

The Christian Creator

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

Every culture and every religion has a creation story. Each one has an account of how the world came to be. There are as many creation accounts as there are people groups and religions.

Here are some of the creation stories that came out of different times and places.

The ancient Egyptians taught that in the beginning, only a chaotic water existed they called Nun. The sun god Ra appeared from a lotus flower and gave light to the universe. Ra created Shu, the air god, and Tefnut, the goddess of moisture. Those two gave birth to the sky goddess Nut and the earth god Geb. From them, the physical universe was formed.

Similarly, the ancient Mesopotamians taught that in, the beginning there was chaotic water that divided into fresh water, known as the god Apsu, and salt water, known as the goddess Tiamat. These two gods give birth to other gods. These other gods begin to cause trouble and upset Apsu so much he wanted to kill them, which created a conflict between him and Tiamat. From the conflict, a great warrior named Marduk fired an arrow at Tiamat and splits her into two which is said to have created the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; from her corpse, the heavens and the earth were created.

The pre-colonial ancient Zulus believed that “before animals or humans existed, only darkness and one large seed were on the earth. The seed sank into the earth and formed long reeds, called Uthlanga. One reed grew into Unkulunkulu, the first man and creator of all things. As more things, like men and women and animals, began to grow on the reeds, Unkulunkulu broke them off and he created the streams, mountains, lakes and valleys. He taught men and women how to hunt, make fire, and create clothes.”

In Greek mythology, the furthest back in time you can go is to a time when a kind of dark place and substance called Chaos was in existence. Chaos gave birth to five gods – Gaia, Tartarus, Erebus, Nix, and Eros. These five gave birth to another generation of gods. These, in turn gave birth to a group of twelve gods called the Titans. The Titans gave birth to the Olympian gods.

The Norse Vikings had an unusual one. There was a fire land, an ice land and a void. When the ice and the fire met, a giant and a cow came out. The cow licked the god Bor and his wife into being. The couple gave birth to Buri, who fathered three sons, Odin, Vili, and Vé. The sons rose up and killed the god Ymir and from his corpse created from his flesh, the Earth; the mountains from his bones, trees with his hair and rivers, and the seas and lakes with his blood. Within Ymir's hollowed-out skull, the gods created the starry heavens.

Now it is not as if you just have this religion, fully formed, that then works backward and writes a creation story. In many ways, it also works in the other direction. The creation story shapes and forms the religion that emerges out of it. That is why every story of the beginning is the basis of a religion. A worldview, a way of understanding reality emerges from your creation account.

You see, let me give you one more, and show you how it works, closer to our time. In 19th-century England, this creation account was developed. Millions of years ago, the earth was nothing but pools of warm ammonia and salts, and then lightning struck, and it formed a protein compound, which soon became a single cell. Life came from lifelessness. And then this cell underwent more changes, and soon tiny organisms formed, followed by bigger and more complex ones. These organisms would experience random mutations. In some cases, the random mutations randomly gave some organisms a survival advantage. Others had random mutations that didn't give an

advantage, and they died off. Whatever survived was the fittest. More and more tiny changes eventually produced different species of animals in the sea, on land, and in the air. Over millions of years, this produced all the life on earth, including the creature known as man, whose ancestors were ape-like creatures, and before them small mammals, and before them the simple organisms of the ocean.

Now this is a way of understanding the world that produces a belief system. If life came from non-life, and if minds came from matter, then there really isn't any meaning in the world. We are just protoplasm that got too clever for its own good. We invented morality, and meaning, and beauty to console ourselves. But there is no such thing. Meaning is just an illusion. Morality is an illusion. Free will and choice is an illusion.

Ultimately, this means, in such a worldview, we don't need a God to explain reality. The universe just is. There is no Creator, no Lawgiver, no Redeemer, no Father. Indeed, atheism now has a creation myth to satisfy itself. There is no God, or we don't know if there is, but we don't need one to explain the questions of how did the world come to be? Who are we? Why are we here? Where are we going? What happens after we die? This account of creation answers those questions. If you want to know why the 20th century was the most gruesome and bloodiest century in history, then ask yourself which religion with what creation account gripped the world just before the 20th century.

You see, what we believe about creation is not a small, incidental question about religion versus science, or a debate about the age of the earth, the dating of fossils, the question of dinosaurs. No, your creation account sets the stage for the existence or no-existence of God; what kind of God; the nature of the cosmos, and from there, the meaning and purpose of human life.

It makes a massive difference to everything you will believe, if you believe that matter is eternal, or that there was originally a mindless chaos from which came order, or that there were many beings also part of the cosmos with higher consciousness that made the world.

In the Genesis account, we have an account that is fundamentally different from all other creation accounts. Yes, there are elements of similarity that you will find between some of them and the Genesis account. Some critics have tried to make the Genesis account just one more ancient Near East creation myth. But what we find in Genesis 1:1 is something radically different. In fact, many people believe that it is partly written as a polemic, as an argument attacking the false creation accounts that were present in Egypt and Canaan of the time.

Now we have already seen that Genesis 1:1 makes the great and fundamental assumption that God is. It does not try to prove God's existence; it simply assumes it as the great foundational piece of knowledge, the first principle, the absolute axiom.

However, packed into verse 1 are several truths about God and creation that set the stage for our entire understanding of the Bible, and our whole worldview. We can extract three truths about who God is that distinguish Him from every other false god, and from every other creation myth. We will lay the emphasis first “In the beginning, God”, then we will consider the word “God”, and then consider “God created the heavens and the earth”.

I. The True Creator-God is Eternal

“In the beginning God”

The very first phrase, “in the beginning God” means God does not emerge out of the creation. He is not one of the events taking place in time and space. God is present and fully God, and already eternally ancient at the moment of the beginning.

God is eternal. God is without beginning. God is without origin.

² Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You *are* God. (Psalm 90:2)

That totally distances the biblical God from every other creation story which either has eternal matter, or eternal chaos, or something pre-existing which gives birth to the god. Ancient philosophers thought the universe had no beginning and could have no end. They did not give an origin for the cosmos, for they thought it simply had always been. It was the gods who had a beginning.

So, in fact, everyone has believed in some kind of eternity. The question is simply, do you believe in eternal matter, or an eternal Person?

It may surprise you to hear that many cosmologists and astronomers hated the idea of the Big Bang precisely because it seemed to point to an absolute beginning to the universe. Now, we'll hopefully get to some discussion of the theory of the Big Bang at some point. Christians are usually hostile to it because it is often lumped together with evolutionary theory. But whatever you decide about it, it teaches that the universe began. Many materialist, naturalist astronomers hated the idea. They believed in something called the steady-state theory, which taught, just like the ancient Greeks, that matter was eternal. But 20th century science kept pointing to an absolute beginning of the universe.

In fact, one of the greatest observational astronomers of the twentieth century was a Caltech astronomer named Alan Sandage. He was a materialist – believed that matter is all there is – and an agnostic, with little interest in questions about the existence of God. But at a conference in 1985, he announced to his shocked colleagues that the scientific evidence pointed to a creation event. He told them that he had recently become a Christian, and that the scientific evidence no longer supported his materialism.

This first phrase of Genesis 1:1 refutes the doctrine of materialism, that matter was eternal, or primary, or always existing. It refutes every creation story, including modern cosmologies like string theory or inflationary cosmology that claim there was always matter, or the quantum vacuum.

The point is, it is a big deal to acknowledge that at some point, the universe did not exist. Because it it did not exist, but now does, then Someone existed outside of timespace and created everything.

That someone is the God of Genesis 1:1. When we say God is eternal, we do not merely mean to say that God is a lot older than us. We mean to say that God stands apart from time-space not just in quantity, but in quality. His is an altogether different relationship to time. God has no beginning, no end, and experiences no successive states of being. His life is not a sequence of events, where He loses the present moment into the past, and must wait for the future to arrive. His life is not a flowing succession of moments, but a standing experience of all of them. All the moments we have, divided up by the succession of time, God has every moment at once.

Boethius: “God’s eternity is the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life.”

⁸ But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (2 Peter 3:8)

Augustine once joked that when people asked “what was God doing before He made the world?”, the answer was, *preparing hell for those who pry into such mysteries*. But in all seriousness, the only legitimate answer is, being God. Because there was no before from the point of view of God. If you draw a straight line within a circle, you cannot ask, is the circle before or after the line? It is both, the line is contained within it. All time-space is known to God from eternity.

Of course, this means God is self-existent, containing His existence in Himself, being the ground and reason for His existence.

Genesis 1:1 has another ground-breaking truth.

II. The True Creator-God is Personal

In the beginning **God** created the heavens and the earth.

The word for God, Elohim, is a title, not a personal name. We first read His personal name in 2:4. But the very verb used here in 1:1 is a masculine singular: He created. And then we see in verses 3 and 4 that God says, and God sees and regards it as good, and God divides, and God names. These are all personal, deliberate actions. God is a person. The Creator is a person.

Now in most creation myths, the original, eternal thing is impersonal, like chaos, or water, or fire. In modern cosmology, it is the quantum vacuum, or energy. And the impersonal, the mindless then gives birth to one or two or many gods. Even Aristotle taught that there had to have been some unmoved mover who created the world, but is almost totally unaware that he or it did so.

In fact, someone has said, in the 21st century the fundamental worldview question is this: you either believe that matter created minds, or that mind created matter. If you believe that mindless energy and matter evolved into minds, then you believe the impersonal gave rise to persons and matter created minds. But if you hold to the Genesis account, then you believe a Mind created matter, and a Person created persons.

This refutes atheism, that claims there is no Person behind creation.

This refutes polytheism because there is only one God here doing all the creating. In paganism there were always many gods, overseeing different parts of creation, competing with each other. But here, there is one God, who makes everything.

In non-biblical religions you either have the absolute or a person, but never together. When you have an absolute, then it is a great infinite but impersonal chaos or sea or fire. Absolute but not personal. When you have persons, they are superhuman gods, but not absolute – there are many of them, and they have a beginning. Only in the Bible do you have a creator who is absolute and personal.

Now if the Creator God is personal, then at least two truths follow on from this.

If the Creator-God is personal then the entire creation was made with purpose, with personal intentions. The Creator meant something by it. Just as a painter means something when painting, and a composer means something when writing music, so God meant something when creating. The Bible tells us the meaning.

But the Bible teaches He created out of love. Love and meaning was at the beginning.

⁵ To Him who by wisdom made the heavens, For His mercy *endures* forever; ⁶ To Him who laid out the earth above the waters, For His mercy *endures* forever; ⁷ To Him who made great lights, For His mercy *endures*

forever—⁸ The sun to rule by day, For His mercy *endures* forever; ⁹ The moon and stars to rule by night, For His mercy *endures* forever. (Psalm 136:5–9)

¹¹ “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.” (Revelation 4:11)

God created the world because He wished to share His beauty and glory with free beings. He wishes to give the gift of Himself to His creatures, and the gifts of redeemed creatures back to Himself within the Trinity. All of this is about beauty, and love, and goodness.

That leads to a second idea if the Creator-God is personal. He created a world that is good and like His nature. What do we keep hearing in Genesis 1? And God saw that it was good. God made a world that He found beautiful and delightful. It was well-ordered and beautiful to look upon and to experience. Even man was made good originally.²⁹

Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes.” (Ecclesiastes 7:29)

Creation is not evil. Nor is it neutral. Creation is good. Creation can be abused, and it can be distorted. Creation does now exist under a curse, and exhibits death and the fall and decay. And man has succeeded in his sin in destroying and defiling what is good. But the created order is not evil, like the ancient Gnostics used to say. The body is not evil.

This refutes dualism: the idea that good and evil have always existed together – the yin and the yang, the dark and the light, the good side of the force and the dark. No, originally, there is only God, and only good.

The True Creator God is personal, meaning creation has meaning, and is filled with His intentions to show forth His beauty, delight His creatures, and glorify Himself. It also means creation is like Him: good, true, beautiful in its original, unfallen state.

The Creator is eternal. The Creator is personal.

III. The True Creator-God is Transcendent

In the beginning God **created the heavens and the earth**.

Here are two theological words you need to know: transcendent and immanent. Transcendent refers to God’s distance, exalted far above the creation. Immanence refers to God’s nearness, being intimately present with us. These are not spatial ideas; they refer to God’s difference from us. Now God is both, and to hold one to the exclusion of the other is to go into heresy.

But when we are talking about creation, it is important to understand God is transcendent, different, separate from His creation. Here is why it makes a difference.

See, in pantheism God makes the world out of Himself. God is the world and the world is God. Hinduism holds to pantheism. So do all the New Age teachings which say that the cosmos is made up of consciousness and energy, and if you learn to harmonise with cosmic vibrations and energies, then you are communing with God, with your creator. Because all is god and god is all. Not a transcendent God.

Similar to this is panentheism. God contains the world, or that it is part of his body. The universe completes God, and so God had to create. From this we get something known as process theology, where God is growing, developing, in process with us as creation meets a need in him. This is like the God or gods of Mormonism.

Bur what we have here is a transcendent God. God creates everything, out of nothing, without any constraint, and remains sovereign over it and involved in it. Where do we see this?

When we are told *God created the Heavens and the Earth*, it means He created from A-Z. He created all that is. He did not create a portion of created reality, but all of it. And since He did so in the beginning when there was nothing else, it means He created all of it out of nothing. We'll spend some more time in a future message studying the importance of God creating out of nothing. But this means God is transcendent because He didn't create the world out of Himself, nor out of something existing.

³ By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

God, ...calls those things which do not exist as though they did; (Romans 4:17)

But when He made it, He remains distinct from it. God is not an extension of creation.

²⁵ Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens *are* the work of Your hands. ²⁶ They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed. ²⁷ But You *are* the same, And Your years will have no end. (Psalm 102:25–27)

Furthermore, He didn't make it to fulfil a need in Himself. This is unlike all the Greek gods who had needs, unlike all the deities who are hungry and lustful and vengeful.

We've already seen He made it for His own pleasure. Psalm 50 is more explicit that the creatures and the creation do not feed or benefit the Creator.

⁹ I will not take a bull from your house, *Nor* goats out of your folds. ¹⁰ For every beast of the forest *is* Mine, *And* the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field *are* Mine. ¹² "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world *is* Mine, and all its fullness. (Psalm 50:9–12)

²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. (Acts 17:25)

³⁵ "*Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?*" ³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:35–36)

God is transcendent – distinct and not dependent on His creation. This refutes all those sub-Christian theologies that make God out to be hurting because of the world, needy, suffering, and needing us.

Transcendent doesn't mean distant. The world is distinct from God, but not completely different. It reveals Him and His nature. This is different from Islam, where Allah is totally unknowable, and creation doesn't really reveal him at all. Though the Creator is transcendent, He remains involved in the world. He is sovereign over it, and providentially rules it.

³ who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Hebrews 1:3)

¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (Colossians 1:17)

This is very different from the God of deism, who makes the world, but then ignores it, or leaves it, or lets it run on its own.

The true Creator-God is eternal: In the beginning. The true Creator-God is personal: God created. The true Creator-God is transcendent: God created the heavens and the earth.

Now think of what Genesis 1:1 has refuted and eliminated. Materialism: that matter is all that is or eternal. Atheism – no god. Polytheism – multiple gods. Dualism – good and evil together. Gnosticism – matter is evil. Pantheism – the cosmos is God and God is the cosmos. Panentheism, the world is contained in God. Process theology, Mormonism, Hinduism, Islam are all refuted by Genesis 1:1.

A good beginning is half the battle won. If you begin rightly with Genesis 1:1, you will be delivered from errors on every side. In the beginning, the eternal, personal transcendent God made the heavens and the earth.