

Creation
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Talking about God and about what we believe or do not believe is sometimes very helpful. But not always. It is like talking about love; when you analyze and rationalize too much you may find out that some of the feeling is gone.

Coming in contact with a person's experience of God is quite different. It is something real, which you may share or not share, but it is a real experience. The Bible is a record of such experience of God, a record of man's growing awareness of God, a record of man's dialogue with God.

Yet in many ways the Bible, especially the Old Testament is not easy to read. In the very first chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, we stumble against a number of inconsistencies and contradictions which come as a shock to our modern thinking.

In Chapter 1, v. 26-28 we find an account of the creation of man. It is described as the next to the last act of a seven-day drama, -- after creating all the plants and the animals, God adds the last touch. Man is referred to in the plural -- "male and female created He them." The implication seems to be that God created them at the same time. But just a short while later, in the next chapter, we find a rather different story. The creation seems to be limited to one day -- "In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens," (2:4) and man is created as a single individual, called Adam. The first woman, Eve, is created out of a rib from his side. These are two people, not necessarily mankind in general.

There are other inconsistencies difficult to understand. Where did Adam and Eve's children find wives and husbands? Isn't it written that Cain went to the "Land of Nod" where he found a wife and where his descendants married too? Doesn't all this imply that there were other people on earth beside the family of Adam and Eve?

Other questions can be raised about the Biblical story of creation from the point of view of modern science. Carbon dating, fossils, evolution, all demonstrate beyond doubt that it took billions of years to create our world. To say that the Biblical days of creation were not days as we know them, but days in God's eyes, is not quite adequate, for the Bible explicitly says "And there was evening and there was morning, one day," and repeats this sentence for each day of creation. In Chapter 5 of Genesis we are given the genealogy of Adam's descendants. The ages to which they lived are quite difficult to believe -- Methuselah, the oldest, lived nine hundred and sixty nine years...

What then do we make of all this? Must we dismiss genesis as an assortment of myths created in order to explain the world, its origins and nature to a people who did not have the benefit of modern science and education? Is it just a story that pre-scientific men

made up in order to explain the beginning of the world and of man, and which we can now safely ignore?

To do this would be a great tragedy. The Bible was not, never meant to be, and should never be understood as “a book of science.” The Bible was not written as an explanation of how the world began. It is not an exact history of the Hebrew people from the beginning of the world up to a few centuries before Jesus Christ. It used what was then known of Hebrew history, it used what the early Hebrews thought about the beginning of the world, but it was saying something different, something infinitely more important. It was trying to record the experiences of God by His chosen people, the Hebrews.

The authors of the Bible saw that there was something underneath the surface of life. They saw into this depth, they saw the mystery of life and the divine Presence in it. The Old Testament penetrated further into the mystery of “what God is” than any other religion of its time. Pagan religions saw the beginning of man as the result of some great battle between monsters or gods; human events are the angry wake churned up as these mythical figures pass by. Gods were supernatural monsters on every hilltop. They invaded each other’s territories, got jealous when a man moved from one hill to another, fought each other. The only way to escape the unpleasantness and suffering caused by all this was for men to offer sacrifices, often human sacrifices, or to hold extravagant rituals to appease, or pay off the gods.

Compare with this the experience and vision of God presented in the Old Testament: One Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth, Maker of man, and Ruler of the world. This God cares for man, and he cares for man’s answering love and obedience, freely given. If He became angry at man, it was only because man failed God’s hopes for Him. This God was god of the whole world, not just of this or that hilltop, of fire, or water, or woods. The life of the Hebrews was not determined by side effects of battles between supernatural monsters. They were God’s chosen people, chosen by the God of everything, to represent His truth, which so far they alone had perceived.