

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

“In the Nick of Time”

Occasional Essays
and Other Stuff
for Christian
Students

Presented by the
President of

Central Baptist
Theological
Seminary of
Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

✠ ✠ ✠

January 6, 2006

✠ ✠ ✠

The Creation Narratives

Part One: The God Who Creates and Blesses

Have you ever wondered what people did with the opening chapters of Genesis before they had evolution about which to argue? For that matter, have you ever wondered what we would do with the stories of the creation, fall, Cain and Abel, and the flood, if we did not spend so much effort defending their historicity and Mosaic authorship?

One thing we might do is to try to interpret these passages. We might ask ourselves seriously why they are included in the Bible in the first place. The answer to that question could enrich us immeasurably.

We often assume that these chapters are included in the Bible to satisfy our curiosity about origins. “Where did I come from?” is, after all, a perennial question. But these chapters do not seem to provide a compact answer to that question. They contain too much that is not relevant to it. Besides, how often does God reveal something in the Bible simply in order to satisfy our curiosity?

“Where do I come from?” is part of a bigger question, “Who am I?” which in turn dovetails with the questions “Why do I exist?” and “What does it all mean?” These questions together are not only perennial, they are fundamental to our humanity. And the Bible answers all of them by defining our identity in relation to God.

The creation narratives serve as the introduction to the literary corpus that we know as the Pentateuch, or the five books of Moses. These five books constitute a single narrative, a comprehensive literary whole. The entire narrative is focused upon the events that occur at Sinai, and especially upon the giving of the Law. Therefore, a primary concern of the Pentateuch is the character of the God Who reveals the Law.

It is easy to perceive God's Law primarily as punitive. It restricts us from the illicit fulfillment of certain intense desires, and it pronounces judgment upon those who pursue those illicit fulfillments. Sinful people readily come to view the God of the Law as an angry and vengeful being. I think it was Mencken who defined Puritanism as the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, might be happy. That is how many—perhaps most—people perceive the God of Sinai.

The opening chapters of Genesis completely subvert this false perception. From the very beginning, God is depicted as One Who creates what is good. Seven times the opening chapter of Genesis has God declaring that creation is good, concluding with the observation that everything is "very good."

The term "good" is sometimes used of moral uprightness; other times it is used of beneficence or usefulness. In Genesis 1 it almost certainly has the idea of usefulness or beneficence: things like light, trees, birds, and fish are useful. This leads to the question, For whom are such things useful?

The answer to that question also clarifies the focus of the creation narratives. The things God makes are useful for human beings. Those things are good because they are good for humanity. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the apex of the chapter is the creation of humanity. Humans are designed to enjoy the good things that God has made and (more importantly) to enjoy the Creator Who made them.

The notion of goodness and enjoyment is reinforced in three ways. The first is the introduction of the blessing. After God creates humanity as male and female, He blesses them with the capability to be fruitful and multiply, to exercise dominion, and to subdue the earth. The passage is often misread as a mandate, but several reasons exist for taking it as a blessing. First, the language of blessing and the language of command are grammatically identical, so the grammar of this passage could be taken either way. Second, the text bluntly declares that this is a blessing, but it does not call it a mandate. Third, the language is virtually identical to the words God uses in blessing the fish and birds earlier in the chapter, and no responsible interpreter would insist that God is giving a mandate to brute beasts. Fruitfulness, multiplication, dominion, and the subduing of the earth are not a job description but a blessing from God to humans.

The notion of goodness and enjoyment is also reinforced by the Sabbath rest. At the end of the creation week God rested on the seventh day, blessing and sanctifying that day. The connection of God's blessing and sanctification with rest on the seventh day seems to imply that this rest is one of the good things in God's creation. Humans are created in God's image; if God rests, then they, too, should rest. The problem lies in trying to understand what "rest" means.

Clearly it cannot be taken to mean that God was tired and needed to "rest up." God does

not get tired. He did not need to recuperate after a hard week of creation. Some other kind of rest must be in view.

An analogy may be helpful. Think of a man who spends half-a-day mowing the lawn, trimming the hedges, edging the walks, and weeding the flower beds. He is far from exhausted when he finishes, but he goes and pours himself lemonade, plants a chair in the middle of the lawn, and sits down to rest. What is he doing? In what does his rest consist? Not merely in the relief of tired arms legs, but in the opportunity to delight himself in the result of his labors. The new-mown lawn, the crisp edging, the orderly hedges: all of these are a pleasure to his eye, and he takes pleasure in them. He may briefly entertain the thought, "Hey—I'm really good."

This helps us to understand the quality of God's "rest" on the seventh day. He made nothing new; rather, He surveyed what He had done and delighted Himself in it. At that point He might justly and without a bit of conceit entertain the thought that He was a marvelous creator.

By delighting Himself in His works and occupying Himself with His glory, He was setting a pattern for us. For us, "Sabbath rest" (whether it occurs on the seventh day or at some other time) means more than relief from weekly labors. It means pondering God's person, His mighty works, His blessings and gifts. It means recognizing His goodness and glory in all that He has done. It means delighting ourselves in Him and in His good gifts—gifts that might include family, leisure, food and drink, or natural beauty, among others.

Finally, the notion of goodness and enjoyment is reinforced by the fact that God created humanity in His own image and likeness. Of course, theologians debate what that means. At minimum, it appears to imply that humanity is made for companionship with God. God wishes us to enjoy Him and to experience His goodness. That is why He made us.

The God who gave us a good creation is also the God of Sinai. The God Who pronounced blessing upon us is also the God Who gave the Law. From the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, God is depicted as infinitely benevolent. Such a God is worthy of our trust and obedience. ✠

This essay is by [Kevin T. Bauder](#), president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

Discipline

by Henry Vaughan

Fair prince of life, light's living well!
Who has the keys of death and hell!
If the mule man despise thy day,
Put chains of darkness in his way.
Teach him how deep, how various are
The councils of thy love and care.
When acts of grace and a long peace
Breed but rebellion and displeas;
Then give him his own way and will,
Where lawless he may run until
His own choice hurts him, and the sting
Of his foul sins full sorrows bring.
If Heaven and Angels, hopes and mirth
Please no the mole so much as earth:
Give him his mine to dig, or dwell;
And one sad scheme of hideous hell. ✖

Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis | [Contact Us](#)
900 Forestview Ln N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 1-800-827-1043 | www.centralseminary.edu