

Systematic Theology part 2.5: Creation

Introduction

1. Creation in General. The word creation is not always used in the same sense in the Bible. In the strict sense of the word it denotes that work of God by which He produces the world and all that is in it, partly without the use of pre-existent materials, and partly out of material that is by its nature unfit, for the manifestation of His glory. It is represented as a work of the triune God, Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13; 38:4; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 40:12, 13; John 1:3; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17. Over against Pantheism we must maintain that it was a free act of God. He did not need the world. Eph. 1:11; Rev. 4:11. And over against Deism, that He created the world so that it always remains dependent on Him. He must uphold it from day to day, Acts 17:28; Heb. 1:3.

a. The time of creation. The Bible teaches us that God created the world "in the beginning," that is, at the beginning of all temporal things. Back of this beginning lies a timeless eternity. The first part of the work of creation mentioned in Gen. 1:1 was strictly creation out of nothing or without the use of pre-existent material. The expression "creation out of nothing" is not found in the Bible, but in one of the apocryphal books, II Mace. 7:28. However, the idea is clearly taught in such passages as Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:9; 148:5; Rom. 4:7; Heb. 11:3.

b. The final purpose of creation. Some find the final end or purpose of creation in the happiness of man. They say that God could not make Himself the final end, because He is sufficient unto Himself. But it would seem to be self-evident that God does not exist for man, but man for God. The creature cannot be the final end of creation. The Bible teaches us clearly that God created the world for the manifestation of His glory. Naturally, the revelation of the glory of God is not intended as an empty show to be admired by the creature, but also aims at promoting their welfare and attuning their hearts to the praise of the Creator. Isa. 43:7; 60:21; 61:3; Ezek. 36:21, 22; 39:7; Luke 2:14; Rom. 9:17; 11:36; I Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:5, 6, 12, 14; 8:9, 10; Col. 1:16.

c. Substitutes for the doctrine of creation. They who reject the doctrine of creation resort to one of three theories for the explanation of the world. (1) Some say that original matter is eternal, and out of it the world arose, either by mere chance, or by some higher directing force. But this is impossible,

because you cannot have two eternals and therefore two infinities alongside of each other. (2) Others maintain that God and the world are essentially one, and that the world is a necessary issue (outflow) of the divine being. But this view robs God of His power of self-determination, and men of their freedom and of their moral and responsible character. It also makes God responsible for all the evil there is in the world. (3) Still others take refuge in the theory of evolution. But this is clearly a mistake, since evolution offers no explanation of the world. It already presupposes something that evolves.

2. The Spiritual World. God created not only a material but also a spiritual world, consisting of the angels.

a. Proof for the existence of angels. Modern liberal theology has largely discarded the belief in such spiritual beings. The Bible, however, assumes their existence throughout and ascribes to them real personality, II Sam. 14:20; Matt. 24:36; Jude 6; Rev. 14:10. Some ascribe to them airy bodies, but this is contrary to Scripture. They are pure spiritual beings (though sometimes assuming bodily forms), Eph. 6:12; Heb. 1:14, without flesh and bone, Luke 24:39, and therefore invisible, Col. 1:16. Some of them are good, holy and elect, Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; II Cor. 11:14; I Tim. 5:21; Rev. 14:10, and others are fallen from their original state, and therefore evil, John 8:44; II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6.

b. Classes of angels. There are evidently different classes of angels. The Bible speaks of cherubim, who reveal the power, majesty, and glory of God, and guard His holiness in the garden of Eden, in tabernacle and temple, and at the descent of God to the earth. Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:18; II Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10; 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16. Alongside of these are seraphim, mentioned only in Isa. 6:2, 3, 6. They stand as servants round about the throne of the heavenly King, sing His praises, and are ever ready to do His bidding. They serve the purpose of reconciliation and prepare men for the proper approach to God.

Two angels are mentioned by name. The first of these is Gabriel, Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26. Evidently it was his special task to convey divine revelations to man and to interpret them. The second is Michael, Dan. 10:13, 21; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7. In the Epistle of Jude he is called the archangel. He is the valiant warrior fighting the battles of Jehovah against the enemies of the people of God and against the evil powers in the spirit world. Besides these the Bible mentions in general terms principalities,

powers, thrones, dominions, Eph. 1:21; 3:10; Col. 1:16; 2:10; I Pet. 3:22. These names point to differences of rank and dignity among the angels.

c. Work of the angels. The angels are represented as praising God continually, Ps. 103:20; Isa. 6; Rev. 5:11. Since the entrance of sin into the world they serve those who inherit salvation, Heb. 1:14, rejoice at the conversion of sinners, Luke 15:10, watch over believers, Ps. 3:7; 91:11, protect the little ones, Matt. 18:10, are present in the Church, I Cor. 11:10; Eph. 3:10; I Tim. 5:21, and convey believers to the bosom of Abraham, Luke 16:22. They also frequently bear special revelations of God, Dan. 9:21-23; Zech. 1:12-14, communicate blessings to His people, Ps. 91:11, 12; Isa. 63:9; Dan. 6:22; Acts 5:19, and execute judgments on His enemies, Gen. 19:1, 13; II Kings 19:85; Matt. 18:41.

d. Evil angels. Besides the good there are also evil angels, who delight in opposing God and destroying His work. They were created good, but did not retain their original position, II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6. Their special sin is not revealed, but they probably revolted against God and aspired to divine authority, cf. II Thess. 2:4, 9. Satan, who was evidently one of the princes among the angels, became the recognized head of those that fell away, Matt. 26:41; 9:34; Eph. 2:2. With superhuman power he and his hosts seek to destroy the work of God. They seek to blind and mislead even the elect, and encourage the sinner in his evil way.

3. The Material World. In Gen. 1:1 we have the record of the original creation of heaven and earth. The rest of the chapter is devoted to what is often called secondary creation, the completion of the work in six days.

a. The days of creation. The question is frequently debated, whether the days of creation were ordinary days or not. Geologists and evolutionists speak of them as long periods of time. Now the word 'day' does not always denote a period of twenty-four hours in the Scripture. Cf. Gen 1:5; 2:4; Ps. 50:16; Eccl. 7:14; Zech. 4:10. Yet the literal interpretation of the word 'day' in the narrative of creation is favoured by the following considerations:

(1) The Hebrew word yom (day) primarily denotes an ordinary day, and should be so understood unless the context demands another interpretation.

(2) The repeated mention of morning and evening favours this interpretation.

(3) It was evidently an ordinary day which Jehovah set aside and hallowed as a day of rest.

(4) In Ex. 20:9-11 Israel is commanded to labour six days and to rest on the seventh, because Jehovah made heaven and earth in six days and rested on the seventh day.

(5) The last three days were evidently ordinary days, for they were determined by the earth's relation to the sun. And if they were ordinary days, why not the others?

b. Work of the six days. On the first day light was created, and by the separation of light and darkness day and night were constituted. This does not conflict with the idea that sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day, for these are not themselves light, but light-bearers. The work of the second day was also a work of separation, the separation of the waters above from the waters below by the establishment of the firmament. On the third day the work of separation is continued in the separation of the sea and the dry land. In addition to that the vegetable kingdom of plants and trees was established. By the word of His power God caused the earth to bring forth flowerless plants, vegetables, and fruit trees, each yielding seed after their kind. The fourth day brought the creation of sun, moon, and stars, to serve a variety of purposes: to divide day and night, to serve as signs of weather conditions, to determine the succession of the seasons and of days and years, and to function as lights for the earth. The work of the fifth day consisted in the creation of birds and fishes, the inhabitants of the air and of the water. Finally, the sixth day is marked by the climax of the work of creation. The higher classes of land animals were created, and the whole work was crowned by the creation of man in the image of God. His body was formed out of the dust of the earth, while his soul was an immediate creation of God. On the seventh day God rested from His creative labours and delighted in the contemplation of His work.

c. The theory of evolution. Evolutionists want to substitute their view of the origin of things for the Scriptural doctrine. They believe that from the simplest forms of matter and life all existing species of plants and animals (including man), and also the various manifestations of life, such as intelligence, morality, and religion, developed by a perfectly natural process, purely as the result of natural forces. This is merely an assumption, however, and one that fails at several points. Moreover, it is in hopeless conflict with the narrative of creation as it is found in the Bible.

To memorize. Passages bearing on:

a. The fact of creation:

Gen: 1:1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Ps. 33:6. "By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth."

John 1:3. "All things were made through Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made."

Heb. 11:3. "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear."

b. The final end of creation:

Isa. 43:6, 7. "Bring... every one that is called by my name."

c. The theory of evolution. Evolutionists want to substitute their view of the origin of things for the Scriptural doctrine. They believe that from the simplest forms of matter and life all existing species of plants and animals (including man), and also the various manifestations of life, such an intelligence, morality, and religion, developed by a perfectly natural process, purely as the result of natural forces. This is merely an assumption, however, and one that fails at several points. Moreover, it is in hopeless conflict with the narrative of creation as it is found in the Bible.

To memorize. Passages bearing on:

a. The fact of creation:

Gen: 1:1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Ps. 33:6. "By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth."

John 1:3. "All things were made through Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made."

Heb. 11:3. "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear."

b. The final end of creation:

Isa. 43:6, 7. "Bring... every one that is called by my name, and whom I have created for my glory, whom I have formed; yea, whom I have made."

Ps. 19:1, 2. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork."

Ps. 148:13. "Let them praise the name of Jehovah; for His name alone is exalted: His glory is above the earth and the heavens." Cf. the connection.

c. Angels:

Ps. 103:20. "Bless Jehovah, ye His angels, that are mighty in strength, that fulfil His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word."

Heb. 1:14. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation?"

Jud. 6. "And the angels that kept not their principality, but left their proper habitation, He hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

d. Time of creation:

Gen. 1:1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Ex. 20:11. "For in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore Jehovah blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

For Further Study:

a. In what sense is the word 'to create' used in Ps. 51:10; 104:30; Isa. 46:7?

b. Do Gen. 1:11, 12, 20, 24 favour the idea of evolution? Cf. Gen. 1:21, 25; 2:9.

c. Do the following passages tell us anything about the sin of the angels? if so, what? II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; cf. also II Thess. 2:4-12.

Questions for Review

1. What is creation?
2. Was creation a free or a necessary act of God?
3. Is the word 'create' always used in the same sense in Scripture?

4. Does the Bible prove creation out of nothing? Where?
5. What two views are there as to the final end of creation?
6. In what sense is the glory of God the final end?
7. What substitutes have been suggested for the doctrine of creation?
8. What is the nature of the angels?
9. What orders of angels are named in Scripture?
10. What is the function of Gabriel and Michael?
11. What is the work of the angels?
12. What proof have we for the existence of evil angels?
13. Were they created evil?
14. Were the days in Genesis ordinal days or long periods?
15. What did God create on each of the six days?
16. Is the theory of evolution consistent with the doctrine of creation?
17. Can you name some of the points on which they differ?

?

Acknowledgements and further reading: the Systematic Theology of Louis Berkhof; Wayne Grudem Systematic Theology. Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology can also be found in audio version online.