

# NewportNaz

*B*elong...

*B*elieve...

*B*ecome...

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January 22, 2012

## Genesis For The Many...

The Power of the Living Word

Genesis 1:14

Whew!, finally back in my arena: exegesis of Scripture and consequent theology. My dabbling in micro biology, evolutionary theory and intelligent design has worn my simple brain out, not to mention the 'hack job' of explaining it to which you have been subjected. But today, I'm back in my playground, the world of exegesis and theology. And oh how I love to explore God's Word, the footing for that which often can't be 'measured' (an inside joke for those of you who have suffered through this entire series).

### I) Some basics about Genesis...

Before we exegete the text, let me suggest a few guidelines to set parameters for what the text can and cannot do (and was never intended to do):

◆ Genesis is not 'anti-science' it is 'pre-science': Asking Genesis to function as a science manual is an over extending of its purpose. While it may shed light on 'science', it was never intended to be a 'science text', rather it arose out of inspiration that clearly predates any notion of what would become 'contemporary science'.

◆ "Genesis is meant for scientists and cowboys" (George Partridge): I unabashedly confess this was not in the original outline conceptualization. I stole it from one of our medical professionals who meets with me and others in the wee hours of Tuesday mornings (yes, all men are welcome, but it is awfully early). It was the profound recognition that the beauty and power of Genesis is its ability to speak, via poetic artistry<sup>2</sup>, to both scholar and laborer. It is the power of 'dynamic revelation'.

◆ Genesis is more philosophy (art) than science: It is important to understand that Genesis sets about affirming 'who' more than it does 'how'. The 'how' question is left for science to discover as it explores the creation itself in an ever increasing manner (See Romans 1:20-21).

◆ Genesis, like all Scripture, is 'living word'<sup>3</sup>, not static words on a page: As science unpacks the 'creative process' over the last few hundred years, the amazing aspect of Genesis is that it continues to 'reveal truth' in the format of each new truth that science seems to discover.

### II) But what does the 'living word' literally say...?

Yet, even 'poetic imagery' is based upon 'literal verbiage' that can shed immense light on the 'picture' that is being painted.

◆ "In the beginning...": Theologians have long debated the precise meaning of this ancient text. Does 'it' (beginning) suggest the beginning of simply the heaven and earth, or the beginning of the 'creative process' as a whole? If it is the latter, then God becomes 'culpable' in some sense, for every dimension of the 'creation's' failure (God made it). Hence, some theologians, suggest that God attempts to give form to a 'creation' that predates God's 'hovering over the face of the waters'. I would suggest the text seems to more naturally suggest that God is the 'origin' of every dimension of the creation. God is the 'originator' of all aspects of the 'creation'<sup>4</sup> and thus assumes a sense of foundational 'culpability'.

◆ "God created...": The verbal shift from 'created' (vs. 1) to 'made' (vs. 7,16,25,26) is significant. 'Created' suggests 'to cause a thing to be' while 'made' suggests 'giving order' to that which has no order. Thus, the initial phase of creation appears to be 'a calling into existence' that which had not been. Later, the created 'stuff' is given form and functionality of a very specific kind (light and darkness, day and night, etc...).

◆ "The earth was without form and void...": Clearly, there is a sense in which the 'heaven and earth' are in existence, yet without clarity of 'form' and 'function'. Some suggest this points to the process in which the elements necessary for the creation are being assembled and processed to allow for 'made' to occur. (This often called the 'gap' in the process).

◆ 'Made' with 'form and function': The final step is the establishing of each element in a functional manner. Hence, 'light' and 'dark' begin to function as the means for days, nights and years. (vs. 14 serves as case in point). Thus, each dimension of the creation has great 'intentionality' and 'purpose'. Random chance is never suggested as an organizing and productive principle.

◆ Made to function with the 'likeness of God': The question of 'likeness' and 'image' has been a center point for Christian theology. Specifically, "Is the point of Genesis 1 to describe how God created (methodology) or to paint a picture of how 'likeness and image' function as a reflection of God's functioning?" I would suggest the latter. Specifically, Genesis attempts to describe what 'subdue' and 'dominion' ought to entail for humanity as humanity reflects the 'image' and 'likeness' of their creator.

### III) So what...?

In the end, one ought to approach Genesis and ask, "Why did we need to know this? What is it God intends for us to glean from the story of creation?" Let me suggest the following:

◆ An issue of autonomy and dominion<sup>5</sup>: Creation 'ex-nihilo' (out of nothing) or 'out of God') is a profoundly important doctrine in Christian theology. It establishes God's autonomy and dominion over every aspect of the

creation<sup>6</sup>. It suggests that all that 'is' is precisely as the creator intended it to be. There is purpose in the details.

◆ A God of the micro details: More importantly, as our study of the cell demonstrated last week, God's creative intent expresses itself in the tiniest of details. The idea of 'random chance' disappears in light of the intricacy that the creation points to. God is a God of the micro.

◆ Humanity's reflection of the likeness and image of God: Herein lies the key to the opening chapters of Genesis.

◆ Image / Likeness: The concept does not point to 'image' but rather function. Thus, it suggests 'being' and 'functioning' as God 'is' and 'does'. Thus, the verses that have preceded are more about 'how' God functions, and not an attempt to describe the creative process.

◆ Subdue: The concept here suggests that the creation will not succumb easily to our efforts. Thus, the creation, seems to have a dimension or unruliness to it. And that unruliness needs 'taming'. Humanity joins God in 'taming' the creation.

◆ Dominion: The final dimension suggests humanity's role as overseeing and caring for the creation. It is a challenge to exercise authority in a proper manner and in such a way that the creation is not only subdued but cared for, just as God cares for us.

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<sup>1</sup> That is why I personally have little interest in the '7 day creation' debate that consumes so many Christians. Whether God ushered in the 'creation' in 7 days or 7 trillion years' doesn't change the simple reality that all we are doing is figuring out 'how' God did it, not if God did it.

<sup>2</sup> Many, if not most scholars, note that Genesis chapter 1 is a fine example of nomadic poetry, capturing the power of poetry to convey a depth of meaning far beyond the mere simplicity of the 'literal word'. Thus it conveys deep and profound meaning to a broad swath of human experience.

<sup>3</sup> Nazarenes, like most if not all Wesleyans, are not 'fundamentalist', but rather 'evangelicals' who affirm 'dynamic revelation', meaning our emphasis is not on the 'static words' on a page, but rather the 'living message' that those words convey to the 'spiritual mind' (1 Cor. 2:12-16). It is staggering to consider the depth and multiplicity of insights that have been 'revealed' to those who are trekking after God.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Oord of Northwest Nazarene University suggests, "...God always creates out of that which God created previously. I do deny creation out of nothing...My position is that God creates something new out of that which God previously created, and God has been doing this kind of creating everlastingly." He will attempt to avoid the culpability problem by suggesting God does not decide to create, rather, 'creating' is part of the very 'nature' of God.

<sup>5</sup> This is a profound issue that greatly impacts the meaning of the cross and atonement. It suggests the possibility that God pays the price of redemption by 'co-suffering' with us, a solidarity, not only because of empathy toward us, but in a form of culpability, acknowledging that God takes ownership for both the good and the bad of God's creation.

<sup>6</sup> Conversely, 'process and open theologians' attempt to get God 'off the hook' by suggesting that God merely gave the creation 'order', rather than created it. Thus, God can only be held to a limited culpability in regards to the 'fallen' creation, in that God 'created' with the only material God had to work with, rather than that which God created 'ex-nihilo' (out of nothing).

The DNA of NewportNaz is relatively simple (see above). Your presence with us this morning provides Worship and Insight. The final step, the one that ultimately matters, application, can only happen after you exit this gathering place. Learning is relatively useless if it never becomes 'Applied Knowledge'.

## Thinking about Principles...

- ~ What does it mean to be pre-science?
- ~ What do Wesleyans mean by 'dynamic revelation'?
- ~ What does 'living Word' suggest to you?
- ~ What is the significance of making God responsible for every aspect of the creation?
- ~ Does Genesis 1 leave room for an evolutionary process?
- ~ Does it matter how long God took to create?
- ~ What is the importance of adding 'form' and 'discussion' to this dialogue?
- ~ What does it mean to suggest God is culpable for God's creation?
- ~ What does the 'image and likeness' of God suggest to you?
- ~ Do you believe God acts in the 'micro' of our lives?
- ~ Is God still creating?

## Thinking about Personal Application...

- ~ In what do you personally reflect the image of God?
- ~ How do you attempt to 'subdue' the environment around you?
- ~ Does it matter to you that God is in the micro of your life?
- ~ How do you exercise your personal autonomy toward life?
- ~ How will you seek to exercise dominion over the creation?

## Action point (one thing I intend to do)...

Inspiration creates potential... Application creates *reality*...  
"NewportNaz Morning After Dialogue" on FaceBook