

Scripture - Genesis 1 Seven Days of Creation
Part 3 - Meaning: Who Gets to Say What the Bible Means?
(Hermeneutics & Authorial Intent)

This fall for our Bible study we're asking - what is the Bible? So we're asking all these fun, hard questions about the Bible that the Bible asks and answers about itself. The question today is about meaning: Who gets to say what the Bible means?

Problem: Have you ever shared something from the Bible with someone and their response is, *"Well, that's just your interpretation"*? When talking about what the Bible means some people will say the Bible can mean different things to different people and nobody's wrong. *"Well you've got your interpretation of the Bible and I've got my interpretation of the Bible and none of us can say who's right and wrong. To you the Bible means one thing but to me the Bible means something else BUT we're both still right."*

Answers: The problem with that problem is that if the Bible can mean many different things at the same time then it can mean anything AND if the Bible can mean anything then it really means nothing. This is a way of saying, *"The Bible means whatever I want it to mean,"* which means you become the LORD over the Bible.

Do your friends ever misunderstand what you meant by your text? Has anyone ever twisted something you said or wrote and then accused you of saying something you never meant to say? How frustrating is that?

If the author of a book of the Bible is saying something to us then it's the author who gets to say what he means, not us. If God is saying something to us in the Bible then it's God, not us, who gets to say what he means. It's our job to listen and hear him best we can. If God is talking to us in the Bible then

you don't want to misunderstand him or twist his words to say whatever you want.

In one of the apostle Paul's earliest letters in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 he says the church "received" the gospel as the Word of God. That means you don't get to take his Word and make it say whatever you want it to say. You receive it for what it is.

In one of the apostle Paul's last letters in 2 Timothy 2:15 he says, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, **rightly handling the word of truth.**" We have a responsibility to interpret the Bible right.

[Hermeneutics] This fall we're talking about all these methods of interpreting the Bible and understanding what the author meant to say. Like you have to read the Bible as the divinely inspired word of God. And, you have to read it like it is inerrant and infallible. Another basic method of interpreting the Bible that sounds really obvious (but isn't to everybody!) is trying to understand what the AUTHORS of the Bible meant by what they wrote! This is called **authorial intent**.

[Grammatical-Historical] To get at the author's intent you've got to do some grammatical-historical interpreting. Think grammar-history method. What might that method focus on?

Grammar - Think about the grammar. Is it a narrative? Or poetry? Are there words that are repeated in the passage? Are there words you don't understand the meaning of?

History - Think about the history of the book of the Bible you're reading. What period of time is it talking about? Who wrote it? Moses, Paul? Who is the author writing to?

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Most basically the history grammar method is focused on context! We don't rip words out of context! Context is king.

Let's look at Genesis 1 and ask: what is the author telling us about creation?

[Grammar] Let's start simple and start with the grammar, the language, the plain reading - start with v.1. What does the author tell us? God created everything. God is the Creator. There are no other creators or gods.

[Days 1-3] Read vv.2-5: What does God create Day 1? Day and night.
Read vv.6-8: What does God create Day 2? Water and sky.
Read vv.9-13: What does God create Day 3? Dry land and vegetation/trees.

What word is repeated over and over in Days 1-3 when God is creating?

Separating! Day 1 God **separates** day and night. Day 2 he **separates** waters below (seas) from waters above (clouds and sky). Day 3 he **separates** waters from dry ground. The author is telling us God is creating by separating; separating and creating boundaries between these different **realms** of day/night, waters/sky, and dry land.

[Days 4-6] Read vv.14-19: What does God create Day 4? Sun, moon, stars.
Read vv.20-23: What does God create Day 5? Fish and birds.
Read vv.24-31: What does God create Day 6? Animals and man.

What do days 4-6 have to do with days 1-3? Do they match up? Do they go together?
Day 4 the sun, moon, stars rule over the realm of Day 1 day and night. Day 5 the fish

and the birds rule the sea and the sky of Day 2. Day 6 the animals and mankind rule over dry land of Day 3. The author tells us that God created **rulers** of days 4-6 to rule over the **realms** of day 1-3.

But, how much more does mankind rule than all the other rulers?
Man rules over his realm of dry ground; but also over all other realms and all other rulers.

[Day 7] But that is not the end of the story. Read Genesis 2:1-3 (Day 7). If man is ruler over the realms and all other rulers, what does Day 7 say about God?
The 7th Day says God is the King of Kings and the King of heaven and earth.

SO, what is Genesis 1 affirming?
In God's creation there are **realms** and **rulers**; there are **kingdoms** and there are **kings**.

Do you think the author of Genesis 1 is focused on the number of days or the length of days or what he created in chronological order? Bunch of problems with that. E.g. he creates day and night on day 1 but he doesn't create the sun, moon, or stars until day 4 so where does the light come from on day 1? No! The author wants to talk about kingdoms and kings. The author of Genesis 1 did not organize his telling of creation chronologically but THEMATICALLY.

[History] Let's talk history too! So are we saying Genesis 1 is not history?
No! Genesis 1 is NOT legendary, it is not mythical. It is history, but it's told in epic style.¹ The author means to give his account

¹ The ESV Literary Study Bible argues the literary genre of Gen 1 is the epic tradition. "A long narrative having the following characteristics:

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a very particular structure; a very particular design, a very particular framework, and it's a work of genius. His framework groups creation into two triads of days that parallel realms/kingdoms with their rulers/kings.

REALM/KINGDOM	RULER/KING
1 Day & night	4 Sun, moon, stars
2 Waters & sky	5 Fish & birds
3 Dry ground	6 Animals & man

[Grammar] Back to grammar real quick - is there any chronology in Genesis 1? Yes! The build up to the 7th day is crucial. God works for 6 days and then what does he do on the 7th day? What important pattern is the author of Genesis telling us about?

When God's work is completed, on day 7, he rests. The pattern is: WORK then REST.

What does that pattern have to do with man?

God gives this pattern to man to follow. God tells man to imitate him in his work (1:28ff): multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, have dominion and reign over all the kingdoms and kings. Remember God creates Adam in his own image which means man is supposed to imitate God. And the pattern God lays out for Adam is simple: 1) Do your work and 2) then you get to rest. Adam was given a work to do that would have led to God's 7th day eternal rest of glory.

expansiveness and grandness; the story of a nation or group, not simply an individual; a unifying hero; motifs of warfare, conquest, kingdom, rulership; presence of supernatural characters and events); exalted style. Epics are very important to societies; they sum up what a whole culture wants to say about itself and life."

Adam failed but did someone else do the work for us? Yes! Jesus, the second Adam, did the work the first Adam was supposed to do. AND, he paid the penalty for Adam's sin and ours on the cross.

[History] Back to history to end - does the Bible say Adam and Eve were historical people?

Yes! The Bible says God specially created Adam and Eve as real, historical individuals (Rom 5:12-14; 1Cor 15:21-22, 45-49), and it denies that Adam and Eve were products of evolution from lower forms of life. Adam, the first man, represented all mankind for good or bad before God. He failed. Jesus is the second Adam who represents all his people for good because he did what the first Adam failed to do and paid the penalty of sin for us.

So, who wrote Genesis? Moses.

And, who wrote Genesis? God.

What other books did Moses write? Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

Of all five of those books, which did Moses write first?

Exodus!!! Moses and Israel live and experience all the stuff of Exodus from their slavery in Egypt, to the 10 plagues, to the Exodus, to the parting of the Red Sea and defeat of the Egyptian army, to the giving of the 10 commandments and God making Israel his kingdom on earth. Moses wrote Exodus first to reveal to all Israel that YHWH is their Savior. God then inspires Moses to write Genesis to reveal to Israel that the God who saved them is also the one God of all creation, the King of Kings, the King of heaven and earth, and there are no others.