

The Creation Report in Genesis 1

(A short review of some important aspects for the interpretation of the creation report in Genesis 1:1-2:4 and the difference between the first humans and Adam)

To create

"**To create**" (Hebrew "*bara*") occurs only three times in the creation story: 1. heavens and Earth (1:1); 2. aquatic and flying animals (1:21); 3. humans (1:27). The word designates an activity by God exclusively, when he lets appear something new that had never existed before.

"**To make**" (Hebrew "*asah*") is used for an activity by God or by humans: in the creation story for 1. the expanse between ocean and clouds (1:7); 2. the light of Sun, Moon, and stars (1:16); 3. terrestrial animals (1:25); 4. humans (1:26); 5. all of God's work that he had done in creation (2:3). When humans "make" something, source material and time is always needed. Thus, it is a **Development**; something which already exists is changed in time into something new. **Evolution** is a development; cosmic and biological evolution are two special cases of developments.

"**To create**" by "**making**": God (Hebrew "*Elohim*") created his work by making it (2:3); the same thing is repeated (2:4) for the LORD God (Hebrew "*Yahweh 'Elohim*") at the transition to Adam's story. God also creates each individual human being *by* developing him or her (Isa.43:6-7). Thus, creation and evolution or individual development go hand in hand: they are natural processes, in which God determines and guides whatever he designs.

Heavens and Earth

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (1:1) - "the heavens and the earth" is a set phrase for the material universe (whereby "heaven" is always plural).

In the bible, there are three different "**heavens**": 1. the heaven of the air (the expanse or thinly spread-out layer [Hebrew "*raqi'a*"] between the ocean and the clouds, from which it rains, the atmosphere with the clouds, where the birds fly); 2. the heaven of the stars (space outside the atmosphere, where Sun, Moon, and stars are); 3. the heaven of God's presence (the invisible world, in which God is, which penetrates the entire material world, as well [Is.66:1]). "The heavens" in 1:1 comprise the 1st and 2nd, but not the uncreated 3rd heaven.

The "**earth**" (Hebrew "*eretz*") is not only the planet Earth, but also the mainland, a land or smaller region, the ground, or humanity.

Day

*God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day (1:5) - "day" can mean different things: 1. the bright part of the day (1:5a; 1:14a; 1:16; 1:18); 2. a 24-hour day (1:14b); 3. an **undetermined length of time** (2:4). It would be arbitrary to assume that the seven days counted in the creation story are 24-hour days each. That God said, "... the seventh day is a Sabbath... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth..." (Ex. 20:10-11), is an analogy, which doesn't automatically make 24-hour days out of the creation "days"; there was also a Sabbath year (Lev. 25:4).*

Likewise, the "**beginning**" is not simply a point in time, but a period of undetermined length. In this period ("*In the beginning*") God created the universe including the stars, the Sun, the Earth, and the Moon. Immediately afterwards (1:2) we already read of the primeval ocean on the Earth: already the Earth had cooled sufficiently from its initially very hot state. All of these events together must necessarily have taken billions of years, in order to produce a stable earthly environment. God creates by using, not setting aside, the natural laws which he himself had given.

An emergence of the **mainland** (1:9) within 24 hours would not only have produced a tsunami, but would have melted the Earth's crust and vaporized the world ocean. On the same 3rd "day", the mainland itself on God's order produced (out of the ability given it by God) its entire **vegetation**, among much else fruit bearing trees (apparently grown within many years).

Light

³ *And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light... ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night... (1:3-5) - There "**was Light**", not immediately, but gradually, in a natural process of undefined length, and in particular it was the first dim brightness penetrating the thick cloud cover down to the ocean level. The source of this light was the Sun, of course, which had been made earlier.*

A widely spread, but misleading misunderstanding holds that Sun, Moon, and stars are said to have been created on the 4th "day". But there, the text doesn't say "create", but "make", i.e. "develop" out of something pre-existing. Furthermore, Sun and Moon are called "**lights**" (Hebrew "*ma'or*", which simply means "lamp"), whereas the brightness of the 1st "day" (1:3-5) and the daylight in the cycle of day and night (1:18) is called "light" (Hebrew "*or*"). Also, God did not "set" these lamps "in the firmament of the heaven", but "**gave**" them "**into the expanse**" (1:17) of the atmosphere, i.e. he made it possible, by means of a further evolution of the atmosphere, that the light rays of the heavenly bodies could now penetrate unhindered down to the surface of the Earth.

The purpose of this change is mentioned explicitly (1:14-18): these light rays should serve for temporal (and geographic) **orientation**, which higher animals (and later humans) need, which then appeared in the 5th and 6th "days".

Of course, the **plants** needed the light of the Sun from the 3rd "day" onward, as well, but not necessarily the direct light rays: they could grow under a covered heaven, as well, and produce the oxygen needed later by the larger, and particularly the higher animals, since the 5th "day".

Aquatic animals

So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm... (1:21) - The dangerous "**great sea monsters**" are named first among the water animals created by God. Virtually no large, rapidly swimming water animals are able to live without eating others. Thus, biological death existed at that time already.

And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas..." (1:22) - God "**blessed them, saying**", speaking to them: by means of a corresponding evolution of brain, nervous system, and blood circulation, they have some emotional faculties. They are therefore called "living creatures", literally "**living souls**".

God "**created**" these animals: bodily, they were already derived from earlier animals by means of descent and evolution, but their soulish dimension is something God now created anew.

According to its kind

God created the animals "**according to its kind**" (1:21). It would be arbitrary to deduce from this that every biological "kind" was produced through an act of special creation, independently of any other "kind". On the contrary, the concept itself (Hebrew "*min*") has the primary meaning of "a splitting off", "separation", "descent" and therefore underlines the **derivation from a common origin** and a **permanent separation**. In modern Hebrew, "*min*" designates a sectarian and is used for Jewish christians, who are of Jewish descent, but diverged from the Jewish teaching through their conversion to christianity and can therefore no longer be accepted into their original community.

The context, as well, points to **Reproduction**, thus descent. God ordered these animals to reproduce and fill the oceans. The same specification "according to its kind" is given for plants (1:11-12) and terrestrial animals (1:24-25), which were "brought forth" by the earth itself (1:12 and 24) - with the additional remark, "²⁴ ...*And it was so.* ²⁵ *And God made the (wild) beasts of the earth according to their kinds...*" for the terrestrial animals (1:24-25).

The only meaningful interpretation, bringing together all aspects, is **descent from common predecessors by means of evolution**, God creating, developing (he "made"), and allowing to work the natural processes (with random fluctuations) which he himself had brought into being.

Aerial animals

Most versions then translate: "²⁰ '*...let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.*' ²¹ *So God created... every winged bird according to its kind*" (1:20-21). But the term translated "birds" means literally "fliers" (derived from "to fly") and designated any kind of flying animals, e.g. bats (Lev. 11:13-19); the phrase "winged bird" is literally "**winged fliers**". Although birds appeared only much later, there were flying insects very early.

Terrestrial animals

Just as the mainland earlier produced plants, when it was prepared for it sufficiently, it now produced animals. Literally: the mainland "caused" that (pre-existing) animals "**came out**" (Hebrew "*jatza*") onto the dry land. These new living souls must have come **out of the oceans**, which immediately before were described as "*teeming with living souls*". No new dimension was created, nor is there any mention of blessing. As a tree of descent suggests (2:4), the terrestrial animals descended from the aquatic ones,

inheriting their bodily and soulish capabilities. God then carefully "made" (Hebrew "[^]asah"), i.e. "developed" these animals further (1:25).

Humanity

²⁶ ...*"Let us make man..."* ²⁷ *So God created man...* (1:26-27). - The **origin of humanity** occurred in two steps. God declared that he was going to prepare (Hebrew "[^]asah") humans, and then he created them (Hebrew "bara").

Apparently God prepared humans by a developmental process (tree of descent, 2:4) from animal precursors: a **pre-existing creature** needed an **additional preparation** (Hebrew "[^]asah"), in order to become what it was destined for. The human body is basically built like animal bodies, and the sentient (psychological) aspect is a refinement of abilities which had already been given other "**living souls**". According to Ecc. 3:18-20, man is (biologically) an animal (Hebrew "*behemah*"), like the tamed ones of 1:24.

But then "**God created man in his own image**" (1:27) by creating the **spiritual dimension** in pre-existing hominids (pre-humans, all extinct except modern man). As this dimension belongs to the invisible world, it could not arise out of the visible one. Humanity possesses aspects of both worlds, just as every child is both a bodily-soulish organism, and an individual, spiritual creation of God. The "image of God" can best be compared to the human **personhood**. It implies language, free will, responsibility, abstract thinking, logic, creativity, conscious planning, designing (not just manufacturing) tools, having dominion over other creatures, plus - as the most important aspect - the ability to enter into a **personal faith relationship** with God. "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth'" (1:28). "**And it was so**" (1:30) within the 6th "day"! Evidently, this 6th "day" already covered a long human history.

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (1:27). - "**Male and female he created them**":* Luther's "einen Mann und ein Weib" (a man and a woman) is incorrect and misleading: the text does not deal with Adam and Eve, but with the first humans, God especially emphasizing that he was going to bless them in such a way that they would fill the Earth.

Creation report as tree of descent

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created (2:4) - or translated more literally: These are the procreations of the heavens and the earth in their being created - "generations" stands for the Hebrew "*toledot*" (a plural), derived from the verb "*holid*" (to procreate). It is a biblical "technical term" for lines of descent and family trees. Literally it means procreations; it could also be rendered as **sequence of procreations**, sequence of generations, descendants, genealogy - but also as table of nations, or even as history of the origins, **genealogic tree** (as in biological evolution).

These biblical family trees may be branched or linear and list either individuals or nations. They concentrate on what is essential in God's view and often omit some individuals or many generations, or even entire lines of descent (similarly, biological phylogenetic trees certainly contain gaps and missing lines - but there it is due to the incompleteness and uncertainty of the finds so far). In all other occurrences the Hebrew "*toledot*" (sequence of procreations) designates lines of descent, family trees, or tables of nations, so that it stands to reason to likewise understand the **creation report** (1:1-2:4) in the sense of a **genealogic tree**.

*These are the procreations of the heavens and the earth in their being created (2:4) - thus, **evolution and creation** are **two aspects of the same events**:* the evolution of the universe and the evolution of life occur to a great extent through natural processes, which natural science can (and according to God's will should, cp. 1:26-28; 2:19-20) investigate, but behind all of it stands the Creator, who directs all events according to his will and through his "natural" laws.

Adam not the first man

² *And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.* ³ *So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation (2:2-3).* - A more literal translation would have: instead of "*on the seventh day*" better "**in** the seventh day" (his work continued in the 7th day); instead of "his work" better "his **sending**" or "his **mission**" (God sent his Word, his Son, commissioning him with creating the universe, cp. 1Cor. 8:6: "...Jesus Christ through whom all things exist.."); instead of "he rested" better "he **ceased**" (Hebrew "*shavat*", which not only means Sabbath, cp. e.g. Jos. 5:12; God does not faint or grow weary).

*These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens (2:4) - or translated more literally: These are the procreations of the heavens and the earth in their being created in the day of preparing Yahweh God [Yahweh 'Elohim] the earth and the heavens - the pointedly symmetrical construction (from the ends to the center: "heavens... heavens"; "earth... earth"; "in their being created... preparing Yahweh God"; "in the day") shows that 2:5-25 is not a "second creation story", but constitutes together with 1:1-2,4 one single **continuous narration**. These two sections (1:1-2,4 und 2:5-25) have different focuses (creation - election of Adam), ways of expression ('Elohim - Yahweh 'Elohim, etc.), spaces (universe and Earth - southern Mesopotamia), climates (everything from desert to rain forest, ocean to high mountains - rainless lowlands watered by rivers and canals) and time periods (14 billion to a few thousand years ago - a few thousand years ago).*

The Hebrew word "**'adam**" means "**man**" or "**humanity**" - and God gave the man he specifically elected a few thousand years ago the proper name **Adam**. The context must indicate how the Hebrew "'adam" has to be rendered. Apart from the immediate context, the old Greek translation of the Old Testament from the 2nd century BC (Septuaginta) helps, as well as Old Testament quotations in the New Testament (all these authors and translators knew nothing of modern science, thus nothing about dating genuine humans). Greek clearly distinguishes between the name "Adam" and the general designation "human" ("*anthropos*").

All this shows that in 1:26-27 **humans in the general sense** (i.e. humanity) is meant, and only in 2:7-4:1 and 4:25-5:5 **the man Adam specifically elected by God**. The New Testament authors may have believed Adam to have been the first man, but God kept them from explicitly saying so, even when they wrote of both Adam and the first humans in the same context. Paul mentions Adam several times. At least in some cases, he quoted the story of Adam or hinted at it. He referred to the accepted text, in order to illustrate a theological argument. Where Paul talked about the contrast between Adam and Christ, he took both as representatives of humanity - in the fallen state, and in the state sanctified to God, respectively. When Chronicles, Luke, and Jude used the name Adam, they simply referred to the available family trees. That Jesus, in Mat. 19:4-9, quotes the creation of humans as male and female (1:27) and a man and his wife becoming *one* flesh (2:24) in the same context does not prove that the two quotations are dealing with the same event: Jesus is discussing divorce, therefore bringing together the two divine indications for marriage originally being indissoluble.

Romans 5:12-21 has been misused to justify the false dogma of inherited sin. But Paul views neither a biological inheritance of sin and death, nor any time sequence, but the contrast between two human collectives in the context of the eternal security of the believers in Jesus.

A **biological evolution of man** can be compatible with a **historical Adam**. God's creating humanity after his image can be placed at that time which most plausibly suits the dates determined from **fossils and genetics**, but **Adam and Eve** lived only a few thousand years ago in the country of the Sumerians in southern Mesopotamia.

Peter Rüst, CH-3148 Lanzenhäusern, Switzerland, paraske@aneste.ch, www.aneste.ch
translated from P.Rüst (2010), *Der Schöpfungsbericht in 1.Mose 1*