



Science Tells How, Scripture Tells Who

Genesis 1

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First Baptist Church, Wilson, NC

Let me tell you an old baseball story. A boy asked his dad, "Dad, does God play for the Baltimore Orioles or the New York Yankees?" Said the dad: "Son, whatever gave you the idea that God plays baseball?" Said the son, "Well, the Bible says that 'In the *big inning*, God created the heavens and the earth...'"

Actually, I must say that baseball is indeed the most cosmic sport of all. There is no sport like baseball. It has no limits in space or time. The first and third base lines go out into infinity; they do not end. There is no clock in baseball, the teams just keep on playing until someone is ahead after nine or more innings.

But back to Genesis and today. Just last week (July 7) the Wilson Daily Times carried an Associate Press story titled, "Schools confront old debate over science of life." It reported how county school boards still wrestle with arguments over Darwinism versus Creationism versus Intelligent Design. The story was one part politics, one part religion, and one part science -- and that combination, friends, is never boring! It is a debate that has gone on since before the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee eighty years ago.

I must confess that I have never understood why people still argue about this. It is a debate that has generated far more heat than light. To my mind, there is a simple solution: science tells how, scripture tells who. Now, I did not get this answer when I was in seminary. I did not get this answer when I majored in Biology in college. I believe I came up with this idea somewhere between junior high school and senior high school. The first time that I ever heard of Charles Darwin and the theories of natural selection and evolution, I thought, "O.K., so that's how God chose to do it." I saw no conflict between my Bible and my science textbooks. If God chose to work through natural selection and evolution to create life and you and me on this planet, then I would leave that to God's prerogative.

I still think that way. I do not think that evolution is in conflict with Holy Scripture. I believe Genesis 1 is God's revelation to human beings in terms that ancient people could understand. God did not sit the Hebrew people down and give them a lesson in quantum mechanics and black holes. God did not give Moses a crash course in genetics and deoxyribonucleic acid. God gave the people a simple and beautiful account of the beginning in terms they could relate to.

Let me put it this way. If your three year old daughter comes up to you and says, "Mommy, where did I come from?", you are not going to explain gametes and embryos and the combination of chromosomes and all that. You are not going to tell her more

than she is asking for. You are going to tell her what she needs to know in terms she understands. So when some ancient Hebrew, maybe Moses or maybe someone whose name we will never know, asked, “God, where did we come from?”, God then proceeded to reveal the wonders of creation in terms anyone could understand.

Rather than speaking of billions and billions of years, God spoke of days, for as Scripture says, with God a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. And rather of speaking of a Big Bang or a singularity, God spoke to ancient humanity using their own ancient three-level picture of the universe (top level: a mass of water held up by a firmament underneath; middle level: the earth; bottom level: more water under the earth).

And yet, as God explained the creation to ancient man with concepts he could understand, I see in Genesis 1 a lot of agreement with what science says today. God is revealing to us that creation did not all happen at once; it was a process. And in that process there was an orderly progression from darkness and light and dust, to land and vegetation and plants, to things swimming in the water, and birds flying in the air and creatures creeping upon the earth.

And then God said, “Let us make man in our image...” (Gen. 1:26) Genesis 1 doesn’t give any further details about how God did this. Genesis 2:7 tells a little more: “then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” So the most we know is that humanity was made in God’s image, from the dust of the ground, and from the breath of God.

A couple of years ago I was out of town and I slipped into a Bible study for college students. The leader was asked, “What do you think about evolution?” The leader grunted, “I didn’t come from no monkey.” Actually, the Bible says we come from something lower than a monkey, we come from the dust of the earth. We come from mud pies formed by God. Now if God chose to make humanity from that mud pie in one 24 hour day, well and good. But if God chose to make humanity from that mud pie in a day and an eon of thousands of millions of years, if God chose to use a slow and patient process that went through many forms between mud pie and human being, then wouldn’t that be God’s prerogative? And if God has a sense of humor and wants to deflate our pride and keep us humble, wouldn’t that be just like God to create the human race from such humble origins?

Speaking of humor, a word very close to humor is humility, the humility of knowing I could be wrong. Someday I’m going to have to face my Lord and give an account for all the sermons I have preached. I’ve been wondering what the Lord will say to me about this sermon. I’ve been imagining walking up to the pearly gates, and seeing my Lord waiting for me there, and as I come closer I see him grinning, and shaking his head, and saying: “Murray, what were you thinking? SEVEN days.” And you know what I would say? “WHOA!! What an awesome God!” But what if when I go to

Heaven, I find out that I was right? What would I say then? I would say “WHOOA!!! What an awesome God!” Either way, it is awesome.

About 40% of the average scientists in this country believe in God. When they study and teach the latest science about the origin of things, they have no trouble making a leap of faith to believe that God is behind the processes they are teaching about. As they relate their science to their faith, they come across things that take their breath away. For them, science helps them re-connect to creation and the Creator. Here are some breath-taking examples...

Scientists have found that if the laws of physics were tweaked ever so slightly, the world as we see it would not exist. “With just tiny changes in the values of some of the numbers that go into the laws, no one would be around to marvel and wonder at any of this. The cosmos seems fine-tuned for existence, in an almost-too-good-to-be-true manner.” (*Sharon Begley, The Hand of God: Thoughts and Images Reflecting the Spirit of the Universe, p. 16*) When a scientist who is also a believer ponders this, he or she sighs, “Whoa. What an awesome God.”

Here’s another “Whoa:” “If the strength of gravity were slightly greater than it is, the balls of gas that condensed into stars would keep collapsing until they quickly formed black holes. ... Thus, if gravity were stronger than it is, neither our Sun nor we would be here.” If gravity were weaker, then our earth would spiral out “like a tether ball breaking off from its rope.” (*Begley, p. 18*)

Here’s one more “Whoa:” our Earth is just the right distance from the sun to produce life as we know it. A little farther out and Earth would be as arid as Mars. A little closer in and Earth would be a pressure cooker like Venus.

The British astronomer Fred Hoyle joked that the universe looks like a “put-up job:”

Someone has been turning the dials that determine the size of the gravitational constant and the strength of the force that glues together atomic nuclei, the strength of the electrical force and the masses of the fundamental particles – and frozen the knobs at just the precise points that will lead to stars, and planets, and life intelligent enough to wonder about it all. (*Begley, 19-20*)

Now many scientists will say, “Hold on, you cannot make that kind of conclusion. Science tells a lot but it cannot tell us that.” And they are right. But it is amazing coincidences like these that can help us make a leap of faith, a leap that does not contradict science, but goes where science cannot go.

There is an astronomer named Alan Sandage, who has spent nearly forty years at the great telescopes on Mt. Wilson and Las Campanas Observatories. Sandage figured out that the universe is around 15 billion years old. But he was stumped by this question: Why is there something rather than nothing? Then, he confessed,

It was my science that drove me to the conclusion that the world is much more complicated than can be explained by science. It is only through the supernatural that I can understand the mystery of existence. *(Quoted by Begley, p. 21)*

Some scientists like Sandage have seen the hand of God in huge stars and galaxies. Other scientists have seen the hand of God in the smallest things: electrons and quarks and muons. They have marveled at how much uncertainty there is at the subatomic level, where hardboiled scholars are reduced to speaking in terms of mystery and paradox. Albert Einstein once even called one subatomic phenomenon “spooky,” and went on to say,

Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.

Now here’s another spooky thought: What passes for modern science today will be primitive five hundred years from now. Science will learn a lot more about how the universe got here and about how we got here. What will scientists in the year 2505 say about the theories of the Big Bang or about evolution? Will they revise them, or will they throw them away for new theories? We don’t know.

But one thing we know. God’s revelation in Genesis 1 will speak just as powerfully in 2505 as it does in 2005. The word pictures of Genesis will be just as beautiful and profound and true as they are now:

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”: and there was light...

This is my telescope here. Through it I have seen the red disk of Mars and the rings of Saturn and the moons of Jupiter. I like to point it to that middle star of the sword on Orion, and wonder at the Orion Nebula, a vast cloud of dust billions of miles across. I gaze into that cloud and see brand new stars being born where the dust has clumped together and by its own gravity has compressed and compressed until the furnace of nuclear fusion begins. When a star’s long life is done, it explodes in a supernova that spits out vast amounts of gas and dust, and that’s where planets come from, and that’s where you and I come from. We are star dust. Genesis says the same thing -- we are dust: “then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” (Genesis 2:7)

I look up into the heavens at the dust of stars, and I see where I came from. And I rejoice:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens. ...

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory
and honor. . . .

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

(Selected verses from Psalm 8)

-- Douglas E. Murray

Recommended Reading:

The creation narratives: Genesis 1:1-2:4a, Genesis 2:4b-25, Job 38,
Psalm 8:22-31, Proverbs 8:22-31

Barbara Brown Taylor, [The Luminous Web: Essays on Science and Religion](#),
Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2000.

Michael Reagan, editor, [The Hand of God: Thoughts and Images Reflecting the Spirit of the Universe](#), Atlanta: Andrews McMeel Publishing (Sponsored by the Templeton Foundation), 1999.