

DIFFERENT WAYS OF KNOWING

(GEN 1:1 – 2:3)

The world view of the writer of what we know as the 1st chapter of Genesis was VERY different than ours today. When it was written in we think the 5th or 6th century BCE, by and large, most people believed the world was flat, that disease was caused by an indwelling of evil spirits, and that *everything* – and I do mean EVERYTHING that happened was the Will of God. If you did good, ya' got good; if ya' did bad ya' got bad; and if things weren't going terribly well for you and you had no idea why, there was little doubt that you had gone against the laws and will of God, and you were being justly punished for it. For those who believed in the "One true God," God was to be feared, and was a God of war and vengeance. The average life expectancy was somewhere in the 30's or 40's (though there are accounts of those who lived longer), the average height for a male was 5'4" – 5'6" (although there are reportedly those who were taller), and getting sick from eating pork was seen as God's way of saying pork was forbidden to be eaten, rather than an issue of proper food preparation or storage.

And seeing as the ancient Hebrews were a “pre-scientific” people, and their faith was at the center of their lives, it only makes sense that they would attempt to explain the inexplicable through the eyes of their faith – looking at what “is,” and trying to understand why. For centuries, these early faith stories gave beautiful and poetic expression to the mysteries of God and Creation, and it really wasn’t until the rise of Fundamentalism in the last couple of centuries in response to theological liberalism, cultural modernism, and the sometimes rigorous application of the scientific method and findings to faith issues and understandings that a “problem” arose between what the Bible said about Creation, and what the world of Science proposed as the most likely manner in which Life began. Prior to that – it either wasn’t an issue, or there was seemingly an understanding that one was an explanation through the eyes of faith, and the other through the eyes of science; it was 2 different discussions, neither of which proved or disproved the other. They were 2 parallel explanations of the same thing, looking at the notion of Creation through the lenses of Faith on the one hand, and Science on the other.

I have long been fascinated by the fact that many people understand and are willing to accept the fact that we, as human beings, “evolve” over our lifetimes in the area of developmental capabilities and readiness, but are unwilling or unable to accept that same fact when it comes to certain areas of science and history – especially as it may apply to offering a “different” understanding of the beginning of life and the world as we know it from what the biblical narrative recounts.

When we start out learning math at an early age, we don’t begin the process by attempting to teach the concepts of analytical geometry and calculus ... that would be absurd. Instead, we begin by teaching basic numbers: 1-10, the concept of “0,” how to add and subtract, then how to multiply and divide, the times table up through 12 (I can still remember how proud I was when I first “knew” that $12 \times 12 = 144$!). And then, later on, at a time when we are at a point in life and schooling where it is appropriate, more complicated mathematical concepts can be introduced and taught.

It’s not much different in teaching and learning about faith – we begin with the basics: foundational stories from the Hebrew Scriptures, the Parables of Jesus, the call to “do justice, love

kindness, and walk humbly with our God” as the prophet Micah puts it, or the Great Commandment from Jesus, based on the Shemah as found in the Book of Deuteronomy, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” And then he goes on to add “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (LEV 19:18).

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind – and in some renderings it also says *with all your might*. What does it mean to “love the Lord your God with all your mind?” Does it mean to halt our faith learning curve somewhere back when we were in Sunday School – where things were pretty basic and simple ... or does it mean to nurture the minds we, as people of faith, believe we were given by God, to ever deepening and higher levels of critical thinking and understanding?
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Christian writer and speaker Emily Maynard writes:

“I remember, growing up, how excited I would get that God made the world in six literal days.

I liked going to Creation Group meetings on Saturday mornings because, even though I hated having to talk to strangers, I liked what the speakers said and I got donuts.

I'd dedicate myself to the folded paper newsletters they'd pass out there. Back in the 90s, they featured scratchy scanned photos of people holding up fossils they found in the foothills not too far from my home or carefully reported notes on the latest book explaining that evolution was a trap.

Every winter, when even non-Christians in the northwest were making Noah's Flood jokes about the constant rain, I'd pour over the regional creation conference schedule. I'd carefully read the brochures, picking out the topics I thought would be most interesting.

I liked the ones about dinosaurs.

My favorite speakers spoke passionately about a world divided into clear categories of science and faith. The speakers were always men, of course, because God apparently didn't create women with the logical mind needed for Creation Science. They told us about recent possible-dinosaur sightings in South America. They described

people who were blinded by the devil to participate in a vast conspiracy of carbon dating methods and falsified fossils. They reminded us that if we didn't believe that Genesis was absolutely true, our whole faith would fall.

Later on, in high school, I trained with Christian apologists who taught me the trick questions to undermining evolution in any college Biology class or conversation with an atheist because, after all, it was just a theory.

Of course God made the world in six days, and napped under a tree on the seventh.

That was where I got my security, my assurance that God was in charge and that I believed enough right things in the right way to please him.

Until I stopped believing in all of that.

Over the ... years, my understanding of the world and my experience of God have changed drastically. My knowledge of science and scripture are stretched out, but I didn't lose my faith.

I'm actually excited about the God of the evolutionary process. Separating the creation myths from Genesis and the evolutionary development of the earth makes me more excited about God.

If the earth is really billions of years old, then I can trust that God is patient.

I used to believe in a God who was perpetually angry at humans because we sinned and broke the perfect world he had created. And because I was the worst of sinners, and still messing up as a Christian, it meant that he was angry at me. And he was coming back soon to bring judgment on everyone and everything evil, which also meant me.

It's not surprising that I've had nightmares about the rapture and apocalypse as long as I can remember.

But now I know God's not going to fly off the handle at me if I mess up or if we, as humans, mess up again and again for thousands of years.

Some may be drawn to a God of swift justice, but right now I find peace in and worship a God who is not in a rush. I am intrigued by a

God who breathes into a process and lets it run wild. I am captivated by the idea of a God who is mysterious and so steady, so enamored by small processes, that it would be worth billions of years of waiting for this revelation.

I used to believe in miraculous leaps ahead in life, but I don't see it working like that. I'm intuitive and can fully change direction in an instant, once I've done my research. But most of the miracles in my life have been relatively small illuminations and steady work.

Right now, it amazes me that God doesn't need me to suddenly shape up once and for all, to be fixed and never encounter changes again. It is much more fluid than that.

I have a deep faith in a God who evolves and who invites me to evolve. I am growing trust in a God who is with me in process, not just at the beginning.

I worship a God who not only evolves, but incarnates to become human like us, and in that unspeakably revolutionary act of divine flesh, invites us to be made new.”

Indeed ... may we each “be made new” in our time here together this morning, and in each day that stretches out before us into an ever evolving future, as we attempt, to the best of our abilities, to live our way into our profession of faith in a Still Speaking God when we say (say it with me), “No matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.”

..... And let us pray