

# Views on the Early Chapters of Genesis by Bible-believing Christians

## Overview

The first chapters of Genesis are understood in some very different ways by different Christians, despite those Christians believing all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). The aim of this article is to explain what the main views are, point out some possible pros and cons of each view and highlight the main points they agree on.

The main views can be summed up as:

- 1) **Young Earth Creationism** – includes the idea that the Earth is only a few thousand years old and that the opening chapters of Genesis should be taken very literally.
- 2) **Concordism** – is the idea that it is possible to see the early chapters of Genesis as tying in well with the current understanding of cosmology and biological evolution.
- 3) A **symbolic narrative** of God's creation – while science largely describes *how* and *when* God made the universe, including mankind, the early chapters of Genesis explain *why* he made it and us. It speaks in figurative terms of the creation of the universe, the earth and mankind.

## Young Earth Creationism

This understanding is based on the belief that the early chapters of Genesis should be read *literally*, in particular that Genesis 1 speaks of 6 days of 24 hours each, that God created a man called "Adam" in a manner that meant no link to any previous life form and that God also literally took a rib from Adam's side to create the first woman, Eve. Generally, proponents of this view believe the Earth and the rest of the universe are only a few thousand years old, usually 6000 to 10,000 years old. Such proponents usually also believe the flood written about in Genesis 6-9 covered the entire planet.

### Pros

- To the modern reader, at least, it reads very much as if this is how it happened. It is seen as "the plain reading" of the text.
- All readers can understand it.
- It affirms the trustworthiness of Scripture, including these chapters, over and against the perceived attack on it by non-believers.

### Cons

- It can be argued that reading it this way is very much a 21<sup>st</sup> century, Western way of reading an ancient text, whereas it was written in a non-Western language for readers/hearers in a very different culture.
- It is contradicted by mainstream science.
- It claims to be a literal understanding of the text, but is not totally so, e.g. Genesis 1 speaks of the sky being a firmament (something solid).

## Concordism

This view argues that the text can genuinely be aligned with the understanding of mainstream science without compromise. Typically, the "days" of Genesis 1 are seen as long

periods of time rather than periods of 24 hours. Views differ on how Adam and Eve came into being, with some agreeing with Young Earth Creationists, but with others accepting some sort of biological evolution. Proponents may hold different ideas on the extent of the flood in Genesis 6-9.

#### Pros

- It can be argued that the “days” of Genesis 1 do indeed tie in fairly well with the ages of the earth and biological evolution.
- It affirms the trustworthiness of Scripture.

#### Cons

- Some parts do not fit as well as hoped, e.g. the creation of the Sun and Moon on the fourth “day” after the appearance of vegetation.
- It gives the appearance of making Scripture fit with science rather than it being the plain reading of the text.
- It struggles to fit Adam and Eve into the picture.

### A Theological Explanation

This understanding argues that the two previous views miss the point and claims that they read the text in a way neither the author nor original readers/hearers would have understood. It argues that it explains God creating in a way as to emphasize his sovereignty and purpose in creating mankind. It argues that it is written in the style (but not content!) of similar accounts from the same period. It is fairly relaxed about the ambiguity of the use in Genesis of the Hebrew word “adam”, which can mean “the man”, “mankind” or the name “Adam”. Proponents generally hold that the flood of Genesis 6-9 was not planet-wide, but covered “the known earth”.

#### Pros

- There is no clash with science as it is very much about “why” rather than “how” or “when”. In particular, there is no clash with cosmology, the age of the universe or biological evolution as it takes no stance on those matters.
- It takes the type of literature (genre) most seriously of the three views.
- It too affirms the trustworthiness of Scripture.

#### Cons

- It is more complicated for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Western reader to understand (being separated by at least 4000 years and hundreds of miles from its being written).
- It is not the “plain reading”, at least in the eyes of a 21<sup>st</sup> century, Western reader and therefore can be seen as a copout.

### Ideas Shared by all Views

Though the different views may place more or less emphasis on the following, they are all held in common.

- God is the creator of all things and that his creation is good.
- God created mankind, including making them male and female.

- God created mankind for a purpose and in his image and likeness.
- Men and women are dear to God.
- Mankind rebelled against God and continues in that estrangement, needing a saviour.

### For More Reading

Note that there is some overlap between some aspects of each view.

- Young Earth Creationism
  - Answers In Genesis - [www.answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org)
  - Creation Ministries International – [www.creation.org](http://www.creation.org)
- Concordism
  - God and Science.org – [www.godandscience.org](http://www.godandscience.org)
  - Reasons to Believe – [www.reasons.org](http://www.reasons.org)
- Theological Explanation
  - Biologos – [www.biologos.org](http://www.biologos.org) particularly <https://biologos.org/articles/famous-christians-who-believed-evolution-is-compatible-with-christian-faith>
  - The Faraday Institute (generally) - [www.faraday-institute.org](http://www.faraday-institute.org)
  - A good, short explanation is available at [https://www.faraday.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/resources/Faraday%20Papers/Faraday%20Paper%2011%20Lucas\\_EN.pdf](https://www.faraday.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/resources/Faraday%20Papers/Faraday%20Paper%2011%20Lucas_EN.pdf)