

QUESTION #37:
"WHICH IS RIGHT- YOUNG EARTH OR OLD EARTH?"
(Genesis 1:1)
5.24.20

INTRODUCTION

Well, with this wonderful question, we come to the end of our "big questions" - at least for now. Like we mentioned last week, I always want us to be known as a church that answers people's questions - no matter what they are. So, questions will always be welcome.

But, starting next week, we will begin a new series, and I think a very exciting one. We're calling it "The Radical Rabbi," and it will be focusing our attention on the three-year ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. We'll be looking at both His teaching and healing ministries, and how those lessons inform how we are to live pleasing to the King these 20 centuries later.

But for now, we are looking way, way back into our history, to the very beginning of time. But first, let's begin with a word of **PRAYER**.

TEXT

If you ever saw the movie, "The Sound Of Music," you probably remember these opening words from the song "Do-Re-Mi," which Fraulein Maria was using to teach the children under her care how to sing; the song begins: *"Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start."* Well, that's probably good advice for us too as we probe today's question. In our case, the beginning we need is found in the very first verse of the Bible: ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth - Genesis 1:1.*** Now this verse basically is functioning as a creation "summary", with the details to follow. But one thing stands above all else: Creation was all about what God did. He and He alone did it all. So, let's take this verse apart a little bit by looking at some key words (from the Hebrew of course):

- 1) RE'SHIYTH (ray-sheeth") (occurs 51 times in the OT) - often the term denotes the point in time or space at which something started, except when it specifies the point when time and space themselves were started. Interestingly, this word is the first word in the Hebrew Scriptures.
- 2) ELOHIYM (el-o-heem^) (occurs more than 2,600 times in the OT) - a noun that designates the one true God; it is often paired with Y'HOVAH (yeh-ho-vaw^) - God. "Elohim" conveys God as Creator, King, Judge, Lord and Savior. It also brings to it His compassion, grace and faithfulness to His promises.
- 3) BARA (baw-raw") - a verb meaning to create. Only God is the subject of this verb, and it means His creating in both physical and spiritual contexts.
- 4) SHAMAYIM (shaw-mah"-yim) - heavens. The word describes everything God made besides the earth. The heavens that humans observe with their senses are indicated by this word - the stars, the sun and the moon, as well as the planets. The word also describes the invisible heaven, which is the abode of God. Heaven is also described as a place from which God operates.
- 5) 'ERETS (eh-rets) - the earth, land. It is used almost 2,500 times in the OT. It refers to the whole earth under God's dominion.

ANALYSIS

Now those are the details of that summary statement; now let's look at the definitions behind our question:

- 1) Old Earth: The earth has an age of about 4.5 billion years, within a universe of some 13.8 billion years of age. Within this category of several prominent versions of events that would have resulted in an "old earth":
 - a) Each "day" is actually a span of time, each day in and of itself being millions of years long.
 - b) Each "day" being a "creative day," meaning that each day happened just as Genesis 1 relates but with potentially millions of years between each day.
 - c) Each "day" being a literary device referring either to "days of forming" and "days of filling" or as a metaphor for the Hebrew work week.

Old earth also has within its concept of billions of years a viewpoint often called "theistic evolution," which teaches that God created matter but then got an evolutionary process going while He essentially kept a hands-off approach on any direction that purely natural forces took, making creation a completely undirected process - which is what evolution itself teaches.

Another reason for an Old Earth point of view is the idea of an unknown length of time between the description of the world in Genesis 1:1-2 and the beginning of God's actual intentional process beginning in 1:3.

- 2) Young Earth: The creation account of Genesis 1 is a historical narrative of six literal days within a literal week, and the overall age of the earth is thus an estimated 6-10,000 years old.

It is probably useful and important to note that both Old Earth advocates and Young Earth proponents completely agree with the first four words of the Bible, maybe the most important and influential words in all Scripture because from them everything else flows: ***In the beginning God- Genesis 1:1a.*** And beyond that, both sides absolutely believe the truth behind all of Genesis 1:1 - that God indeed was the Creator - and that creation followed the order that God led Moses to record - the sequence we know from Genesis 1 as "creation week":

- 1) Day 1: Light (3-5).
 - a) **'OWR** (ore) - light. In a literal sense, used primarily to refer to light from heavenly bodies but also for light itself.
 - b) **YOWM** (yome) - day, time, year. This word stands as the most basic conception of time in the OT. It designates such wide-ranging elements as the daylight hours from sunrise to sunset (which is how it is used in Genesis 1), a literal 24-hour cycle, a generic span of time, or a given point in time. It is the definition of this word that creates a lot of the variance in how to interpret Genesis 1.
- 2) Day 2: Sky (6-8).
- 3) Day 3: Dry ground ("land") and seas, and vegetation (9-13).
- 4) Day 4: Sun, moon and stars (14-19).
- 5) Day 5: Fish, sea mammals, and birds (20-23).
- 6) Day 6:
 - a) **Animals (24-25).** At this point in the creative process, all creation has occurred in the same manner: God said, and it happened - ***By the word of the Lord the heavens***

were made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth. . . . Let all the earth hear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere Him. For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm -Psalm 33:6, 8-9.

b) Human beings (26-31): *Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (KJV: "soul") - Genesis 2:7.*

- i) YATSAR(yaw-tsar")- to mold into a form, especially as a potter. To form, to fashion, to shape, to devise, used of God's fashioning man from the dust of the ground; also of His creative works in nature and in the womb, the molding of clay, the framing of seasons, the making of plans; it also signifies a potter, a sculptor or the Creator. Paul confirms this style of hands-on creative style in his first letter to Timothy where, in saying, ***For Adam was formed first, then Eve - Paul, I Timothy 2:13***, he uses the Greek word PLASSO (plas"-so), which also means to mold or shape, picturing the idea of an artist working in clay or wax.
- ii) NEPHESH (neh"-fesh) (used 753 times in the OT) - breath, the inner being with its thoughts and emotions. When applied to a person, it doesn't refer to a specific part of a human being. The Scriptures view a person as a composite whole, fully relating to God and not divided in any way.
- iii) ***[T]he Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man - Genesis 2:21-22.***
BANAH (baw-naw^)- to build, make.

There is actually enough material in the debate of young earth vs. old earth that I could probably speak for a week. But I also really like you guys, so I certainly wouldn't want to subject you to all that. But I think the Bible, both in its creation narrative and in the story of human reconciliation with God, makes several points very clear.

First, the Genesis 1 account of creation is not metaphor or allegory or any other literary device. Genesis 1 is historical narrative; that is how it is presented, and there is no reason to consider it in any other way.

Second, it seems to me (and yes, this is just my take on things) that, making the word for "day" mean anything else than a literal, 24-hour span of time, goes a long way in taking away the overwhelming response that everybody should have in considering what God **did** - actively and personally. Certainly, God was free to create however He wanted, but a literal approach of six literal days in an equally literal week leaves me in a much more profound sense of awe and praise for what God did. And the hidden issue in viewing Genesis 1 in any other way is: So how do we decide what in the Bible can be viewed as literally correct? Are there other places we should view with a pessimistic eye? That becomes a very slippery slope. The fact is Jesus viewed Genesis 1 as specific, narrative history. The apostle Paul did the same. Many of the foundational doctrines of our faith are absolutely dependent upon the historicity of Genesis 1.

Third, both the Old and New Testaments use God's creation in Genesis 1 as a basis for God's

testimony about Himself - a God worthy of praise and worship, and also as a basis for simply revealing a God of truth and reality - a supreme being to whom we owe our lives and our allegiance. Consider the following:

1. From the OT: *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech; they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world - David, *Psalms 19:1-4a*. Just listen to all those "operative" words and phrases: declare, proclaim, pour forth speech, reveal knowledge, voice goes out, words - so profound they can travel to the "ends of the world." It's like somebody yelling at us to get our attention - only God is the one doing the yelling. And He is basically saying, "You want to see Me, know something about Me? Look up - the sun, the clouds, the moon, the stars. Aren't they glorious? Guess what - they came from Someone glorious - Me!"*
- 2) From the NT: *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever praised. Amen - Paul, *Romans 1:18-25*. That's quite the debate Paul details here between God and the wicked:
 - a) God: Has made his truth plain. Man: Has suppressed God's truth.
 - b) God: Has made His qualities seen. Man: Has no excuse.
 - c) God: His truth clearly seen. Man: Their hearts became darkened.
 - d) God: His truth presented. Man: Truth exchanged for a lie.*

God puts His creation, just what He has done that we can see all around us, as giving sufficient evidence to learning Him, knowing Him, and understanding Him for who He truly is. A young-earth perspective underscores all that creation presents about God in a much more dynamic, powerful picture.

APPLICATION

OK; drum roll, please: So, what's the ultimate outcome here? Which one is right? Answer: I don't know. But you know what? I'm not sure God sees it as all that important. What?! How can I say that? OK; give me a minute to explain.

There certainly is an importance in this question, but the question becomes, how important is it? The age of the earth is largely an intramural argument between Christians. I have a good load of materials that advocate both sides of the argument - written by genuine, believing,

evangelical Christians that I fully expect to one day see in eternal fellowship in heaven. But while "earth age" does touch on some important considerations within our faith, it by itself is not a salvation issue; it is not a faith issue.

However, if "old earth" becomes an attempt to reconcile the positions of science, particularly the theory of evolution, with the position of Scripture, then I think there is an issue. Evolution simply creates nothing more than dead ends in its quest to explain different aspects of life, and I believe anything that attaches itself, even remotely, to the idea of evolution is walking a dangerous path. Evolution at its heart is an attempt to create without the Creator; why would I want anything to do with that?

In fact, it was an ill-conceived attempt to reconcile Christianity and evolution that gave birth to the idea of "theistic evolution." According to theologian Wayne Grudem in his writing in the book, *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, he defined theistic evolution this way: "God created matter and after that did not guide or intervene or act directly or cause any empirically detectable change in the natural behavior of matter until all living things had evolved by purely natural processes" (*Chapter 27, page 784*). In other words, God created matter and then literally let nature take its course. So, does the Bible teach that? Quite the contrary: The Bible teaches that God is intimately, directly connected to all that happens on earth.

- 1) ***"My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes. . . Am I only a God nearby," declares the Lord, "and not a God far away? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?" declares the Lord. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the Lord - Jeremiah 16:17, 23:23-24.***
- 2) ***"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered"- Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:29-30.***
- 3) ***Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account - Hebrews 4:13.***

Another reason that comes to mind when I judge the importance of which is the correct view is the fact that God nowhere mentions the age of the world, or how long creation took, or anything related to that idea. And it's certainly not because there wasn't an early concept of time and years. Genesis 5 gives us the years of the lives of the patriarchs - from Adam to Noah - and repeated gives further lifespans as it continues the narrative. Noah's flood is measured in specific amounts of days, and the move of Israel out of Egypt is counted from the specific day and month it occurred. In other words, if there is something that God in His infinite wisdom deems important for us to know, He has made sure that His holy authors communicated that information. Bottom line: All of creation occurred for God's honor and to be a glory to His name. ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth - Genesis 1:1*** is where the glory is found. When it happened, or how it happened, doesn't impact His glory; if it did, He would have let us know.

An additional reason why I don't think God considers it important is found when we consider some particular biblical truths that tie to the idea of purpose - specifically, why are we here, and why has God established His body of believers? To evaluate this, let's look at a couple of

important questions:

First question: What lasts forever? This is what the Bible tells us:

1) God lasts forever:

a) *Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God - Moses, Psalm 90:1-2.*

b) *[Y]ou remain the same, and Your years will never end - Psalm 102:27.*

c) *"Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you will never die - Habakkuk 1:12a.*

2) God's word lasts forever:

a) *The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever - Isaiah 40:8.*

b) *"[M]y words will never pass away" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 24:35b.*

3) Heaven lasts forever:

a) *Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever - David, Psalm 23:6.*

b) *[W]e know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands - Paul, II Corinthians 5:1.*

4) Hell lasts forever:

a) *He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might - Paul, II Thessalonians 1:8-9.*

b) *[T]he devil . . . was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. . . . Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire - Revelation 20:10, 14-15.*

5) Now if heaven and hell last forever, that also indicates that our souls, our most basic "us," will also last forever:

a) *[T]he dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it - Ecclesiastes 12:7.*

b) *"Then [the King] will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. . . . Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 25:41, 46.*

c) *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die" - Jesus Christ, John 11:25-26a.*

OK, so God (and His Son and His Spirit) live forever, as does His word. In addition, there is a life beyond our time on earth - heaven for believers in Christ, hell for those who rejected Him - which will also last forever. And our souls, that which God Himself breathed into us, will

likewise last forever. Eternity is a matter of destination - where are you going to spend your eternity - rather than duration.

Now for the second question: What doesn't last forever? Again, what does the Bible tell us?

- 1) This world, and the heavens we see are temporary.
 - a) *In the beginning You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded - Psalm 102:25-26.*
 - b) *"Heaven and earth will pass away" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 24:35a.*
 - c) *[T]he day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. . . . That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat - II Peter 3:10, 12b.*
- 2) Our bodies are temporary:
 - a) *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" - God speaking, Genesis 3:19.*
 - b) *"Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die" - IISamuel 14:14a.*
 - c) *When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing - Psalm 146:4.*
- 3) Our lives are temporary and, in biblical terms, extremely short:
 - a) *"Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope" - King David, I Chronicles 29:15b.*
 - b) *The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more - David, Psalm 103:15-16.*
 - c) *What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes- James 4:14b.*
- 4) Our earthly possessions, our "stuff" - our treasures - are temporary:
 - a) *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:19-21.*
 - b) *"[O]ne's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" - Jesus Christ, Luke 12:JSb (ESV).*
- 5) Our doctrinal disputes and disagreements are temporary: *[W]here there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am*

fully known - Paul, I Corinthians 13:8-12.

- 6) Our opportunities to minister, to present the gospel to the world around us are temporary:
- a) *"As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work" - Jesus Christ, John 9:4.*
 - b) *[N]ow is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation - Paul, II Corinthians 6:2b.*
 - c) *[Y]ou do not even know what will happen tomorrow - James 4:14a.*

Now if we compare what is temporary - our world, our bodies, our lives, our possessions, our differences, and our opportunities to do ministry, how can we allow ourselves to get hung up on a dispute over something that is not near as important as those things that are going to last through eternity - in particular, heaven, hell, and our souls. That is where our attention needs to be; that is where our focus needs to be.

CONCLUSION

For the record, I am a "young-earth" subscriber. I believe it fits best with a straightforward, literal reading of the events of that amazing time in cosmic and human history. But, at the same time, none of us were there. God was there, but He doesn't seem particularly interested in telling. Maybe in heaven we'll get that chance to find out from the Creator Himself.

Also, it should never be my place to judge where somebody feels God has called them to minister, nor is it my place to judge where somebody has developed passions for God's truth. But I also know that many thousands, if not millions, of dollars have been spent in research, publication and presentation of the validity of the positions of young earth vs. old earth. The question remains: Could that time and those resources have been better spent on gospel outreach?

Folks, we have limited time and resources with which to reach people in the world with the lifesaving, eternally-impacting message of God's salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And while our time and activities on earth are limited, our time in heaven will never end; our resources will never run out, and we will have all kinds of eternal time to pursue our passions and our questions.

Make the best use of your time. Evaluate how you are using your time against the eternal impact your activities will have. And God bless you in your passion for the Master! Let's pray.