

Bible Study: Genesis 1

General Observations about the Six Days of Creation

The first question that comes to mind is whether these are actual days or not. Some people think that if these were not actual days, then the literal interpretation of Genesis is lost. At the same time, people try to reconcile it with the modern theory of evolution and think that these days must be millions or billions of years old.

God could have of course willed these days to be 24 hours long. The Fathers generally say nothing on the subject. Only one or two fathers (Saint Ephraim the Syrian, for example) say that these were precise days.

While science explains natural processes, we have to remember that the Six Days of Creation are not a natural process. They came before all the world's natural processes began to work. The laws of our natural world today are not really relevant, because in these six days, nature itself was being made.

Therefore, we need to keep in mind a few points:

1. Our focus should be theological and not necessarily scientific. We focus here on the creative acts of God.
2. The events of these days are miraculous and not subject to the laws of nature that now govern the world.
3. The creative acts of God did not require twenty-four hours, but occurred in an instant, according to the Fathers of the Church. Although each creative act is instantaneous, the whole creation consists of an orderly sequence of these creative acts. Saint John Chrysostom teaches us that God did not create everything in a single day or in an instant, but that we might learn His love for mankind in seeing all the details of creation.

The First Day (Genesis 1:1-5)

“In the beginning” reminds us of Him Who is the beginning of all things. In Christ, God created heaven and earth because *all things were made through Him and without Him was made nothing that was made* (John 1:3).

The Trinity as a whole creates: the Father commands, the Son creates, and the Spirit participates as He “moves” or “hovers” over the waters. In creative power, they are all equal.

We see an order in creation. The foundation is created first, and then elements.

Also, the light that appeared had nothing to do with sun, since the sun was in fact created on the fourth day.

Each stage of God’s work is called “good.”

The Second Day (Genesis 1:6-8)

In its general meaning, the “firmament” is more or less synonymous with “heaven” or “sky.” The “firmament” was never viewed as a crystal dome or sphere, or anything like that. The “firmament” is not, however, synonymous with the heaven mentioned on the first day. This heaven has a more solid nature. It is some kind of natural barrier or filter that separates two levels of atmospheric moisture. We do not observe this phenomenon today.

Saint Basil believes that its function was to preserve a mild temperature over the whole earth. We do know of a certain “greenhouse” effect on the earth in prehistoric times: tropical plants and animals have been found in the ice of the far north, indicating that the northern regions were indeed once temperate. Also, in Genesis 2, we read that the Lord had not caused it to rain upon the earth, but there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

The Third Day (Genesis 1:9-13)

Here, God does not merely create seeds or a potentiality for growth, but the actual creations that we know.

The Fourth Day (Genesis 1:14-19)

This day proves that the Six Days of Creation cannot fit into an evolutionary framework. Some say that the sun was actually created on the first day and only appeared on the fourth day in order to fit the evolutionary model. However, we are not free to rearrange the Days of Genesis to fit our theories. The Fathers are unanimous in affirming that the sun and the heavenly luminaries were *created* on the Fourth Day, and did not merely appear. Saint John Chrysostom writes, “He created the sun on the Fourth Day so that you might not think that it produces the

day.” Also Saint Basil affirms, “The sun did not yet exist, nor the moon, lest men might call the sun the first cause and father of light, and lest they who are ignorant of God might deem it the producer of what grows from the earth.” The nature of light had been created, and now the sun is the vehicle for it. The sun and moon do not make the day, but simply rule the days.

The Fifth Day (Genesis 1:20-23)

The “kinds” described are those creatures capable of producing a fertile offspring. Saint Basil teaches that the “kinds” of Genesis maintain their nature to the end of time. The Fathers who were ultimately concerned about preserving the teaching regarding the orderliness of creation and the distinctness of its kinds of creatures.

The Sixth Day (Genesis 1:24-31)

With this act of creation, all is now ready for the creation of man. God did not just create these animals for the practical use of man, but that we might be astonished at the might of the Creator and might understand that all this was created with wisdom and unutterable goodness for the honor of man, who was to appear.