

The Bible
Handbook
of Difficult
Verses

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Josh McDowell
Sean McDowell

The Pentateuch
Genesis–Deuteronomy

Difficult Verses from the Book of Genesis

Passage:

In the beginning... (Genesis 1:1).

Difficulty: Doesn't science claim the universe is eternal? If so, how can it have a beginning?

Explanation: The First Law of Thermodynamics states that matter and energy can be changed from one form to another, but it cannot be created or destroyed. For centuries scientists believed the universe was uncaused and eternal.

In the early part of the twentieth century the scientific community was confronted with the ramifications of Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity. Like most scientists of the day, Einstein assumed the universe was static and eternal. Yet his mathematical equation of relativity pointed strongly toward a universe that was either expanding or contracting. While this seemed to unsettle him, Einstein later accepted that the universe had a finite past. Why did he change his mind?

In 1929 cosmologist Edwin Hubble used his hundred-inch telescope to demonstrate that light from distant galaxies were shifting toward the red end of the light spectrum. This meant that the universe was expanding in all directions. This was a powerful confirmation of Einstein's findings that the universe is not static but at some point in time had a beginning.¹ This first moment of existence is now referred to as the *singularity*, which is an edge or boundary to space-time itself. According to Professor Paul Davies at Oregon State University, "For this reason most cosmologists think of the initial singularity as the beginning of the universe."²

This doesn't mean that all scientists necessarily accept God as the best explanation for the beginning of the universe, but most now believe that the universe began to exist at a finite point in the past. It appears that many in the scientific community have caught up with the biblical declaration that "in the beginning..." (Genesis 1:1).

Passage:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

Difficulty: Is there any evidence that God did in fact create the universe?

Explanation: There is solid evidence that the universe had a beginning (see previous *Explanation*), but that doesn't prove that God gave the universe its beginning, right? And while many scientists now concede that the universe had a beginning, this doesn't address who or what caused it. But there *is* evidence to confirm what Christians believe: that God is the Creator of the universe as Scripture states.

One of the evidences that God created the universe is what is often referred to as the first-cause argument for God's existence, or the cosmological argument.

The idea is that everything that begins to exist must have a cause. So if you go back in time far enough you will find the first cause—and that cause will be an Intelligent Creator. Actually this argument has three premises:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore the universe has a cause.

The first premise seems self-evidently true. Can *you* think of something that comes from nothing? Some try to evade this problem by defining “nothing” as a quantum vacuum. But even vacuums aren't technically nothing. They have energy and quantum particles, which is *something*. We have no empirical evidence of something emerging without a cause from absolute nothing. The ancient Greeks were right when they said, “Out of nothing, nothing comes.” It certainly seems more reasonable than to not believe that things that begin to exist have a cause.

The second premise finds support from the second law of thermodynamics (see question on Genesis 1:1 for additional scientific evidence). That law states that usable energy within a closed system will eventually run down. Since the universe is a closed system, its usable energy will eventually run down and the universe will reach a state of equilibrium known as “heat death.” But the energy has not run down yet. Why not? The answer is simple: The past is finite. If the past were eternal, then the universe would have already run down at some point in the past.

The last premise builds off the previous two: The universe has a cause. This can lead us then to a conclusion based on the question, “Who caused the cause?” We can derive our answer from the origins of time, space, and matter. It is logical to conclude that since time, space, and matter did not exist prior to the beginning of the universe, then the “cause” of the universe had to be timeless, spaceless, and immaterial. Further, this “cause” could not be physical or subject to natural law since that would presuppose its existence involved time, space, and matter. This then leads us to conclude that the timeless, spaceless, immaterial “cause” was in fact God. (For more details and other evidences for the existence of God see the book *Is God Just a Human Invention?* by Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow, described in the back pages of this book.)

Passage:

God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Genesis 1:3).

Difficulty: Isn’t it contradictory to say light was created on the first day, yet the sun wasn’t created until the fourth day?

Explanation: Some have suggested that on the first day God created light, as well as all other types of what is called electromagnetic radiation (EMR). Some who hold this view believe God created the light of the sun and moon on the first day, but it only became visible on the fourth day as the atmosphere of the Earth became transparent.

Visible light is just a small part of the entire spectrum of EMR. The

visible light range or wavelength of what we can see with the naked eye is from about 380 nanometers (NM) to about 740 NM. But the electromagnetic spectrum is much broader. It extends from low frequencies used for radio broadcasts, which we cannot see to very high frequencies of gamma radiation, which again are beyond our vision. This means electromagnetic radiation covers wavelengths from thousands of kilometers down to a fraction of the size of an atom. What we see with the human eye is only a very small part of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Scientists say that the electromagnetic spectrum in principle is infinite and continuous. Indeed, while Einstein's theory of relativity predicts that time, space, and mass can all change due to relativistic effects, the speed of EMR is always constant in all frames of reference. Perhaps that is why Jesus so aptly referred to himself as the "light of the world" (John 8:12)—God as the constant, infinite, and continuous one brings his light to every dimension of the universe, from the distant stars to a fraction of the diameter of a proton.

On the very first day of creation God may have very well brought into existence the miraculous phenomenon of light along with the entire spectrum of electromagnetic radiation, ranging from the lowest of the low in frequency to the highest of the high. Then on the fourth day (Genesis 1:14-18), God formed the sun, moon, and stars to warm Planet Earth and radiate light throughout the visible universe.

The other possible response to this question involves asking a question about the nature of Genesis—"Was Moses trying to offer a scientific chronology of the creation event?" In other words, is the Genesis 1 creation account meant as a scientific account of the sequence and manner of creation? If yes, then some explanation such as the above is necessary. If no, then this difficulty disappears. See answer to Genesis 2:1-4 for alternative ways of understanding the creation account.

Passage:

God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves" (Genesis 1:26).

Difficulty: Why does God refer to himself as “us”?

Explanation: Some people suggest that God, being a Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), is actually speaking among the three persons of the Godhead and therefore refers to himself as us. We know, for example, that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, was at creation for it says in Genesis 1 that “the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the water” (verse 2). Scripture also states that Jesus was at creation. “Through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth...He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together” (Colossians 1:15-17).

We can then clearly conclude from other passages of Scripture that the three persons of the Godhead were present and actively engaged in creation of all things. So since God is Trinity, is that why God said, “Let *us* make human beings in *our* image?” The short answer is “Maybe.”

There are three possible explanations for the plural pronoun in this passage. The first option is, as we have seen, that the “us” and “our” passages refer to the Trinity. However, one difficulty with this interpretation is that the word “us” is actually part of a Hebrew verb, not a pronoun. The “our” is the first plural pronoun. As a result, some scholars believe the “us” is literally meant to signal that the creation of humanity is special, rather than indicate the numerical plurality of the Creator.

The second option is that the Hebrew word *elohim* gives a more encompassing, grand, and majestic context of the person of God. The plural name *elohim* is in the *majestic plural* (the royal “we”) and should lead us to remember that God cannot be placed in a narrow singular box. As the prophet Isaiah wrote,

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

The third option is that the “us” refers to God and his heavenly court (that is, angels). While this interpretation does have some difficulties, it is a possible view held by a number of respectable evangelical scholars.

Regardless of the proper interpretation of this passage, this in no way lessens the truth that God is triune. God has revealed his character progressively throughout history, and most fully in the person of Jesus Christ (John 14:7-9).

Passage:

God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.” So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

Difficulty: How are we humans like God? We don't have the infinite characteristics of God of knowing everything and having all power, so what does it really mean to be created in God's image?

Explanation: Scripture teaches us that 1) God has life without beginning or end (eternal, see Isaiah 40:28); 2) God is almighty and powerful (omnipotent, see Job 42:2); 3) God is ever-present (omnipresent, see Jeremiah 23:23-24); 4) God knows all (omniscient, see Isaiah 46:9-10); and 5) God is constant and will not change (immutable, see Psalm 102:26-27). And none of these Godlike characteristics has been passed on to his human creation. And being created in God's image doesn't mean we look like him either, because “God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). We are physical beings—God is not. So what part of his image did we inherit from our Creator?

Before there were humans, before the material universe or time and space existed as we know it, God existed eternally as a loving relational being. He is relational by his very nature, three personalities blended in perfect harmony—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While he is the infinite one and we as humans are finite, we bear his relational image.

We have inherited his relational ability to love in a way that other creatures cannot. Scripture says, “Love comes from God...for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

As part of God’s relational image we have inherited the ability to communicate our thoughts, intents, and feelings to others through complex language. Scripture repeatedly uses the phrase “God said,” showing us that relationships mean communication to others. The ability to express and enhance relationships by communicating is another way we reflect the image of God.

We have inherited his sense of value for human relationships and for life itself. God said, “Honor your father and mother...you must not murder...you must not commit adultery...you must not steal...you must not testify falsely...you must not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Deuteronomy 5:16-21). From God’s giving of the law at Mount Sinai up through the early church and beyond, it was understood and taught that life is sacred at every stage. Promoting social justice, taking care of the poor, and defending human rights find their basis in each of us because we are purposely created in God’s relational image—with value, dignity, and worth.

We have inherited God’s sense of satisfaction and joy in accomplishing things through relationships. After each creative act in Genesis, this relational God “saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:10). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit found joy in their collective creative acts as the Master of the universe.

We inherited from the Master of the universe the charge to “reign” over all the creatures of the earth (Genesis 1:26). God told the first humans that in relationship with one another they were also to live in proper relationship with their home—Earth. God said to be stewards of the earth and “to tend and watch over it” (Genesis 2:15). So God instilled within his human creation an environmental responsibility to relate lovingly to the planet they inherited.

God placed humans on a plateau above the rest of creation when he fashioned them in his relational image and likeness. To summarize, this Godlikeness bestowed upon the human race certain gifts and obligations:

- to love God and one another as persons

- to effectively communicate through complex language
- to be creative
- to think logically
- to make moral decisions
- to defend the dignity, value, and worth of all human life, to be the protector of peace and harmony among all people, and to preserve the unity and sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman and the family
- to rule over and be the steward of creation

It is this relational dimension with all its ramifications that distinguishes us as created in God's image and gives us special meaning.

Passage:

God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it" (Genesis 1:27-28).

Difficulty: Doesn't the science of genetics refute the concept that the entire population of the world came from just one couple?

Explanation: Over the past couple of decades researchers have used "population genetics" to estimate initial population size of the human species. By studying human genetic diversity in the present day, they have tried to extrapolate back to determine the minimum size of the original population of humans necessary to produce the diversity we observe today. Some have argued that it is impossible for civilization to have come from one human couple.

Dr. Francis S. Collins is a physician and geneticist who in 2007 formed the San Diego-based BioLogos Foundation. It is an organization that promotes theistic evolution among evangelicals. Dennis R. Venema, PhD, a BioLogos senior fellow for science and biology

chairman at Trinity Western University, is a writer for BioLogos. He too is a theistic evolutionist who is trying to promote harmony of Darwinian science and faith within the evangelical community.

Dr. Venema claims that human population “was definitely never as small as two.” He contends that “our species diverged as a population. The data are absolutely clear on that.”³ He asserts that to reach the level of genetic diversity we see today, the initial population of humans would have had to be several thousand individuals at minimum—not one couple.

Not all biologists, however, agree with Dr. Venema. Dr. Ann Gauger is senior research scientist at the Biologic Institute, a pro-intelligent design research lab based near Seattle, Washington. She earned a PhD in biology from the University of Washington, and later did postdoctoral work at Harvard. In the chapter “The Science of Adam and Eve” in the 2012 book *Science and Human Origins*, Gauger finds that Venema’s arguments were based upon a now outdated study of genes involved in the human immune system that was published by the geneticist Francisco Ayala in 1995.

According to Gauger, these population genetics studies make many assumptions—including a constant background mutation rate, lack of natural selection, lack of migration, and a constant population size. If any of those assumptions are wrong then the conclusions could be meaningless. Gauger reanalyzed Ayala’s data and found that he failed to control two of the assumptions, and analyzed a portion of the gene known to experience an unusually high mutation rate, causing him to dramatically overestimate the required initial population sizes.

When the analysis is done properly, Gauger found that “a first couple could have carried sufficient genetic diversity to account for” the genetic diversity we observe today in humans for this gene.⁴ Gauger further found that more recent research reveals this gene shows conflicting phylogenetic patterns, which “cannot be explained by common ancestry” of humans and apes.⁵

Likewise, Dr. C. John Collins, professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, questions these population genomics figures. He cites 2006 research from Canada, France, and Japan that “indicates ambiguity about the rate of changes in genetic diversity that have been used thus far to calculate primordial population sizes.”⁶

Theorizing about how many people it would initially take in the deep past to generate observed human genetic diversity today, according to Collins and Gauger, is far from an exact science.

Another factor that geneticists usually fail to consider is the original genome of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. From a creationist's point of view, the optimal DNA and genetic diversity of the first couple formed by the hand of God is impossible to quantify because it has been lost to time, and potentially radically changed since the Fall. But it does seem plausible that Adam and Eve had a physiology and genotype different from our own today. After all, Adam lived to be 930 years old—so clearly his biology was different from ours. So their biological makeup may have been such that their genetic diversity was not comparable to humans today. If that is the case there might be no genetic reason why an initial pair of two humans couldn't have led to present-day human genetic diversity in a short period of time.

Passage:

God said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it” (Genesis 1:28).

Difficulty: Didn't God ordain sexual relations between a husband and wife for the sole purpose of procreation?

Explanation: There are those who believe that the only time a husband and wife should engage in sexual intercourse is for the purpose of procreation. However, Scripture identifies at least two other reasons God gave humans the gift of sex.

“God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him’ . . . Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:18,25). God also designed sex within marriage to bring two people together emotionally, to remove their aloneness, and to create a bonding and oneness.

Certainly sex was given to us to reproduce and have a family, but one of its additional purposes is to bring a married couple fully together

spiritually, relationally, and biologically for a lifetime. When expressed properly sex can meet the desire and need for intimacy for a husband and wife. That is why Jesus said, “Since they [a married couple] are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together” (Matthew 19:6). Sexual relationship is designed to express the oneness of marriage and intimacy of the husband and wife relationship.

Another purpose of sex within marriage is the recreational factor. Procreation and intimacy are very important factors of sex, but marital sex was made for our pleasure as well. King Solomon put it this way:

Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. She is a loving deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you always be captivated by her love (Proverbs 5:18-19).

Sex between a committed husband and wife is designed for pleasure—to playfully enjoy each other as well as to express and deepen their intimacy and to “be fruitful and multiply.”

Passage:

The creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation. This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth (Genesis 2:1-4).

Difficulty: Did God create the world in six 24-hour days, or is the world billions of years old as the standard scientific dating suggests?

Explanation: There is a wide variety of theories Christians have presented and understood for the duration of creation in Genesis. Here are a few of the more common explanations:

The *gap theory* postulates that eons passed between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2—possibly leaving plant and animal remains in the fossils we now find. Part of this theory postulates that Satan was cast down to earth and destroyed it, rendering the earth “formless and empty” as described in Genesis 1:2. This is partially based on the assumption that God would never create something as chaotic as is described in the second verse of the chapter. The time then between verses 1 and 2 could have been millions of years. This view has grown out of favor in scholarly circles.

The *day-age theory* holds that each day of creation embraced extended periods of time. This theory turns on the scientific data for an older earth as well as the definition of the Hebrew word *yom* or “day” for the six days of creation in Genesis 1. Does *day* mean 24 hours or a period of time in general, as in “the day of trouble” (Psalm 20:1 NASB)? Those that support this theory say that a day is not limited to 24 hours. They also point to Peter who said, “A day is like a thousand years to the Lord” (2 Peter 3:8).

The *progressive creation theory* suggests that God may have guided a general evolutionary process and intervened at strategic points—such as imparting life into the first cell or breathing a soul into hominids. This theory usually utilizes some form of the day-age theory to explain the six days of creation. It is important to recognize the difference between this view and Darwin’s theory. Progressive creation implies that God was involved in *guiding* the process to a desired end. Thus, progressive creationists embrace intelligent design. In contrast, Darwinian evolution lacks any intelligent design and is entirely materialistic.

The *24-hour solar day theory* is that God created everything at full maturity in six 24-hour solar days (this view is usually associated with *young-earth creationism*). This means that the universe and all within it has the appearance of having gone through a development stage. Examples of this would be Adam and Eve, created fully developed, and the wine Jesus created in Cana, fully fermented in an instant of time. This would explain the earth’s appearance of millions of years of age, while in reality it was recently created within only thousands of years. Young-earth creationists believe the fossil evidence and geological data can also be explained by appealing to Noah’s universal Flood.

The Earth is typically viewed as somewhere between 6000 and 10,000 years old.

The *framework view theory* regards the seven days of creation as a figurative framework. While Genesis 1 records real historical events, such as God creating light or animals, they are recorded in a nonsequential literary structure of a seven-day week. Framework view proponents note how creation days form a framework of two parallel triads. The first triad (days 1-3) includes the creation of the “creation kingdoms” of light (day 1), sky and seas (day 2), and dry land and vegetation (day 3). The second triad (days 4-6) includes the creation of “creature kings” who exercise dominion over those kingdoms. Thus, God creates luminaries (day 4), sea creatures and winged creatures (day 5), and land animals and man (day 6). Framework view supporters observe that the temptation accounts of Jesus in the Gospels are recorded in different chronological order (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13), yet this does not diminish the historicity of the temptation itself.⁷

There are others, such as Dr. John H. Walton, Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, who believe we mistakenly read modern concerns about the material origins of life into the Genesis account. Walton contends Genesis 1 was not written to give us a scientific explanation of the origin of the universe. Rather it focuses on metaphysical questions of how God ordered the universe. He asserts that the biblical record describes how the cosmos was created as God’s temple—a place he wished to reside with his creation. According to Dr. Walton, days 1-3 establish functions of the universe, while days 4-6 establish functionaries—the vehicle through which the created world was to operate. Day 7 was the day God took up residence within his created world. Walton contends that in the Hebrew mind Genesis 1 is presenting the cosmos in its original state as God’s residency in his temple with his creation.

There are yet others, like Dr. John Sailhamer, a Hebrew and Old Testament scholar at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, who propose a kind of “modified gap theory.” He contends that the word *beginning* can refer to an indefinite and possibly long period of time. Sailhamer believes, while the functioning universe was created sometime “in the beginning,” God’s declaration of life (Genesis 1:3) is the advent of sunrise and cities. He sees Genesis 1:2 and the following

material as describing God preparing the Promised Land for his chosen people.

We recognize there are well-meaning, thoughtful, and Bible-believing Christians who disagree about the age of the earth and how Genesis 1 is to be interpreted. While these are important matters, they are *not* essential questions that should divide Christians. The most important truth Genesis 1–2 offers is that the personal God is the Creator of all and that humans are his special creation with whom he wants a relationship.

Passage:

The LORD God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:15-17 NASB).

Difficulty: It is clear that Adam didn’t die on the day that he sinned—in fact he lived to be 930 years old. So how can this Scripture passage be accurate?

Explanation: Both Adam and Eve did suffer “death” on the day they disobeyed God. But to understand what that death was, we must understand a little of the nature of God and his relationship with the first human couple.

Scripture tells us that God is all-powerful (see Job 42:2) and has life without end—he is eternal (see Isaiah 40:28). Jesus said, “The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son” (John 5:26). And it is God the Son, known also as the Word, through whom God created everything, “and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created”

(John 1:3-4). Adam and Eve got their life from God and were continually dependent on him to sustain their life.

Within God there is not only life, but love, joy, peace, goodness, and everything that brings happiness, meaning, and purpose to our existence. “Whatever is good and perfect,” James said, “comes down to us from God” (James 1:17). So if Adam and Eve were dependent upon God, as was everything else, for the sustaining of life, love, joy, goodness, and so on, what would happen if they somehow become disconnected from that very source of life and love? They would die—be separated from life and love.

God is not only the eternal creator and sustainer of life; his core nature is also holy and pure. “The LORD is good and does what is right” (Psalm 25:8). “The LORD is just! He is my rock! There is no evil in him” (Psalm 92:15). He is “the one who is holy and true...” (Revelation 3:7).

God is perfectly holy and without sin. And to be in relationship with sin would be in violation of his nature. The Bible says of him, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong” (Habakkuk 1:13 NIV). He is so holy that he “cannot allow sin in any form” (Habakkuk 1:13 NLT). So to preserve his holiness there is only one thing he can do when confronted with sin, and that is to separate himself from it.

The reason Scripture says that the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) is because God, the sustenance of life, has separated himself from those who are sinful. “When Adam sinned,” the Bible says, “sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death [separation from God], so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned” (Romans 5:12).

It’s true that Adam and Eve did not physically die on the day they disobeyed God. But they died spiritually that day because they became relationally separated from God. And the physical death process began immediately. Their relational separation from God separated them from him as the eternal life source, and it was only a matter of time until they would physically die. So on the very day Adam and Eve sinned they did die spiritually, and their separation from God eventually resulted in physical death.