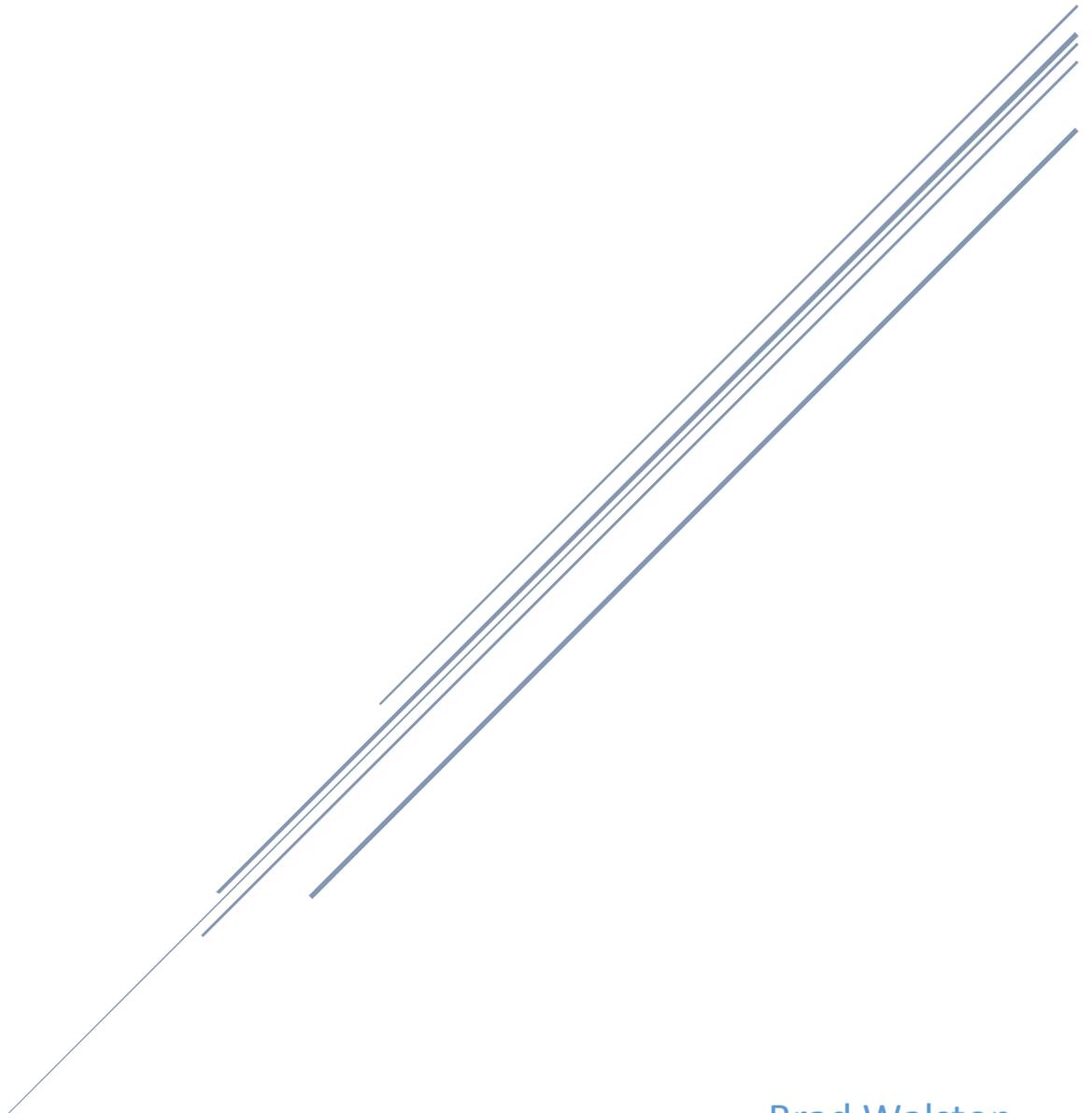


CREATION CONVERSATIONS

Genesis 1:1-2:3



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A surgeon, an engineer, and a politician were arguing over whose profession was first established on earth. "Mine was," said the surgeon. "The Bible says that Eve was made by carving a rib out of Adam."

"Not at all," said the engineer. "An engineering job came before that. In six days the earth was created out of chaos. And that was an engineer's job."

"Yes," said the politician. "But who created the chaos?"

In the beginning....

What a beautiful way to begin a story, don't you think? And that's just what it is – a story. Not that there isn't an awful lot of truth to it, as there is with many stories – it is, after all, the inspired word of God -- but here are some things I believe about the Bible, particularly the Creation Story.

Let's say your 5-year old comes to you and asks that dreaded question: "Where do babies come from?"

What to tell him/her? Do you go into all the biology and the science about who puts what where, and how, going into all the detail about the miracle of conception? Or do you give them the simple version, maybe even making up a few things just so they'll get on with their day? Uhh...the stork brought you!

Now your 5-year old is 15, and not likely to ask YOU for this information, but if they did, what would say then? My dad used to say, "You've heard of the birds and the bees? Well, people do the same thing."

Would you tell them the same simple story that you told them when they were 5? The stork brought you – they'd never believe it, and their faith in you as a knowledgeable and trustworthy adult would plummet. My point is that your explanation is radically different to a 5-year old than to a 15-year old. Try explaining algebra to a 5-year old – or a 15-year old – or even to an adult! I never understood algebra – maybe I just never cared what 'x' equals, or why it mattered.

That's how I look at the creation story in Genesis. Imagine God trying to explain the creation of the world to a bunch of Bronze Age nomads. I mean, they haven't even invented the wheel yet.

I have always thought that the information in Scripture is on a need to know basis. When we need to know something, God makes a way for us to know it – like science, maybe. I have always had the distinct feeling that we don't really NEED to know all about the creation of the earth. Besides there are other, more important things to focus on, don't you think?

Etiology is the study of origins, the study of why things occur, or even the reasons behind the way that things act. An **etiological myth** is a [myth](#) intended to explain a name or create a mythic history for a place or family.

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,” is a great way to start an etiological myth. Remember that when this was written – supposedly by Moses, but most scholars doubt that Moses actually wrote it. When this was written, the earth was flat and the heavens, or ‘sky’ as we like to call it now, was a dome over the flat earth with the stars attached to it. Sometimes we hear the word ‘firmament’ used. The Hebrew word for this is *raqia* (pronounced *ra-KEE-ah*). Biblical scholars understand the *raqia* to be a solid dome-like structure. It separates the water into two parts, so that there is water above the *raqia* and water below it (v. 7). The waters above are kept at bay so the world can become inhabitable. On the third day (vv. 9-10), the water below the *raqia* is “gathered to one place” to form the sea and allow the dry land to appear.

The Ancient Israelites “saw” this barrier when they looked up. There were no telescopes, space exploration, or means of testing the atmosphere. They relied on what their senses told them. Even today, looking up at a clear sky in open country, the sky seems to “begin” at the horizons and reaches up far above. Ancient Israelites and others in that part of the world assumed the world was flat, and so it looked like the earth is covered by a dome, and the “blue sky” is the “water above” held back by the *raqia*.

Biblical scholars agree on this understanding of *raqia*. But some Christians find this troubling. How can the Bible, which is the inspired, revealed word of God, contain such an inaccurate piece of ancient nonsense? So they invest a lot of time and energy to show that the *raqia* is not solid but more like the atmosphere. Often, the word “expanse” is the preferred translation because it does not necessarily imply something solid.

The article goes on to say that arguing for a non-solid *raqia* in Genesis is extremely problematic, for two reasons. First, the biblical and extrabiblical data indicate that *raqia* means a solid structure of some sort. The second problem becomes a larger theological issue, but is actually more foundational. Regardless of what one thinks of the *raqia*, *why would anyone assume that the ancient etiological story in Genesis should jive with modern science in the first place?*

This second issue *creates* a conflict where there doesn’t need to be one. The debate exists because of the assumption made by some Christians that the ancient biblical description of the world *has to* be compatible on a scientific level with what we know today. I don’t think that makes any sense. Genesis and modern science are neither enemies nor friends, like apples and oranges, they’re simply two different ways of describing the world *according to the means available to the people living at these different times*.

Remember, like trying to explain sex to a 5-year old, God *always* speaks in ways that people can actually understand, especially with stuff that's so hard to understand! Remember what Paul writes to the church at Corinth: "...I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?" I'm pretty sure that's what God was doing with the creation story.

In the ancient world, people held certain views about the world around them that are reflected in Genesis and throughout the Bible.

So, "What the heck?!?" -- "Why bother?" -- If the creation stories in Genesis are just so much hogwash, what's the point?

The point is that there's always something to be learned from any given scripture passage. I am fascinated by the repetition of the phrase, "Let there be..."

Let there be light. Let there be a firmament (or dome). Let the waters be gathered. Let there be lights in the dome. Let the waters and the earth bring forth critters of every kind. Every task that God undertakes in the creation of the world begins with Let it, or let them.... It reminds me of that Beatles' song, "Let it Be."

It's like saying "Be still and know that that I am God." Really. This whole story is about the mind and imagination of God. It's about the all-powerful God in whom we can trust with our lives and our hopes and our dreams. This God who, like a father, can fix all our broken dreams – and give us new ones – if only we'll just be still and let it be. Let God be God.

Al-Anon is the support group for friends and family of alcoholic/addicts. My mother always said that the biggest thing she learned in Al-Anon that saved her life, was that "There is a God, and you ain't it!"

If God is big enough and creative enough to form the entire universe out of nothing, then isn't this same God big enough to handle all my problems, and then some? God's got some pretty big shoulders...

God saw everything that God had made and, indeed, it was very good. And you know what God did then? God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it, and then rested. On that day God let it be. He let it all be.

So I think we would do well to remember that these stories come from long ago and far away and while some of the truths never change, some do. There are things in the Bible that we know today to be wrong. Simply wrong – it's obvious to us: slavery, no eating pork or shellfish, the list goes on. The truth that these stories spoke to the people of the Bronze Age are different

than the truth they speak to us in many ways, but the truth that doesn't change is the one that says God is big enough to handle everything in your life.