

Genesis 1:3-5

Read Genesis 1:3-5.

v3

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

Here we have the first explicit instance in the creative acts of God speaking something into existence. We assume that the same method was employed in vv1-2, but in v3 it is stated explicitly. As we read in our previous session, from Psalm 33,

**By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made,
And by the breath of His mouth all their host...
For He spoke, and it was;
He commanded, and it stood.**

Leupold: No one need think it strange that an inanimate object is addressed as animate when God speaks to the light. The situation is really even stranger: *God speaks to the things that are not, that they might be.* The nature of creation requires just that. (emphasis added)

“Darkness” (*hosek*) God had already created, because it “was over the surface of the deep” in v2. Now, in contrast to this darkness, He creates “light.”

There are generally two ways that v3 has been interpreted:

1. The sun was created in v1, but its light did not penetrate the darkness enshrouding the earth until v3. That is, v3 is interpreted from an earth’s-surface perspective, as if God said, “Let there be light *upon the earth.*” As Sailhamer puts it, “Verse 3 then does not describe the creation of the sun but the appearance of the sun through the darkness.” This assumes there is no light without the sun (but, of course, runs into a problem when, later, the sun [“the greater light”] is created in vv14-19).
2. “Light” here (*or*) represents the primordial element of light, divorced from any object that will later employ it.

This, the second interpretation, follows our interpretation of the earth’s creation in v2, and the overall progression of Creation itself—i.e., a step-by-step process. 📌 When God created the “heavens and the earth” they *both* were essentially “formless and void.” This was His creation of spaces, as it were, that would later be filled in piece by piece, which fits perfectly with the textual progression.

“a step-by-step process”

Remember what I pointed out in Session Three: God’s workflow in His Creative process was to first create a space, or environment, then later either complete it, or populate it with other “creations.”

Verse 3 does not say “Let there be sunlight” or “Let there be the sun,” but “Let there be *light*.” That is, let there now be the fundamental element of light itself—a light that God will later put to use in myriad ways, in myriad objects throughout His universe.

Are we confused by an apparent difference between light and the sun—that the former was created on day one and the latter was created on day four? Asaph (ah-SAPH), in his Psalm 74, delineated them in a similar fashion.

**Yours is the day, Yours also is the night;
You have established the light and the sun. (Psalm 74:16)**

Spurgeon: “Thou hast prepared the light and the sun.” Both light and the light-bearer are of thee.

Humans, as a rule, have small minds that think small, with a small scope. We tend to think pragmatically, even mechanically. If we can’t imagine something, we often think it impossible.

As individuals with small minds and a small scope, we too often—even without meaning to—diminish God’s capabilities by unconsciously imagining His abilities somehow akin to our own. As a result we have those who labor to explain, for example, the Egyptian plagues and the parting of the Reed Sea in Exodus by earthly means: minerals sweeping out of the southern cataracts to explain the “blood” of the Nile; freak atmospheric disturbance blowing back the waters of the Reed Sea—in opposing directions, no less.

But God does not require earthly, mechanical means to perform His will. He *may* employ such means, but He needn’t depend on them.

Thus in our context of vv3-5, there are those who conclude that even though the sun is spoken into existence on the fourth day (vv14-19), the sun *must* have been created when God “created the heavens and the earth” in v1. For how else could there be “light” in v3? That’s reasonable to a mind with a small scope, but why then does He specifically create the sun and moon during the fourth day? No, here we see the Divine power to separate light from the created instruments that shed it.

Calvin: It did not...happen from inconsideration or by accident, that the light preceded the sun and the moon. To nothing are we more prone than to tie down the power of God to those instruments the agency of which he employs. The sun and moon supply us with light: And, according to our notions we so include this power to give light in them, that if they were taken away from the world, it would seem impossible for any light to remain. Therefore the Lord, by the very order of the creation, bears witness that he holds in his hand the light, which he is able to impart to us without the sun and moon. ☞

“light”

The light-giving [E. V., light], Psa_74:16, may either denote **the general, employed in connection with the special**, which is here the sun, as in Psa_148:9, trees and cedars (Hupfeld), or mean the moon as the light of the night (Hitzig, Delitzsch). **[The former is to be preferred.** As analogous examples Hupfeld cites the expressions, Judah and Jerusalem, Ephraim and Samaria...] (Lange)

“without the sun and moon”

As He does for the final, eternal state on the new earth in the New Jerusalem:

And I saw no sanctuary in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its sanctuary. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

Revelation 21:22-24

From the account of the Egyptian plagues we learn that God can create a darkness that is far more than just the absence of light.

Read Exodus 10:21-23.

This sounds like a darkness similar to that of the primordial earth in vv2. Yet the text says that “Israel had light in their places of habitation.” I take it that both of these—the tangible darkness and the localized light—were of supernatural origin.

And God saw that the light was good;

Once again we must detach ourselves from our human, earth-bound perspective to grasp what is being said here—not least because this is the first of a *series* of “goods” in the Creation epic. And this is challenging—not because it is technically difficult, but that this word translated “good” (*tob* [tove]) is used in so many different ways in the OT. Thus it is not surprising that there is no consensus among the various commentators for how it is intended here: ❏

My thoughts incline toward William Wilson’s definition, found in his classic work, *Old Testament Word Studies* (1870). I would express it this way: When God created something and declared it good, He was saying something like, *I have made this exactly as I meant to, and it is just as it should be for the purpose intended.* Thus we shy away from the idea of “perfection,” which implies *complete*, because some of the things God declares good—especially early on—will be either altered or added to later on.

Just so, we probably should not place too great a load on this solitary word, for note that God does not declare everything He does in Creation “good.” For example, look at vv6-8. Here He separates the waters below from the waters above, thereby creating the first heaven (which we refer to as the sky, or immediate atmosphere). But He does not declare it good. Does this mean it isn’t? Not at all. Likewise He creates the primordial earth in vv2, but does not declare anything good until He creates light (vv3-4). The earth in vv2 is not complete, but does that mean it is not just as He intended? I doubt it. ❏

and God separated the light from the darkness.

We find another clue in Isaiah’s prophecy that this light and darkness—not *created* in vv4-5, but separated one from the other—are far more than just light beaming from a sun and its lack thereof.

Interpreting “good”

- not perfect, but approved (Alexander)
- not approved, but perfect, hence worthy of praise (Leupold)
- beneficial for man (Sailhamer)
- fitting, right, as a thing should be (Wilson)
- approved (Calvin)

“the light was good”

We should not miss the parallelism taking place between 2 Corinthians 4:6, John 1:4-10, and other passages in the NT with Genesis 1:3.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6.

Eventually God will declare the *entirety* of His Creation “good” (indeed “very good”). But when He created the initial earth in vv1-2 it is described as formless, void—and dark. God created all that—but He does not declare it “good.” The first thing He creates and deems “good,” is light: “And God saw that the light was good” (v4).

In John’s gospel, the Word is and brings to the world not darkness, but “Light.” Likewise, we are called to walk in the light—not darkness (Isaiah 2:5; 1 John 1:7).

Read Isaiah 45:5-7.

In v4 God has not yet invented “day” and “night,” nor has He created the sun and the moon; He has just created the elements “light” and “darkness” (v2). And now He “separates” them. This does not suggest that they were once one, or once tangled up together with each other, but that God now creates a distinction, a space, even a time-interval (as with the intermission, or interval, between the acts of a play). Light and darkness henceforth will not share the same space; there is one, or there is the other, never both together or at the same time. ◀

v5

And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night.

And here is, at a glance, a deep mystery. Now that the two are separate, God names them; the light He calls “day,” the darkness He calls “night.” *Yet He has not yet created the sun and moon!* (v14ff) Even so, God declares that all that has thus far been created He sets into one day:

And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

The venerable church father, Augustine, helps us understand how light and darkness can be separate from day and night, yet also be associated with them by God’s will: “All light is not day, nor all darkness night; but light and darkness alternating in a regular order constitute day and night.” *K&D* puts it this way: “The first day did not consist of the primeval darkness and the origination of light, but was formed after the creation of the light by the first interchange of evening and morning.”

And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

T. Desmond Alexander: Day 1 describes the creation of a repeated pattern of darkness followed by light. Light does not eradicate darkness; it merely alternates with it. Day and night are formed. This results in the creation of time. This chronological structure is then reflected in the rest of the chapter, as day gives way to night in the evening, and as night gives way to day in the morning. As elsewhere in the earliest books of the Old Testament, the chronological day is understood to begin with sunrise. Later, due to Babylonian influence after the capture of Jerusalem in 586 BC, Judaeans viewed the day as starting with sunset.

As we reach the conclusion of this passage, and v5, we face two decisions we must make:

supernatural light and darkness

I personally believe that “light”—that peculiar, supernatural light unattached from any object of illumination—and “darkness”—that indefinable darkness that covered the face of the initial earth—belong to that category of “God-things” that will remain a mystery so long as we mere humans reside on this earth, and away from the physical presence of our God.

First (the lesser of the two), Is it “first day” or “one day”?

Within our common versions, only the NASB and LSB translate this literally: “one day.” This is a minor point, in my opinion, which is not worthy of much of our time; no one’s faith or theology is going to be determined by this. Nonetheless, we should always endeavor to interpret God’s word as accurately as possible.

The Hebrew is *yom echad* (yome ekh-AWD), and there is no article (“the”) in the text. The difference would be this: “*First day*” suggests the first of many, or several—i.e., a succession. The text does not get ordinal—a number in a series, e.g., second, third—until *after* day one. Instead, the text is “one day,” meaning something like *all that has just been described was created in one day*. ❏

Second (the more important of the two), does “day” mean 24 hours, or an indeterminate period?

I will just touch on this lightly here, but return for a more in-depth look at this important question in our next session.

As we saw in our last session, some (such as Donald Barnhouse) would explain the supposed conflict between the Bible and science by creating a “gap theory,” which places a second fallen, chaotic earth after a first, pristine earth. Among other advantages, this permits this second earth to exist for an indeterminate period, allowing time for what “science” claims is the incredible age of this earth. All of this takes place, as they claim, between v1 and v2 of Genesis Chapter One. ❏

A second group prefers to explain this assumed conflict between Bible and science by claiming that the word “day” in Genesis 1 can mean “eon,” or “period,” here an indeterminate period of perhaps thousands of years. This allows those in this camp to fit into this first “week” of Creation all the innumerable millennia necessary to age this earth into its present state.

I will argue, however, in our next session, that there is no reason to corrupt the meaning of God’s written word—why is it always the *Bible* that must compromise, and not science?—to harmonize the truth. This earth can be as ancient as some believe, *and* Creation can be accomplished in six literal days.

Stay tuned.

“one” / “second”

“One” in v5 is numeral, **cardinal**, (i.e., of main importance, principal, chief), singular, absolute

“Second” in v8 is numeral, **ordinal**, singular, absolute

“gap theory” / Barnhouse, et al
See Session Five

SESSION 6

Light!
Genesis 1:3-5

“a step-by-step process”

Remember what was pointed out first in Session Three: God’s workflow in His Creative process was to first create a space, or environment, then later either complete it, or populate it with other “creations.” When God created the “heavens and the earth” they both were essentially “formless and void.” This was His creation of spaces, as it were, that would later be filled in piece by piece, which fits perfectly with the textual progression.

Light Without the Sun

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What did God declare “good”?

- v4 (day one): light
- v10 (day three): dry land (earth), and gathering of waters (seas)
- v12 (day three): vegetation
- v18 (day four): two great lights, and lights in the expanse
- v21 (day five): every living creature that moves (in sea and air)
- v25 (day six): beasts on the earth
- v31 (day six): “all that He had made” (*very good*)

What is *not* declared good?

- vv6-8 (day two) the creation of the first heaven between the earth and the clouds—what we refer to as sky

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