



MUST KNOW BIBLE STORIES

stories worth exploring

Understanding Christian Belief
in the Creation Account
and FAQs

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What Christians believe about how the universe began

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1:1). The opening verse of the Bible contains a central claim of both Judaism and Christianity: that the entire cosmos has a beginning, a reason for being – God made it.

Genesis as a book: part of a wider story, and very old!

Genesis is the first of the five books of the Bible known as the Pentateuch ('five books' in Hebrew). The traditional view is that all five books were written by Moses. We don't know exactly when Moses lived, but many scholars think he was around in 13thC BC. So the book of Genesis is over 3,000 years old.

Genesis is a book about God, not a science book

The Bible is a book about God. Genesis is a product of the religious background of the Ancient Near East, not our scientific modernist background. Genesis should not therefore be read as a scientific textbook. The author was not concerned with the type of chronology with which we are familiar: so for example, the fact that the sun and the moon are created after water and flora (which we know scientifically cannot exist without each other) does not trouble the author. Genesis itself gives a different creation order in Genesis 2, cautioning against a literal reading of the text.

The Context of Genesis: The Ancient Near East

People in the Ancient Near East believed that there were different gods, who were in control of different parts of the natural world. Genesis 1 declares instead that there is only one God, who made all things and is in control of all things.

The whole Cosmos is a temple in which God is worshipped

One way of understanding the structure of Genesis 1 is that it is a temple narrative. In the Ancient Near East, people made temples in which to worship their gods. These temples were dedicated in ceremonies lasting 7 days. The final act of the ceremony was to place an idol – an image – of the god in the temple, to represent the presence of the

god. Read this way, the Bible is saying that the whole cosmos is a temple. In this temple – the whole cosmos – God is to be worshipped. At the centre of this cosmos temple are the image bearers of God – humans. As image bearers of God, humans are to reflect who God is to the entire cosmos.

The value and purpose of human life

In Ancient Near East religions humans had a lowly place. The important characters were the gods. According to these religions, the gods created humanity to wait on their needs. Thus, humans are only valuable as slaves of the gods. In these religions, it was really important for the humans to keep the gods happy, so that things might go well for them.

Against this, Genesis stresses the value of humans to God, and the centrality of relationship with God. God has no needs. Instead, humans are created as image bearers of God, placed into a world that overflows with life, and living under the blessing of God. The tasks given to humanity by God use language that speaks of kingship (to rule and subdue) and priesthood (to tend and to keep): human beings are kings and queens – they are given authority by God over the whole earth – and they are priests and priestesses – they are to be worshippers.

Many Christians take different views on the creation accounts

Some Christians read Genesis literally – that the world was created in exactly this order, in seven actual days. Other Christians read Genesis more figuratively.

FAQs

Children ask big questions which we should celebrate! Asking questions is how we find out about ourselves, others and the world around us. Questions about God and the Bible may seem daunting or we may worry about giving the wrong answer, so we hope that some of these answers below will help you enjoy the question time with your students.

It is important to remember as you use these suggested answers that there is a big variety among Christians in their answers to these questions. Often, we may not find the ‘right’ answer but as we chat about our answers together we can discover more about the Bible and what Christians believe about God.

Creation 'big' questions

1. **Who made God?**

This is a question by lots of lots of people for thousands of years, people have studied the question at university and written books about it, so you are in very good company! When we make things, we are bigger and greater than the thing we make, which might help us think about God. If someone made God then that thing would be the greatest, and this would go on and on! Christians believe that God is the greatest because no one made him. The Bible explains it by saying that he has always been and always will be.

2. **Why did God make the bad stuff too?**

This is a question that lots of people ask and is one of the questions that we really struggle with and it makes people wonder if God is real. In the Bible it says that everything God made was good, he didn't make the bad stuff. However, when he made people, he made them good and part of that was being able to make our own choices about things. Life would be very dull, and terrible, if we were just like robots and couldn't wonder, or choose, or question, or decide! The problem with this is that we often choose things that are part of the bad stuff, we hurt people by what we say, or by not doing something we could have done to help someone. Sometimes people choose to do things that don't just hurt a few people but whole countries or big groups of people. Choice is a great gift but also a great responsibility.

3. **What about the dinosaurs?**

It is important to remember that the Bible is not a science book, and it doesn't answer all our questions. It doesn't mention dinosaurs, or the ice age, or other things that we know are part of our world's history. The Bible is a book that was written to show us what God is like, who we are, and how we can get to know him, because something isn't mentioned doesn't mean it didn't happen!

4. **Why is the order wrong/different – e.g. dark and light before the sun and moon.**

This links in to the question about dinosaurs. The Bible is not a science book and the story of creation is not a detailed account of how the world was made but it is written to show why it was made and to show us what the God who made it is like, it is more like a poem than a text book.