study Bible and The Quest Study Bible*

Where did Cain find his wife (4:17)?

Adam had “sons and daughters” (verse 5:4), so Cain's wife was probably a sister (though some think God may have created other human beings besides Adam and Eve). Marriages between close relatives

were at first unavoidable if the whole human race came from a single pair. Only later was marriage between siblings prohibited (Leviticus 18:6-18).

–The Quest Study Bible