**The Biblical Account of Origins**

**by Richard M. Davidson**

Script

Instructions: Advance the PowerPoint slides at every new paragraph and anywhere you see “/”

[1] The Biblical Account of Origins, by Richard M. Davidson

[2] Dr. Davidson’s article focuses on the basic elements in the biblical account of origins, which are summarized in the opening verse of the Bible / the When / Who / how / and what of origins (2x)

[3] This article deals with each of these elements…

[4] …with special emphasis on the “when” and aspects of the other elements that involve the relationship between Scripture and science.

ABSOLUTE OR RELATIVE BEGINNING (don’t read)

[5] The first question involving the “when” of origins asks whether Genesis 1-2 describes an absolute or relative beginning.

[6] The answer depends on the translation of Genesis 1:1.

[7] There are two major translations or interpretations.

[8] The standard translation until recently is an independent clause (in other words, a complete sentence that can stand alone) /—“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This translation implies that God existed before matter, and that He created planet earth “out of nothing.”

[9] In recent decades, some versions have translated Genesis 1:1 as a dependent clause (or a phrase that is not a complete sentence) instead: / “When God began to create the heavens and the earth…”

[10] Let’s compare the two and notice the theological implications: / The independent clause explicitly affirms the concept of creation out of nothing. / The dependent clause does not. /

With the independent clause, God exists before matter. / With the dependent clause, matter is already in existence when God begins to create. / In the standard translation, God creates the heavens, earth, darkness, the deep, and water. / In the more recent translation, these things already exist at the beginning of God’s creative activity. / With the independent clause, there is an absolute beginning of time for the cosmos. / With the dependent clause, there is not. (2x)

[11] The importance of this question boils down to this: does Genesis 1:1 suggest that in the beginning there was just God—or that in the beginning there was something else there with God?

[12] The author of this article prefers the standard translation. Let’s look at the evidence for Genesis 1:1 being an independent clause. / According to Hebrew grammar and syntax, the natural reading of Genesis 1:1 is as an independent clause: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

[13] The short, stylistic structure matches the rest of the chapter.

[14] The theological thrust of a God who transcends matter matches the rest of the chapter.

[15] All the ancient versions use the independent clause.

[16] John 1:1 alludes to Genesis 1:1 and uses the independent clause. “In the beginning was the word…”

[17] From the evidence the author concludes that Genesis 1:1 points toward the traditional translation of Genesis 1:1 and describes an absolute beginning.

LITERAL OR NON-LITERAL (don’t read)

[18] Continuing with the “when” of origins…

[19] The next question asks whether the Genesis account of creation is meant to be taken literally or not.

[20] The answer to this question is important for at least two reasons: / There are many scriptural links between the opening chapters of the OT and the closing chapters of the NT. Without a literal beginning, would we expect there to be a literal ending? / Also, the doctrines of humanity, sin, salvation, judgment, Sabbath, etc., presented already in the opening chapters of Genesis, all hinge upon a literal interpretation of origins.

[21] Let’s examine the evidence for a literal beginning: / The contents of Genesis 1 do not fit into the genres of parable, vision, or liturgy. Walter Kaiser says the best genre designation is historical narrative prose. / The narratives of Genesis 1-2 lack any clues that they are to be taken as something non-literal. / The creation narratives are different than later biblical narratives, but this is because of their subject matter and not their literary form. Although God did an extraordinary work in that week, far transcending anything that has occurred since, it was still a real and literal week, just like we ourselves experience every seven days.

[22] We find other evidence in the literary structure of Genesis as a whole. / The whole book is structured by the word generations. This word appears in each section of Genesis, for a total of 13 times. / This word is used in the setting of genealogies concerned with the accurate account of time and history. / The use of generations in Genesis 2:4 shows that the author intends the creation account to be taken literally.

[23] The use of specific temporal terms in the creation account is evidence that it is to be taken literally. “Evening and morning” at the conclusion of each of the six days of creation clearly defines the nature of the days as literal, 24-hour days. / The use of these words together outside of Genesis 1 invariably and without exception in the OT indicate a literal solar day.

[24] The occurrence of the Hebrew word for day with ordinal numbers, like the first day, second day, third day, etc. elsewhere in Scripture reveals that such usage always refers to literal days. /

References to the function of the sun and moon for signs, seasons, days, and years indicates literal time.

[25] Let’s look at how the creation story has been interpreted elsewhere in Scripture. / The divine Lawgiver Himself, when He was giving the 10 Commandments to Moses unequivocally interprets the first week as a literal week. / “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy…six days shalt thou labor…but the seventh day is the Sabbath…for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is…

[26] Jesus refers to Genesis 1-11 with the underlying assumption that it is literal, reliable history. He specifically refers to Genesis chapters 1-7.

[27] Biblical writers understood the six days of creation as literal./ All NT writers refer to Genesis 1-11, / and every chapter of Genesis 1-11 is referred to somewhere in the NT.

[28] Gerhard Hasel in his article The Days of Creation in Genesis 1 says this: “The author of Genesis 1 *could not have* produced more comprehensive and all-inclusive ways to express the idea of a literal day than the one chosen.

[29] The author concludes: Based upon the testimony of the Genesis account and later intertextual allusions to this account, I must join the host of scholars, ancient and modern—both critical and evangelical—who affirm the literal, historical nature of Genesis 1 and 2, with a literal creation week consisting of six historical, contiguous, creative, natural twenty-four-hour days, followed immediately by a literal twenty-four-hour seventh day, during which God rested, blessing and sanctifying the Sabbath as a memorial of creation.

[30] As many evangelical scholars have moved away from a literal interpretation, critical scholars who do not even believe in the authority of the early chapters of Genesis themselves protest this misinterpretation of the obvious intent of scripture..

[31] Critical scholar, James Barr says this: …so far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer of Genesis 1-11 intended to convey to their readers the idea that creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience…

[32] Another giant in OT scholarship, Gerhard von Rad, says: Everything that is said here [in Genesis 1] is to be accepted exactly as it is written; nothing is to be interpreted symbolically or metaphorically.

[33] One commentary suggests that it is not the text that causes people to think otherwise, only the demands of trying to harmonize with modern science.

[34] (no script—just click past slide 34)

[35] The third “when” question deals with whether there were multiple beginnings or only a single beginning. In other words, is there some kind of time gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3ff?

[36] Translating Genesis 1:2 as “the earth *became* without form and void” has produced the active gap theory in which it is hypothesized that Satan ruled a perfect creation here before his rebellion. / According to this idea, the chaotic state described in verse 2 happened as a result of experimentation by Satan or judgment by God because of Satan’s rebellion.

[37] This theory flounders purely on grammatical grounds. / According to the laws of Hebrew grammar, one must translate “the earth *was* unformed and unfilled,” not “the earth *became* unformed and unfilled.”/ Hebrew grammar leaves no room for the active gap theory.

[38] The traditional view, called the *initial “unformed-unfilled” view* declares that God created “the heavens and earth” out of nothing at the time of their absolute beginning.

[39] The author concurs with this view because it is the only interpretation that cohesively follows the natural flow of the verses, without contradiction or omission of any element of the text.

1. God is before all creation (v 1)
2. There is an absolute beginning of time (v 1)
3. God creates the heavens and earth (v 1) but (at least) the earth is at first different than now—it is unformed and unfilled (v 2)
4. On the first day of the seven-day creation week, God begins to form and fill (vv 3ff)
5. The forming and filling creative activity of God is accomplished in six successive literal twenty-four-hour days
6. At the end of creation week, the heavens and earth are finally finished (Gen. 2:1). What God began in v. 1 is now completed.
7. God rests on the seventh day, blessing and sanctifying it as a memorial of creation (2:1-4)

[40] There is one crucial aspect in this creation process about which it may not be possible to be dogmatic—*when* the absolute beginning of the heavens and earth in v. 1 occurred. / The “no gap” interpretation / sees vv. 1-2 all as part of the first day of the seven-day creation week. / The raw materials described in Genesis 1:1-2 were created on the first day. / The “passive gap” interpretation / says that verses 1-2 go together but are separated from verse 3 by gap of time. / The raw materials were created before—perhaps long before—the seven-day creation week. Both believe God was before any matter. The only question is *when* the absolute beginning occurred.

[41] The author prefers the passive gap interpretation for several reasons. Genesis describes each day of creation week using two phrases. The description of each day begins with “And God said…” and ends with “and there was evening and morning…”

[42] If the description of the first day is consistent with the other five, this would place verses 1-2 outside of the first day.

[43] When the “heavens and earth” appear together (as opposed to the heaven, earth, and sea) it refers to the entire universe. Since Job records that the “sons of God” sang for joy when the foundations of the earth were laid, the beginning of the universe must have pre-dated creation week.

[44] The Hebrew word for beginning used in Genesis 1:1 does not refer to a point in time, but to a period or duration of time which falls before a series of events. So this verse may refer to a process of time during which God created the universe. As a potter or architect first gathers his materials and then at some point later begins shaping the pot or constructing the building, God first created the raw materials and at the appropriate time began to form and fill the earth during the six literal days of creation week.

[45] In the creation account there is an emphasis on God creating by separating previously created materials.

[46] The complementary creation account of chapter 2 reveals such a two-stage process of creation. Beginning with the raw materials—the clay—He formed Adam and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. God also used a two-stage process to create Eve from the raw material of Adam’s rib.

[47] While the author prefers the passive gap theory, he acknowledges a possible openness of Genesis 1:1-2 that allows for either option.

RECENT OR REMOTE BEGINNING? (don’t read)

[48] One final “when” question

[49] asks whether the beginning was recent or remote—in other words, thousands or millions of years ago.

[50] We have no information in Scripture as to how long ago God created the universe as a whole. But there is evidence strongly suggesting that the creation week described in Genesis 1:3-2:4 was recent, sometime in the last several thousand years. / The evidence for this is found primarily in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 which have no parallel among the other genealogies of the Bible or other ancient near eastern literature. / Each patriarch’s life span is described the same way:

* A patriarch lived x years, then begat a son (don’t click)
* After he begat this son, he lived y more years, and begat more sons and daughters (don’t click)
* And all the year of this patriarch were z years (don’t click)

Because of these interlocking features, the lists in Genesis 5 and 11 are often called “chronogenealogies.”

[51] Unlike the other genealogies which often do contain gaps, the “chronogenealogies” indicate that they are to be taken as complete genealogies without gaps. / The Hebrew word translated here as “begat” always refers to actual direct physical offspring. / Scholarly consensus is that the Hebrew Masoretic text has preserved the original figures in their purest form.

[52] A slight disagreement exists among scholars about the length of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt, but other than that discrepancy, Scripture is clear that from Abraham to the present is about 4,000 years. / While the date cannot be calculated exactly, according to Scripture, the six-day creation week unambiguously occurred *recently*, a few thousand years ago—not hundreds of thousands or millions or billions of years ago.

[53] It is totally out of character with the God of the Bible to allow a history of cruelty and pain to go on for long periods of time—millions of years—when it would serve no purpose in the cosmic controversy against Satan. Thus the genealogies, pointing to a recent creation, are a window into the heart of a loving, compassionate God.

WHO (don’t read)

[54] After dealing with several “when” questions, we move on to the “who” of creation

[55] Two different names for God appear in the creation accounts. / In Genesis 1 the name Elohim is used. Elohim is the generic name for an all-powerful God—emphasizing His transcendence. / In Genesis 2, God’s covenant name, Yahweh, is used to emphasize that He is a personal God who enters into intimate relationship with His creatures. Only the Judeo-Christian God is both infinite and personal. Interpretations of these chapters which present God as an accomplice, active or passive, in an evolutionary process of survival of the fittest, millions of years of predation, prior to the fall of humans, must seriously reckon with how these views impinge upon the character of God.

[56] Notice that no proof of God is provided. / God is the ultimate foundation of reality. /

The creation account provides a polemic against the polytheism, moral decadence, rivalry, mortality, and pantheism of the ancient near eastern gods.

[57] There are intimations of the plurality of the Godhead in the creation account. / The Spirit of God is mentioned in Genesis 1:2, / the creative Word appears ten times in Genesis 1, / and Genesis 1:26 says, “Let *us* make man in our image.” / This plurality within the deity, whose character is one of covenant love might shed some light on the “why” of creation—to create other beings with whom He could share fellowship.

HOW (don’t read)

[58] Many would claim that the biblical creation accounts are not concerned with the “how” of creation, but only with the theological point that God created. It is true that Genesis 1-2 provide no technical scientific explanation of the divine creative process, but there is a great deal of attention given to the “how” of divine creation.

[59] The Hebrew word for create in Genesis 1:1 is used exclusively to describe God’s action. It is never used to describe human activity. It always describes something totally new that was effortlessly produced.

[60] Divine fiat emphasizes the centrality of the Word in the creation process. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth…For He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast.

[61] Because of specific terminology used or avoided by Moses, it appears that the Genesis accounts were intended to provide a polemic against the ideas prevalent in Mesopotamian creation texts. Our world did not result from struggle between deities or with the forces of chaos. It did not happen because of sexual activity between the gods. Even the sun and moon were called the “greater light” and “lesser light” to avoid any inclination to worship them as gods.

[62] God created dramatically and aesthetically

[63] forming the unformed on the first three days

[64] and filling the unfilled on the next three days.

[65] The divine artistry of creation within the structure of space and time certainly does not negate the historicity of the creation narrative.

[66] Notice the relationship of day 1 to day 4,

[67] day 2 to day 5

[68] and day 3 to day 6.

WHAT (don’t read)

[69] As previously discussed in detail in the “when” section, a question remains about whether the whole universe or just our earth and solar system were created during the seven-day week of creation.

[70] In addition to the evidence mentioned above, the author notes the definite articles before both heaven and earth in verse 1, but not when heaven and earth appear separately later in the chapter.

[71] There is wide recognition among Genesis commentators that when used together as a pair in the Hebrew Bible, the dyad of terms “the heavens and the earth” refers to the totality of all creation, in other words the whole universe. / It would be like trying to express the idea of everyone by saying the opposite words “young and old” or expressing the idea that you had looked everywhere for something by saying you had looked “high and low”

[72] This contrasts with when heaven, earth, and sea are listed together, which is understood to mean the three basic habitats of earth—the sky, land, and water.

[73] While the author acknowledges that Genesis 1:1-2 allows for either interpretation, he believes the evidence is convincing for the idea that it refers to the creation of the entire universe, prior to the six-day creation week. It implies that God was not indebted to preexisting matter. If the “passive gap” interpretation is correct, then the creation of “the heavens and the earth” during the span of time termed “in the beginning,” encompassed the whole galactic universe, *including* the planet earth in its “unformed and unfilled” condition

[74] “The earth” in verse 2 shifts the focus from the universe to our planet, and the following verses tell the story of the forming and filling of our earth’s three basic habitats during creation week.

[75] A question arises when we notice that God says, “Let there be light” on day one, but the sun is not mentioned until day four. / One explanation says that God’s presence was the source of light for the first 3 days. Evidence for this is found by comparing verse 4 where it says that God divided the light from the darkness and verse 18 where it says that the luminaries divide the light from the darkness. Additional evidence is found in Psalm 104 where God is described as covering Himself with light as with a garment. / Another explanation suggests that the sun was present before but only became visible, was given purpose, or became fully functional on day 4. /

The Hebrew syntax does not require the creation of the stars on day 4, and “He made the stars also” could be correctly considered parenthetical.

[76] The whole process of creating “the heavens and the earth” is finished or completed at the end of the creation week.

[77] Other Issues

[78] About the two creation accounts of Genesis 1-2, the author concludes that they are neither identical nor contradictory but complementary. Beginning in Genesis 2:7 a more detailed account of day six is given, focusing attention on humanity’s personal needs.

[79] About the issue of death/predation before sin, the author says this: Not only is there no death on this world before creation week, but there is no life! Genesis 1:1-2 thus make no room for living organisms to be present upon planet earth before creation week, let alone death and predation.

Dr. Davidson’s article, in its entirety, may be found in the Journal of the Adventist Theological Society.