

WEEK 2.

AUGUST 13, 2023

D i g g i n g D e e p e r

Death as Mercy

Questions about the Chronology of Genesis 1 and 2

by Les Bridgeman

Is Genesis 1 narrating a precise chronological account of how God's act of creation occurred? Are we required to view the days of Genesis 1 as literal 24-hour days that occurred in exactly that order? Some note the apparent chronological differences between Genesis 1 and 2 and conclude, "Of course not."

What are the differences? Here are two.

I.) God's creation of vegetation and humans:

Genesis 1: God creates vegetation (day 3) then humans (day 6).

Genesis 2: God creates man then vegetation (vv. 5–7).

Here are two main ways of harmonizing this difference.

First, translate the Hebrew word *erets* in Genesis 2:5 as land not earth. The ESV takes this approach: "When no bush of the field was yet in the land" (v. 5). That would mean Genesis 2:5-7 is focused only on a particular piece of land where vegetation had not yet grown, and therefore, it does not contradict the order of events in Genesis 1.

It's true that *erets* can = earth or land, but most major versions translate *erets* as earth in verse 5 because in verse 4 it's used to refer to the entire earth.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens (v. 4 NIV).

Notice that the ESV, which translates *erets* as land in verse 5, translates it as earth in verse 4.

4 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. 5 When no bush of the field[a] was yet in the land[b] and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground (vv. 4–5).

(In the footnote the ESV indicates that land can also be translated as earth.)

Second, add the word "had" to Genesis 2:8.

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed (NIV).

The word *had* is not in the Hebrew of Genesis 2:8 and the NIV is unique in adding it. Adding *had* makes it seem like the garden was planted prior to the creation of the man, and therefore, the order of events remains the same as Genesis 1: vegetation then humans.

II.) God's creation of animals and humans:

Genesis 1: God creates animals (first part of day 6), then male and female humans (second part of day 6).

Genesis 2: God creates the man, then animals, then the woman.

Can you think of how to harmonize that chronological difference?

If these differences should stand, perhaps we should not interpret the days of Genesis 1 in a strict chronological fashion. What do you think?

Questions To Ask When Reading The Bible

Sometimes when we read a passage in the Bible it can be confusing or we may not know how to best figure out what it is saying. Below are some good questions to ask when reading the Bible to help make the Bible make sense.

1. What stands out to me?

Note that this does not say “What does this passage mean?” Consider what stood out to you? What did you notice? What did the Holy Spirit highlight for you as you read it?

2. What does the text say about the character/nature of God?

The Scriptures are primarily about God so ask first what the text says about Him before moving to what it says about us, about His plan, or about anything else.

3. What does the text say?

Look at what the text literally says first (this may not be the intent of the text but it is important to look at it as read... at least initially).

4. How is it saying it?

What is the genre of the text and how should we read text in that genre?

5. Why does it say it that way?

Speculate about why the author chose this method of saying what they've said.

6. What is it trying to say?

Getting behind the Scripture, looking at its context, its original audience, its author, etc., what is the text trying to get across to the reader (both the original audience and us today?)

7. How does this fit into the whole of the book and the whole of Scripture?

Looking at the whole book, does what is being said jive with the whole book, with the whole of Scripture?

8. What questions do I have?

Do you have questions about the text? If they aren't answered in the text, are they good questions or are we asking questions that the text isn't meant to answer?

9. How do I feel about this teaching/text? Why do I feel that way?

What does your gut say? Are you frustrated with it? Are you trying to make it say something else than what it says? Does it make you uncomfortable? Where are these feelings coming from? Is there sin in my life I need to repent of?

10. What is the universal application of this text/teaching?

What are we to do with this text? Consider the original audience as well as us today.

11. What is my personal application?

What is God calling you to apply with what you've learned with this text?

12. How will I apply what it calls me to?

Make a plan to apply what God has taught you. Seek to be faithful and obedient to His leading, wherever it may go.