

“Finding God in the Waves: If the Bible Is True, What About Dinosaurs?”
Genesis 1

Like it or not, we live in a time of “alternative facts.” This means that opinion could matter more than scientific facts. Even when we are presented with evidence to the opposite of what we believe, it tends to make us hold onto our beliefs more strongly. People even do that with faith and the Bible. Even though the scientific facts are that the world is a lot older than what the Bible presents, there are people who insist on making such disagreements go away. Here is an example. This is from the Creation Museum in Kentucky. It was established in 2007 trying to present what they call “scientific evidence” as to show how the accounts of creation in Genesis are factually true: <https://youtu.be/YyGHsMeljGs>.

In addition to the obvious lack of credible science behind such a project, the problem with such efforts is that they reduce truth to what can be mastered and controlled. This leads to claims such as, “If the Bible is not literally and factually true, then none of it is true.” This also creates such cognitive dissonance for those who try to reconcile all the “scientific errors” in the Bible.

A great example of this struggle comes from author Mike McHargue in his book *Finding God in the Waves: How I lost my faith and found it again through science*. His love for facts came into direct conflict with the literal way he was taught to read the Bible in his church. As he started reading the Bible, he had a very hard time not getting stuck on the scientific conflicts it contained. Here are few of the things he wrestled with:

“The first problem I had was with the idea of God creating a ‘firmament’ and calling it heaven. When I looked up what a firmament was, I found out that the ancients believed it to be either a vast dome or a series of interlocking plates that separated Earth from the heavens. The stars, they posited, were holes in the firmament where the light of heaven shone through, and these same holes were the source of rain and snow. But we’ve been into space. There is no firmament in the heavens.” Then he had a hard time with the trees being created before the stars because according to science stars were there first. “Our planet is a spritely 4.5 billion years old in a universe that has existed for close to 14 billion years.” With this kind of struggle, Mike found himself saying, “Less than a day into my Bible-reading plan, I was already discouraged.” Getting to chapter 2 of Genesis also proved to be a challenge as he realized that the sequence of events was different. In Genesis 1, we are told that God made plants, then animals, then people. In Genesis 2, we are told that God made Adam, then plants, and then animals, and finally, Eve.

Mike McHargue’s struggle with reading the Bible is not unique. Many people have abandoned their faith or don’t see any value in faith because they can’t reconcile such contradictions and issues between science and faith. Today, I believe that the way we read the stories of creation can help us with developing a lens for seeing the world from a more expansive perspective. By learning to approach reality in different ways and with openness to different possibilities, we open our hearts, minds, and lives to God’s transformative power. Richard Rohr writes this, “Literalism is invariably the lowest and

least level of meaning. For deep readers, sacred texts open up the endless possibilities for life and love. For people who merely want to be right or to seek power, sacred texts are normally a disaster. Our Jewish ancestors called the deeper approach midrash, extrapolating from the story to find the truest message(s). The immature approach is obvious when scriptures are used to justify slavery, apartheid, Western capitalism, nationalism, consumerism, and almost any other ism that serves our egocentricity.”

Rohr encourages a more expansive way of reading the Bible which eventually leads us to see reality not just through our minds, but also to look deeply into the spiritual realms of our existence. “Unknown to many post-Reformation Christians, early centuries of Christianity --through authoritative teachers like Origen, Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, and Gregory the Great--encouraged as many as seven ‘senses’ of Scripture. The literal, historical, allegorical, moral, symbolic, eschatological (the trajectory of history and growth), and ‘primordial’ or archetypal (commonly agreed-upon symbolism) levels of a text were often given serious weight among scholars. These levels were gradually picked up by the ordinary Christian through Sunday preaching (as is still true today) and presumed to be normative by those who heard them.

These different senses of Scripture were sometimes compared to our human senses of hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, and touching, which are five distinct ways of knowing the same thing, but in very different languages. After both the Reformation and the Enlightenment, Western Europeans reduced our ways of knowing to one, for all practical purposes, the supposedly rational/literal/historical. We have largely compacted and limited the Bible to this single sense for several centuries now, in both its Catholic and Protestant forms. Our bandwidth of spiritual access to the Bible was consequently severely narrowed, it seems to mean, as many would say, to the least spiritually helpful level. That something supposedly literally happened in one exact way, in one moment of time, does not, of itself, transfer the experience to now, me, or us. I believe that such transference is the transformative function of any spiritual text.”

The more we practice this kind of knowing, the more we are able to enter more deeply into our human experience. We will practice this in two different ways. First, we will read the scripture for today and try to engage it metaphorically and allegorically.

We will read Genesis 1 together, using the Voice translation of this passage. You will be the voice of God. I will be the narrator.

Narrator: In the beginning, God created everything: the heavens above and the earth below. Here’s what happened: At first the earth lacked shape and was totally empty, and a dark fog draped over the deep while God’s spirit-wind hovered over the surface of the empty waters. Then there was the voice of God.

God: Let there be light.

Narrator: And light flashed into being. God saw that the light was beautiful and good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God named the light “day” and the darkness “night.” Evening gave way to morning. That was day one.

God: Let there be a vast expanse in the middle of the waters. Let the waters above part from the waters below.

Narrator: So God parted the waters and formed this expanse, separating the waters above from the waters below. It happened just as God said. And God called the vast expanse sky.” Evening gave way to morning. That was day two.

God: Let the waters below the heavens be collected into one place and congregate into one vast sea, so that dry land may appear.

Narrator: It happened just as God said. God called the dry land “earth” and the waters congregated below “seas.” And God saw that the new creation was beautiful and good.

God: Earth, sprout green vegetation! Grow all varieties of seed-bearing plants and all sorts of fruit-bearing trees.

Narrator: It happened just as God said. The earth produced vegetation, seed-bearing plants of all varieties and fruit-bearing trees of all sorts. And God saw that the new creation was beautiful and good. Evening gave way to morning. That was day three.

God: Lights, come out! Shine in the vast expanse of heavens sky dividing day from night to mark the seasons, days, and years. Lights, warm the earth with your light.

Narrator: It happened just as God said. God fashioned the two great lights the brighter to mark the course of day, the dimmer to mark the course of night and the Divine needled night with the stars. God set them in heavens sky to cast warm light on the earth, to rule over the day and night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that the new creation was beautiful and good. Evening gave way to morning. That was day four.

God: Waters, swarm with fish and sea creatures. Let birds soar high above the earth in the broad expanse of sky.

Narrator: So God created huge sea creatures, all the swarm of life in the waters, and every kind and species of flying birds each able to reproduce its own kind. And God saw that the new creation was beautiful and good. And God spoke this blessing over them:

God: Be fruitful and multiply. Let creatures fill the seas. Let birds reproduce and cover the earth.

Narrator: Evening gave way to morning. That was day five.

God: Earth, generate life! Produce a vast variety of living creatures, domesticated animals, small creeping creatures, and wild animals that roam the earth.

Narrator: It happened just as God said. God made earth-creatures in a vast variety of species: wild animals, domesticated animals of all sizes, and small creeping creatures,

each able to reproduce its own kind. God saw that the new creation was beautiful and good. And God paused.

God: Now let Us conceive a new creation, humanity, made in Our image, fashioned according to Our likeness. And let Us grant them authority over all the earth, the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, the domesticated animals and the small creeping creatures on the earth.

Narrator: So God did just that. He created humanity in His image, created them male and female. Then God blessed them and gave them this directive: Be fruitful and multiply. Populate the earth. I make you trustees of My estate, so care for My creation and rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that roams across the earth.

Narrator: The crown of God's creation is a new creature, a creature that can sound the heartbeat of its Creator. That creature, made male and female, reflects God's own relational richness. The human family is to join God in the ongoing work of creation. The earth below and the sky above with all their inhabitants are too beautiful and too good to be left alone. They need the tender care and close attention that only God's favored creature can give.

God (to humanity): Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant that grows on the earth and every fruit-bearing tree. They will be your food and nourishment. As for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and every small creeping creature, everything that breathes the breath of life, I have given them every green plant for food.

Narrator: And it happened just as God said. Then God surveyed everything that had been made, savoring its beauty and appreciating its goodness. Evening gave way to morning. That was day six.

What are some patterns we notice in this story? Everything was created good. The word good is repeated seven times in Genesis 1. The work of each day of creation was pronounced good by God, including the creation of human beings. God is the creator of it all. Everything was connected to God and to each other.

What allegorical truth (symbols and types) might this story be telling? A story of original blessing. A story about our connections. A story about our common source. A story about the balance of things in nature. "Notable proponents of allegorical interpretation include the Christian theologian Origen, who wrote in the 2nd century that it was inconceivable to consider Genesis literal history; Augustine of Hippo, who in the 4th century, on theological grounds, argued that God created everything in the universe in the same instant, and not in six days as a plain reading of Genesis would require; and the even earlier 1st-century Jewish scholar Philo of Alexandria, who wrote that it would be a mistake to think that creation happened in six days or in any determinate amount of time." (Wikipedia) How does this speak to our reality today in the world?

The second practice today is about something you are experiencing in your life right now. First, try to recall the experience with some of its details. Then pay attention to how you normally look at it. Second, ask: God, where are you in this experience for me? What is stirring within me about this experience? Where do I experience peace about this situation? Where do I experience anxiety? What am I attached to? What am I afraid of? Where are you leading me?

We will end with a reading from science and religion scholar Karl Giberson in his book *Seven Glorious Days*. Using biblical imagery and vivid metaphors Giberson recasts the Genesis creation story within the framework of the latest ideas from modern science. *Seven Glorious Days* takes the reader on a grand ride through the history of the universe, from the Big Bang to the origin of stars and planets, to the appearance of living creatures bearing the image of God. Here it is:

"In the beginning God created all that is. The Logos of creation, out of which the heavens and the earth and all things within them burst forth, was the pattern of God's purpose from which everything would emerge and toward which everything would evolve. And there was evening and morning, beginning and ending, of the first epoch of creation. And God saw that it was Good.

Then God said, "Let matter emerge, with precisely defined properties that will empower the development of everything else in the universe, laying a secure foundation for changes that will eventually lead to living creatures, following the patterns laid down by the Logos." And there was evening and morning, beginning and ending, of the second epoch of creation. And God saw that it was Good.

Then God said, "Let the matter be gathered into stars that they may shine forth, creating life-giving chemicals, providing light to decorate the night and energy to sustain future plant life. And let these stars create gravitational centers about which planets can safely revolve, following the patterns laid down by the Logos." And there was evening and morning, beginning and ending, of the third epoch of creation. And God saw that it was Good.

Then God said, "Let planets of every imaginable size and composition emerge, traveling in precise and predictable orbits about their suns. And let some of these planets be located in temperate zones around their suns, covered with water over which my spirit will hover and call forth life, following the patterns laid down by the Logos." And there was evening and morning, beginning and ending, of the fourth epoch of creation. And God saw that it was Good.

Then God said, "Let the waters bring forth living creatures in abundance. Let all manner of living things fill the seas and move onto the land and into the air. Let life find, create, and occupy every imaginable niche, maximizing the variety and diversity of possibilities. And let all creatures be empowered to reproduce and respond creatively to changes in their environments, following the patterns laid down by the Logos." And there was evening

and morning, beginning and ending, of the fifth epoch of creation. And God saw that it was Good.

Then God said, "Let life grow steadily in its capacity to understand and experience the world at the deepest level and to discover the nature and origins of its own existence. And let life develop its own creative capacities so that the world may be filled with great novelty and rich experiences for all its creatures, following the patterns laid down by the Logos." And there was evening and morning, beginning and ending, of the sixth epoch of creation. And God saw that it was Good. Amen.