

Has God Said?

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Abstract

The question of how God works is one which many struggle with. While this is especially true in the case of the issue of creation with respect to Genesis 1, it really is a broader issue relating to any intervention of God into the physical realm, especially with regard to human affairs. While readers of this journal generally assume that God can intervene in the space-time continuum, this study begins with a reminder of why the Christian view is *that He can*. It observes that these interventions are given a generic name of ‘miracles,’ and then reviews the nature of miracles focusing on examples of Biblical descriptions of events that are presented specifically as miracles by the Biblical author. This is followed by an evaluation of the terminology used in Genesis 1 to describe the original creation event and why Biblically speaking it must be viewed as miraculous.

Key Words: Creation, Exodus, Genesis, miracles, naturalism

Introduction

Genesis 1–11 lays the foundation for the rest of the Bible by introducing key theological principles the rest of the book develops. As such those chapters touch on many of the basic questions each of us wrestles with regarding life—questions such as: Where did the world come from? Why is there so much evil in the world? Is there hope for the future? The cornerstone of that foundation is Genesis 1:1–2:3,

a preface, which describes God creating the heavens and the earth (Harbin, 2021, p. 226). However, that account is highly debated even among those who accept the idea that God is the Creator. If God created, how did He do it? The way one understands the Genesis creation accounts depends on one’s concept of the universe, both in terms of its structure, and in terms of its origins. The two issues are intertwined and both really involve philosophical

presuppositions which determine how one interprets the data. Although fundamental and well-known, the distinctions are often overlooked. As such, a brief review of those distinctions and their implications is worthwhile even for those who affirm God’s direct creation. These can be characterized in general as two basic positions.

Naturalism

In terms of structure of the cosmos, the basic question is whether or not there is anything or anyone beyond the physical universe. One view is that the physical is the only reality, which is called naturalism (Kellenberger,

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2007, p. 207). A logical corollary to that concept is that reality is nothing more than a sequence of physical cause-and-effect relationships. Through the centuries, humans have observed such consistency in these cause-and-effect relationships that they have been deemed “natural laws,” such as the law of gravity. Because they are so pervasive, a normal human response to any event is to look for a physical cause—what caused this? While ultimately this view jettisons the idea of a Creator, more commonly, He is forgotten in routine matters even by those who strongly accept Him. In practice this eliminates miracles or supernatural events from the onset. As such, in our culture, most people including many Christians who are scientists are essentially practical naturalists. But this is nothing new. It is evident even in the Biblical accounts including Jesus’s closest disciples. While they accepted that God could produce miracles, and even saw Jesus performing them, they deemed them unlikely and were often slow to accept them. For example, Matthew describes how before Jesus fed the 5000, His disciples thought only of buying bread (Matt. 15:33). Then, apparently the evening or day after that act, when the disciples were in the boat with Jesus and the lake got rough, they had completely forgotten the event (Matt. 16:7). Even after the resurrection, despite numerous foreshadowings, the first reaction of the disciples was that someone had taken the body of Jesus (Jn. 20:2).

However, having an expectation of a physical cause for an event as a normal response to an event is one thing. To deny evidence that rules out a physical cause is another. While the former is indeed a form of naturalism and really is the foundation of modern science, both Nancy Percy and Charles Thaxton (1994, pp. 24–37) and Francis Schaeffer (1976, pp. 130–143) observe that naturalism has its limits.

As Schaeffer puts it, “Things go on in a cause-and-effect sequence, but at a point of time the direction may be changed by God or by people” necessitating a God external to “the uniformity of natural causes” (1976, pp. 142–143). Naturalism with that caveat could be termed a working hypothesis—something that one begins with until evidence proves otherwise.¹ However, naturalism can also be a philosophical system or worldview which drives the interpretation and acceptance of data. Lewis distinguishes this philosophical form by capitalizing Naturalism (Lewis, 1972, p. 10). Nash and others call it “metaphysical naturalism” (Nash, 1997, pp. 119–124). Lewis examines this in the context of how inference underlies reasoning and concludes “All possible knowledge, then, depends on the validity of reasoning...Unless human reasoning is valid no science can be true” (Lewis, 1972, pp. 19–20). Nash takes this argument one step further when he states, “unless human reasoning is valid, no arguments by any metaphysical naturalist directed against Christian theism or offered in support of naturalism can be sound” (Nash, 1997, p. 125).

Readers adhering to philosophical naturalism read Genesis 1 through that lens and explain the chapter accordingly. That is, they seek to find physical causes to all physical events. While one may propose a number of ways to argue that Genesis 1 should not be read as showing that God created, none is really coherent and one must still explain the existence or origin of the universe.

¹ As such, it is really a method of investigation and should properly be called “methodological naturalism” since it is also practiced by many who reject naturalism as a philosophy. However that term methodological naturalism has been pre-empted by those who see naturalism as a philosophical system who apply it to their system.

Spiritualism

The alternative to philosophical naturalism is that there is a realm beyond the physical, sometimes called the spiritual realm. Because it is not physical, it is not detectable by physical means. However, its existence has been demonstrated (although not “proven”) by induction (Ratzsch, 2000, pp. 100–109). This realm is associated with the existence of God and reflects His transcendence.

Regardless of whether one accepts the existence of God, with regard to the origin of the universe there are simply two choices: either it always was, or it came into existence at some time (Gamow, 1971, p. 57). But each choice is fraught with difficulties—mind-stretching difficulties that demand that one accept incomprehensible givens. Yet, the only alternatives are that something or someone came into existence out of nothing by itself, or something or someone always existed (Overman, 2009, pp. 7–11). With regard to the physical universe, today, it is generally accepted that it had a beginning (Ross, 2001, p. 25). But that does not resolve the debate—it merely refocuses it. Did God create it? If the universe had a beginning and God did not create it, what caused it? Many scientists maintain that it simply began with a singularity; that is, it just appeared out of nothing (Hawking, 1996, pp. 49–54).² Many

² While this idea was developed through mathematical models, there are a number of conceptual difficulties. For example, Hawking explains a singularity as a point where the “curvature of space-time is infinite” and cites an example of a black hole, “a singularity contained within a region of space-time.” If the Big Bang was a singularity where all matter in the universe appeared and time began, into what did it appear? From where did it come? Hawking states “there must have been a time in the very early universe when the universe was so small that one could no longer ignore the

others, however, argue for a Beginner (Schroeder, 1997, pp. 23–27)³ usually denoted as God (Blocher, 1984, p. 60), a view which takes Genesis 1:1 at face value: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”⁴ Even here, debate rages which may be succinctly characterized as trying to understand “How?” Responses generally fall into three theological categories based on how God relates to the physical universe.

A Tale of Three -isms

Theologians use three basic labels to describe how people understand God to relate to His creation: pantheism, deism, and theism. Historically, orthodox Christianity has been defined as a theistic faith. As defined by Webster’s dictionary, the key to this concept is that God “is viewed as the creative source of man, the world, and value and who *transcends and yet is immanent in the world*” (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, s.v. “theism,” italics added). In other words, God is beyond space and time (transcendent), but can and does intervene in the space-time continuum (immanent). Essentially the concepts of transcendence and immanence form a spectrum, with theism in the middle, a tension that is difficult

to maintain especially with respect to our daily routines.

One end of that spectrum emphasizes God’s immanence to the exclusion of His transcendence and is labeled pantheism. In this view, God and the cosmos are essentially one, and physical laws are really just acts of God. Patterson succinctly describes it as an identification of the universe with God (Patterson, 1958, p. 114).⁵ As such, what we call the physical world is viewed simply as aspects of “that cosmic force” although pantheistic religions differ as to whether there is a god (Ghose, 1967, p. 263). However, the dominant view seems to be that there is a god who is infinite and at the same time there is a finite universe which is identical with that god. To escape that contradiction, the universe is generally deemed an illusion (Corduan, 1993, pp. 92–95). While the term “creation” is generally used, it does not seem to be a concept which is developed or discussed (Smart, 1967, p. 22). In Hinduism, the focus is on Brahman and the other gods with the physical being a manifestation of Shiva’s dance (Capra, 1984, pp. 230–233). Buddhism seems to evade the concept of both gods and creation. K. Sri Dhammananda observes that “Buddhism does not pay much attention to theories and beliefs about the origin of the world.” He goes on to argue that “if the first cause can exist though uncreated, there is no reason why the other phenomena of the universe must not exist without having also been created” (Dhammananda, 2002, pp. 166–168).

At the other end of the spectrum, deism is a theological position that

basically eliminates the immanence of God. As Berkhof expresses it, deism argues

At the time of creation, He [God] imparted to all His creatures certain inalienable properties, placed them under invariable laws, and left them to work out their destiny by their own inherent powers. Meanwhile He merely exercises a general oversight, not of the specific agents that appear on the scene, but of the general laws which He has established. The world is simply a machine which God has put in motion and not at all a vessel which He pilots from day to day. (Berkhof, 1941, p. 167)

In other words, deism deems that the transcendent Creator God does not (or cannot) intervene in space-time history. Rather, in the creation process He utilized physical laws (physical cause-and-effect relationships which He established) which may not be violated. What is not clear here is the source of those physical laws. Were they absolutes which constrained God, or were they embedded in the physical materials as they were created and thus instituted by God?

In the middle of the spectrum, theism, the Christian view, understands God as both transcendent and immanent. In other words, while God is close to His creation, and supervises it and intervenes within it, at the same time the creation is separate from God. The question at hand is, what does it mean that God can intervene in our world? Specifically, how and when does God intervene?

God and the World

In terms of God’s relationship to the world, Biblical data suggests two seemingly contradictory perspectives producing a tension point for Christians. Psalms such as 104 and 147 describe God’s relationship with nature.

small-scale effects of the other great partial theory of the twentieth century, quantum mechanics.” Again, the question is, did it always exist, and if not, where did that first particle appear from? What was external to this “small” particular universe? Coming down to the present, if the universe is finite, what is external to it? If infinite, what does that mean?

3 From a philosophical or theological perspective, one is driven in some manner to something or someone which has always existed.

4 Unless noted otherwise, all Bible citations are from the NASB translation.

5 Patterson goes on to differentiate a view where “God is not to be identified with the universe, rather he includes the universe within himself. He is more than the world, yet the world is not external to him.” This view is labeled panentheism (1958, p. 115).

Some passages are readily understood as God utilizing regular physical mechanisms to provide the needs of the created order. For example, Psalm 147:8 states that God is the One who provides rain:

Who covers the heavens with clouds,
Who provides rain for the earth,

This description easily fits our modern concept of “natural processes” as part of the rain cycle (Halpine, 1956, pp. 49–50). Consequently we readily accept that the writer shows God’s control utilizing figurative language. The passage goes on to describe how the precipitation lands on the Earth providing moisture to the soil, which is absorbed by plants giving sustenance so that the cells divide, and the plant grows (Mader, 2001, p. 571). Herbivores eat the grass as food. Continuing with the psalmist through the food chain, one reads that ravens serve as scavengers who “clean-up” eating a wide variety of foods including carrion (Mader, 2001, p. 423). This expands God’s intervention to the entirety of nature.

Other passages such as Psalm 104 are more difficult. Psalm 104:2–3 stress God’s transcendence:

Covering Yourself with light as with a cloak,
Stretching out heaven like a *tent* curtain.
He⁶ lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters;
He makes the clouds His chariot;
He walks upon the wings of the wind;

In the same psalm, verses 27–29 stress His immanence to the point where God is portrayed as actually providing or withholding food for individual animals personally:

They [the animals] all wait for You

To give them their food in due season.

You give to them, they gather *it* up;
You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good.

You hide Your face, they are dismayed;

You take away their spirit, they expire

And return to their dust. (Kidner, 1975, pp. 367–373)

Our understanding of science suggests the idea that God’s involvement in these processes includes that somehow He has set up the cosmos so that it is an exquisitely designed, extremely complex, self-functioning system. This presents God’s involvement as minimal and indirect, and is sometimes termed providence (Dorman, 2001, p. 87; see also, Lewis, 1972, pp. 180–187).⁷ In some regards, this could be viewed as a divine “butterfly effect.”⁸ A slight nudge in a specific place causes a slightly greater evaporation rate, which increases the relative humidity a fraction resulting in a slightly greater rate of precipitation in a location determined by another nudge or two which barely shifts high-altitude winds resulting in a rain shower in a given location. This increased precipitation

⁷ Dorman (2001) characterizes the idea of providence as God “also sustains and governs the world.”

⁸ According to Jamie Vernon, the phrase “butterfly effect” is taken from a question that meteorologist Edward Lorenze posed when he asked, “Does the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?” (Vernon, 2017, p. 130). Wikipedia attributes the concept to earlier mathematical studies, with the role of a butterfly coming from a short story written by Ray Bradbury in 1952 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly_effect). Lorenze’s question was to illustrate how small changes in initial conditions produce unpredictable results in complex systems, but the phrase has been popularized to emphasize the “outsize significance of minute occurrences.”

promotes a bit more growth of grass sufficient to fatten a herd of cattle just a little more, and so on. As a result, while God “did it,” it was more obviously a result of physical cause-and-effect relationships. This is an enticing perspective since it highlights the intricate interrelationships of the physical universe. It also presents a very high view of God as a creator who designed such marvels that make our jaws drop as we perceive them. But it would seem to be a truncated view of the situation if these intricate relationships are viewed simply as a divine chain of dominoes following an initial nudge with all the actual interactions determined by physical relationships, which might be called determinism. Moreover, as such, we easily miss the nudges and wonder, how is *God* providing the rain? How is *God* feeding the beasts? And if the rains don’t come, how can I pray expecting *God* to answer my prayers?

But the Bible also describes God performing actions which seem counter to the normal physical cause-and-effect processes we observe regularly. In the OT especially, God’s actions can be overt, although their presentation is often understated, allowing the evident abnormality of an event to demonstrate its supernatural source. Other times, especially when referring to multiple examples, a variety of terms are used to describe these divine actions, including: wonders, signs, powers, and works (Lockyer, 1961, pp. 15–16). Today, we popularly use the term “miracles” to describe these super-normal interventions collectively.

Scripture suggests that God uses both indirect and direct methods for super-normal intervention. At times, God seems to direct a natural process to accomplish a given end. This differs from the previously noted process of providence which is deemed more general and self-perpetuated. Rather, behind the scenes so to speak, God ini-

⁶ A common Hebrew practice is changing the pronoun from second to third person or vice versa (Bratcher, 1991, p. 227).

tiates a process with a strong nudge at the proper time in a perfectly planned direction with the key being that it is intended for a specific outcome with regard to the human audience. In these cases, the perception of divine intervention derives primarily from the timing which produces a specific result in conjunction with a human request or a divine declaration. An example of this might be the situation in Joshua 10:8–11 where the Amorite army was fleeing from Israel down the descent of Beth-horon. The text appears to describe God's intervention as a severe hail storm (literally "large stones from heaven").⁹ A naturalist might assume that the storm "just happened" to precipitate at the exact location and time the Amorite army was passing, thus allowing the Israelites to defeat it. However, while there is no prophetic declaration prior to the event, the author asserts that God "threw" the stones.

Typically, God seemed to use prophets to announce an upcoming specific action to ensure that the human audience did not miss the source and significance of the action. While utilizing natural processes, these actions were intended to demonstrate His sovereign control over space-time history. While similar to the previous example, the divine action was both more specific in terms of what was done as well as the expected human response (Harbin, 2005, pp. 267–274). An example is the case when Elijah prayed both to stop rain and to bring rain. First Kings 17:1 reports that Elijah declared to King Ahab that there would be no rain until he said so. This initiated a three-and-a-half-year drought, which the context indicates was to draw the

nation back to God (1 Kgs. 18:21). In terms of background, the rains in Israel tend to be seasonal. In the fall and winter, weather systems coming out of the northwest bring moisture from the Mediterranean. This moisture-laden air is lifted by the central highlands of Israel and through adiabatic cooling produces precipitation (Halpine, 1956, pp. 88–99). In contrast, dry winds out of the Arabian desert to the east and southeast tend to keep Israel rain-free during the summer months. After Elijah's announcement, apparently the summer winds prevailed continually for over three years. In contrast, to end the drought, Elijah proclaimed to Ahab "the roar of a heavy shower" (1 Kgs. 18:41) after which he went up on Mt. Carmel and prayed. After several sessions of prayer, Elijah's servant reported seeing a small cloud "coming up from the sea," that was coming in from the northwest. Soon the clouds blackened the sky, the winds arose, and the rains came (1 Kgs. 18:43–45). While the subsequent rain followed a normal weather pattern, the proclamation prior to the event followed by intense prayer demonstrated divine intervention.

Another example of this type of intervention might be the division of the Red Sea when the Israelites crossed. As described in the book of Exodus 14:1–12, following the Passover, the nation of Israel left Egypt, and by God's direction camped on the edge of the Red Sea where it was caught between the advancing Egyptian army and the sea (Harbin, 2005, pp. 131–133). After declaring the upcoming event to the people (14:13), Moses "stretched out his hand over the sea" (14:21). The text then describes the event as a situation where God "swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were

divided" (14:21).¹⁰ In this report, the text clearly describes God directing a physical process (a strong east wind) to produce a physical result (pushing the waters apart so that Israel could pass through).

These cases are situations where God intervened by directing physical causes and we still call them miracles. A second and more spectacular type of miracle involves an intervention that circumvents natural processes.

A key example of this also involves Elijah. Bracketed by the declaration of no rain for years and the subsequent drought ending rain noted above, Elijah confronted Ahab's pagan prophets. Here the challenge was not to bring rain, but to bring fire, specifically to ignite a burnt offering to their god. After the prophets of Baal and Asherah had failed for hours, Elijah prayed and intense fire came down out of heaven incinerating the wood and sacrifice, the

9 The verse describes the stones twice. First they are called "great stones from the heavens" (אֲבָנִים גְּדֹלוֹת מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם), and then they are called specifically "hailstones" (בָּצָר, הֶרְבֵּה).

10 One suggestion that has been proposed derives from the work of D. Nor and N. Paldor, two oceanographers. In the early 1990's, they noted that prior to the dredging of the Suez Canal, the north end of the Gulf of Suez contained an underwater sand bar with an average depth of about 7 meters that stretched from shore to shore (about 7 kilometers). When they modeled this structure both mathematically and then with a wind tunnel they found that a 40–45 knot wind blowing steadily for 10 hours would separate the waters above the reef for a width of about a kilometer. When the wind stopped, the waters being held back by the strong winds would return in the form of a wave in a matter of minutes (Harbin, 2005, pp. 131–133; see also: Nor and Paldor, 1992, pp. 305–314). Whether or not this sand bar had been in existence when Israel left Egypt is open to question. It is interesting that Joel McQuitty (1986) earlier had placed the location of the crossing in that particular location based on his identity of the three geographical landmarks mentioned in Exodus 14:2.

water which doused it, and the stone altar on which it was laid (1 Kgs. 18:39).

Miracle Categories

Scholars use different terms to differentiate the two categories of divine intervention. For example, Corduan describes “direct nonmiraculous interventions” and “direct miraculous intervention.” Both are in contrast to providence which is indirect. The difference is that the nonmiraculous would be a congruence of various “natural and unsurprising processes” in such a way that their cumulative effect would be “unusual.” He calls these “constellation miracles.” In contrast, he describes “violation miracles” a situation where a “law of nature” has been violated (Corduan, 1997, pp. 103–105). For the sake of simplicity, I tend to label the direct miraculous type as “Class A” miracles as illustrated by Elijah, and the fire from heaven and the first type as “Class B” miracles as illustrated by Elijah and the rain.

Just as rain is natural in the post-Flood world, so are periods of a lack of rain, or droughts even in the Bible. In Egypt, the annual flooding of the Nile provided agricultural fertility; as noted above, in the land of Israel, such was the result of rainfall. Consequently, lack of rainfall produced famines. At Sinai, God warned the nation of Israel that He would use drought and subsequent famine as a means of judgment on the nation (Lev. 26:19–20). Still, while judgment might be inferred, few famines are specifically noted as judgments. Moreover, the reader finds occasions where a specific drought-famine event is noted with no indication in the context of a judgmental purpose. Such is the case in Genesis 12:10 where the text observes that Abram went to Egypt because of a famine in the land. Since Abram had just obeyed God and was now in the land where God sent him, one hesitates to see this

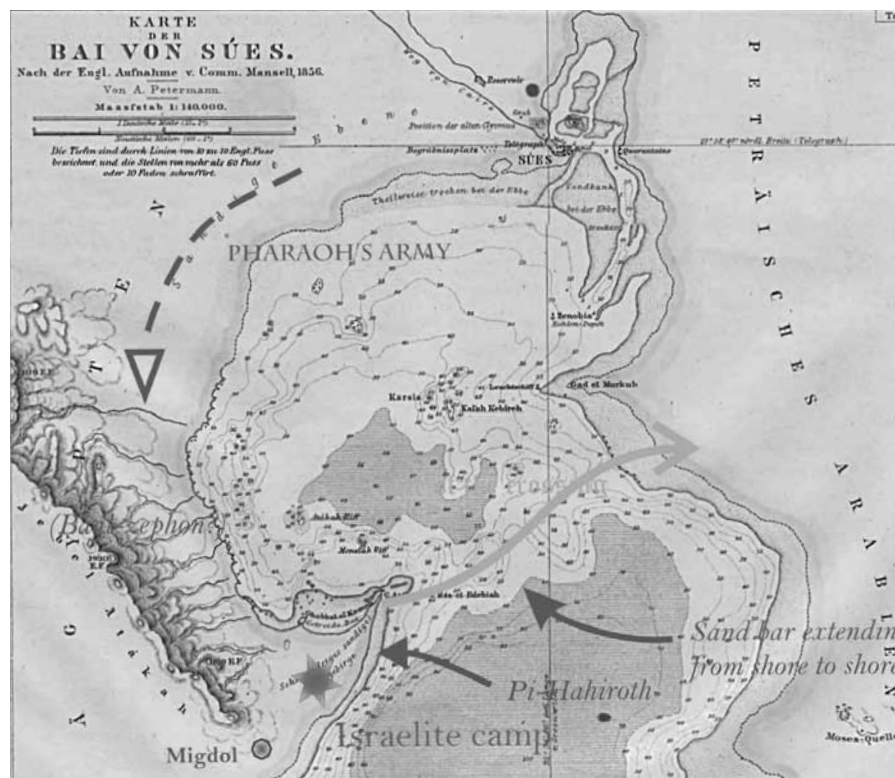


Figure 1. Possible Red Sea Crossing: This 1856 nautical navigation chart shows the location of the underwater ridge over which the Israelites may have traveled with the east wind God provided that pushed the waters away. Possible locations for the landmarks given in the Exodus text are also noted.

as a sign of judgment. Moreover, there is no indication that this was viewed as even a “Class B” intervention.

In contrast, fire descending from heaven to totally annihilate a sacrifice, and the water poured on it, and the altar on which it stands would unquestionably be unnatural. While a reader might seek a naturalistic cause such as lightning, the context highlights the extended period of drought and the fact that the event took place on a day with no clouds. Clearly this would be a violation, thus meriting a “Class A” designation.

The case of the Red Sea crossing is somewhat more complicated. In the events leading up to the crossing, God directed Moses and Israel to change direction and go to a specific location,

camp, and await further directions. When Pharaoh learned that they were camping on the bank of the Red Sea he prepared his chariots and headed out in pursuit. He appeared to have the Israelites cornered, but as Pharaoh’s chariots drew close to the Israelite camp, the angel of God stood as a pillar of cloud in front of the Egyptians blocking their path (clearly direct divine intervention in itself). Then God told Moses to act. At God’s direction, Moses lifted his staff, held it over the Red Sea, and the wind picked up out of the east and blew all night pushing the water of the sea aside and left it standing on either side of a path which led to the other shore. In the morning, the nation crossed. When Moses lifted his staff again at God’s direction, the

wind stopped and the two standing waves that Israel had passed between crashed together wiping out Pharaoh's forces. While the combination of the timing, and the location suggest that the crossing itself might fit into the "Class B" category (see Figure 1), the year-long process leading up to this specific action culminating in the sudden unexplained death of a specific segment of the Egyptian population suggests a very complicated "Class A" scenario.

The Nature of "Class A" Miracles

While the Exodus event incorporated physical systems, more often the miracles specifically named in the Bible have no apparent physical cause. A prime example is when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Today, according to the London Health Sciences Centre, under certain circumstances a person who is apparently dead as a result of cardiac arrest might be resuscitated by either CPR or electrical shock—if the resuscitation process begins within a short time following the cardiac arrest (London Health Sciences Centre website, accessed 31 August 2023). However, in Lazarus's case, he had been dead for four days (John 11:39). In this situation, where the blood would have coagulated and the flesh started to decay, no physical cause could restart the heart and cause the person to start breathing again. This type of miracle evidently involves direct intervention of God to produce a physical effect through a spiritual cause (e.g., the work of the Holy Spirit). They are more clearly miraculous because they are more dramatic—and more difficult to understand (Purtill, 1997, pp. 63–64). If this event were portrayed by Hollywood, it is likely that the sound track would include powerful music and visual effects during a 2–3 minute exhibition of Lazarus

gradually coming to life to heighten the drama. In the actual situation, it seems more likely that when Jesus called out, Lazarus took a deep breath, opened his eyes and sat up, then stood and exited the tomb. In essence, the miracle itself would be understated.

The concept of direct divine intervention is even more evident in John's description of what he calls Jesus' first miracle, turning the water into wine (John 2:1–10). Producing wine from water is actually a natural process although it requires a number of steps and a relatively long period of time. As described by biologists and winemakers, a grapevine (at least three years old) draws water from the soil, and then, in the leaf, photosynthesis processes light, the water, and carbon dioxide into carbohydrates (sugars), and oxygen. As they grow, the grapes collect the sugars. Then, when ripe (about four months after the blossom), the grapes are picked. Vintners squeeze the grapes, gather the juice, and allow it to ferment naturally changing the sugars to alcohol. Today, with the addition of yeast to accelerate the transformation, that process takes about one to three weeks. The wine is then generally aged for a period of time before it is served. In all, the natural process of turning water to good wine (generally considered an "aged" wine) is one that takes several months at a minimum (<https://winefolly.com/deep-dive/how-is-red-wine-made>, accessed 14 August 2023).

According to John's description, Jesus directed the household servants to fill six water pots (each with a capacity of twenty to thirty gallons) with water. When they were full, Jesus directed the servants to draw some of the liquid out and allow the headwaiter to taste it. When he did, the headwaiter pronounced it good *wine* (John 2:10). In other words, the freshly converted water—now wine—now had all of the characteristics of a

good, aged wine although it was only minutes old.¹¹

Biblical Miracles

We have cited several examples of events we view as miraculous in the Bible. Popularly, we sometimes think of the Bible as a book full of miracles, yet the text really only records approximately 166 specific miracles during the period from Abraham to the early Church, a period of a little over 2000 years.¹² And of those, almost 85%

11 A similar observation could be made of the creation of Adam and Eve. As described in Genesis 2, both had all of the characteristics of sexually mature adults, i.e., what might be described as the appearance of a twenty-year old, when they were moments "old." While sometimes labeled as "apparent age," a better perspective is that upon completion of God's work, they were complete, fully functioning systems. While we wonder what life might have been like prior to the Fall, it seems likely that without the Fall, Adam and Eve would have lacked any appearance of aging beyond their mature state at the point of their creation so that at a physical age of 200 they would have an "appearance of youth" of one tenth of that age.

12 These numbers are based on my count and delineation looking just at the historical context beginning with the call to Abraham in Genesis 11. While overall this would average a miracle every 12 years or so, if one looks outside of the three periods of miracle clusters (see note 13), it is more like a miracle every 85–90 years. This list does not include the events recorded in Genesis 1–11, that is, Creation and the Flood. I use the term "pre-historic" advisedly primarily because Adam and Eve were not created until the sixth day, there were no humans to observe the creation process, and thus they could not provide eye-witness testimony or historical records. As such the creation account must have been given by God. While we may (and should) accept the account as accurate as the testimony of God Who cannot lie, we do

are clustered in three periods totaling approximately a hundred years.¹³ The reality is that most of the Bible reflects “normal” life as evidenced by Gideon’s poignant question of the angel of the Lord—“where are all of His miracles...?” (Judg. 6:13).

In general, in the Bible, even for individuals who beheld them, miracles

not know when the account was originally transcribed, whether by Moses at Sinai, or by one of his ancestors who passed that written record through subsequent generations. Although Genesis 5:1 uses the term book, it may just be referring to the genealogical list which follows. It would seem that the earliest Biblical event which may be clearly dated historically would be the birth of Abraham, although even that has some margin of error because of different calendars (Harbin, 2005, p. 90). As such, both of those global events involving very complex divine interactions over time (the Creation and the Flood) may be deemed as pre-historical, that is, before records of the past written by eye-witnesses or taken from eyewitness accounts (Bebbington, 1979, pp. 1–9). However, the Biblical data does place strong limits on their antiquity invalidating deep time.

13 The three periods which contain miracle clusters are the time of the Exodus and Conquest, a period of approximately 50 years with 47 miracles specifically listed, and the ministries of Elijah and Elisha which lasted an estimated 30 years with 30 specific miracles. The third period is the active ministry of Jesus which lasted about 3½ years coupled with the post-resurrection work of Jesus (46 miracles listed) and the ministry of the early Church through the book of Acts which covers perhaps 25 years from Jesus’ ascension to the death of Paul (16 listed). It is true that John records that Jesus did “many other signs” or miracles than those he specifically recorded (John 20:30). As such it seems likely that each of the cluster periods included more miracles than recorded. Likewise, it seems likely that more miracles occurred outside of the cluster periods than the 27 cited. It is clear, however, that the general expectation for daily life was non-miraculous.

were rare events in a mundane life of routine physical existence. When miracles did occur, the first reaction of Biblical characters tended to be that there must have been a “natural” explanation. Despite having been visited by an angelic being who burned his sacrifice with his staff, when Gideon put out the fleece and God responded supernaturally he hesitated to accept it as a genuine miracle from God. His immediate response was to reverse the criteria for a redo—just to make sure. Even more significantly, as noted above, there is the first Easter morning. We have no idea of how many occasions, right up to the night before He died, that Jesus indicated to His disciples that He was going to die, but that He would be resurrected. Setting the stage He performed many miracles in front of His disciples, including resurrecting Lazarus. It is then interesting how His disciples reacted after they found the empty tomb. They assumed that He was still dead and supposed the body had been stolen—a naturalistic perception (John 20:1; Luke 24:11; Mark 16:11). Even when the risen Jesus met with them, it was difficult for them to accept the fact, especially for Thomas (Matt. 28:12; John 20:25). The overall conclusion is that, in general, people who lived in Bible times largely expected a non-miraculous world, perhaps one of the reasons they were so quick to turn from following God.

God’s Work in the Creation Event

The foundation we have laid indicates that while God has interacted directly in the physical realm even after the Fall, producing what we call miracles, those interactions were relatively rare. Genesis 1:29 indicates that God set humankind in control of an extremely complex system that He had designed and set into motion. In that context the human race was expected to use physi-

cal processes to manage this physical world. If prior to the Fall, humans were working in direct communion with God, then it may be that miracles were not needed or at least did not carry the weight they did historically.

It is then suggested that the reason for miracles after the Fall would be for God to more directly guide mankind in specific directions. They would also serve to remind humans, who were prone to forget that God existed, that God still had sovereign control—especially during the three cluster periods as God developed the redemption process. We noted that the first cluster period was the Exodus-wandering-Conquest event. The text indicates that during that approximately fifty-year period, Moses composed the Pentateuch which incorporated the account of God’s creation as part of the background behind His redemption of Israel from Egypt. While this clearly provided Israel a solid theological background to its deliverance and a rationale for the Torah which was being taught and written at Sinai and beyond, that redemption was a precursor to the eventual redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. As such, we share with Israel awesome wonder at the greatness of God in His creation of the cosmos and realize that the God who could create such a marvelous universe could surely save it. At this point we want to briefly survey that pre-historic Creation sequence within the context of our understanding of how historically God’s people saw Him intervene.¹⁴ While there is much in Genesis 1 that could be addressed exploring the nuances and implications of God’s interactions with the physical world, for our purposes we

14 While it would be desirable to do a similar study of God’s role in the Flood of Noah, space does not allow that, so it must remain for a separate study.

will only look at several salient points regarding His methodology as presented in the text.

A common observation, often combined with the observation that the Bible is not a book of science, is that while Genesis describes God as the Creator, it does not describe how He did it. This is a true statement. However, that is because its purpose is not to provide physical cause-and-effect processes, the matters of science. There seem to be two reasons for this. First, the purpose of the OT is to remind the nation of Israel, and subsequently the rest of mankind, that while God created a good world, something happened to it. As a result, God would need to intervene by providing to Israel, and the rest of the world, a Redeemer in the person of God's Messiah. Consequently, the fact that God was the Creator is by itself adequate explanation. Second, as we will see, physical cause-and-effect processes are not provided because they were not used.

This is evident from the start. In the Hebrew, Genesis 1:1 appears to be an independent sentence which introduces the main thought of the section which is that God created all of space-time. The noted Hebrew scholar Umberto Cassuto (1978, p. 20) expressed it as "at the commencement of time.... God created the heavens and the earth." While a crucial bedrock for all theology, in terms of literary structure the rest of the chapter builds on this crucial statement showing that while God followed a process, it was not one of physical cause and effects. An important aspect of verse one is the verb *בָּרָא*, which is translated "created." This verb is only used to describe action by God, most commonly in describing His creation of the universe and its contents. It "can be used for creating something out of nothing, but that idea must come from the context and not from the inherent meaning of this word" (Ross, 1988, pp. 724–728).

As used in this chapter, it shows up in three situations: the creation of the entire cosmos (v.1); the creation of the "every living creature that moves" (v. 21); and three times regarding the creation of mankind (v. 27).

Following the introductory summary statement, verse 2 then sets the stage for the creation process. Cassuto translates its opening as "As for the earth, it was..." explaining that the next three clauses describe the world at that point of the creation sequence (Cassuto, 1978, p. 21). It was *tōhū wābōhū* (תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ) or "formless and void;" it was covered in darkness; and the Spirit of God hovered over it. While much more could be said regarding these three conditions, we will just observe that together they provide the setting for God's work. Mathews characterizes the first phrase that the world was *tōhū wābōhū* as it being "uninhabitable and inhospitable to human life." However he points out later that based on how that phrase is used in the prophets we should not conclude that this was a negative situation pointing to a world under God's judgment, but rather that it denotes specific physical medium for creative change (Mathews, 1996, pp. 130–132). Cassuto (1978, p. 23) suggests that it describes the "unformed material from which the earth was to be fashioned." Similarly DeRemer (2007, p. 71) characterizes it as "without structure" and "without occupants." The darkness suggests a medium awaiting the artist, while the Spirit hovering or moving over it suggests the artist beginning to work. The impression then is, at this point the physical world on which we now live was like a blank slate awaiting God's creative genius, which will be displayed in the rest of the chapter. Isaiah 45:18 reflects this concept when it says, "He fashioned the earth and made it; He established it; He did not create it to be empty, but fashioned it to be inhabited" (my translation).

That creative process is described as a six-day creation sequence using a variety of verbs citing a series of ten declarations of God. The first seven declarations (verses 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, and 24) contain verbs that are in the jussive mood, which is used to "express a command, a wish (or a blessing), advice, or a request" (Gesenius, 1910, p. 321).

These commands decree that something physical should come into existence, or that something physical should produce something else that is physical. For example, Genesis 1:3 reads: "Then God said, 'Let there *be* light;' and there *was* light" (אֵר וְיָהי אֵר). The key here is the two forms of the verb 'to be' (italicized). The first is a statement that directs that light should exist. The second form of the verb 'to be' is an imperfect tied to what is called a "waw consecutive" (the *waw* is translated here as "and"). This typically reflects narrative structure, but here it also describes the resulting state, which might be translated as "and light existed."¹⁵ The eighth declaration of God in Genesis 1:26 is a cohortative where God expresses a self-directive (first person plural) regarding the creation of mankind ("Let Us make man in Our image").¹⁶ The last two declarations give commands to mankind. Verse 28 is the dominion declaration where mankind is man-

¹⁵ A "waw consecutive" is a Hebrew grammatical structure often used in narrative literature where the general purpose conjunction *ו* (a "waw") is attached to a verb in the imperfect state. This transforms the sense of the verb from an uncompleted action (often viewed as future) to one that is completed (Gesenius, 1910, pp. 132–133).

¹⁶ Gesenius describes a cohortative as laying "stress on the determination underlying the action, and the personal interest in it" (Gesenius, 1910, p. 319). The use of the plural here is deemed significant, but lies outside the focus of the present study.

dated to fill and rule the Earth. Verse 29 might be called the diet declaration where God decrees that the entire plant kingdom is to be used by mankind and the animal kingdom for food.

Following the example of light instantaneously existing, the general pattern throughout this chapter suggests instantaneous fulfillment of God's jussive declarations. Based on our foundational discussion, we would suggest they reflect Class-A miracles. A common expression of fulfillment is the phrase "it was so" (וַיְהִי־כֵן, literally "it was thus") which shows up six times.

However, several cases seem to include physical cause-and-effect processes as part of working out of the declaration. At first glance, these appear to be at best Class-B miracles where God utilized physical processes to accomplish the task at hand.

For example, on Day Two, the directive is "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters" using the same jussive form of the verb to be. However, the result is described that God "made the expanse." This is a very difficult term and commentators struggle to explain it (Cassuto, 1978, p. 31). The word translated as expanse is רָקִיעַ (*rāqīa'*) which can be translated as "expanse" or "firmament." Because of how the noun is used in other passages where it can describe a metal plate which has been beaten or stamped out (Payne, 1999, p. 862), some argue that the writer is describing an actual "firm heavenly dome" (Gunkel, 1997, p. 108). Consequently it is often translated as firmament. Mathews (1996, p. 149) points out that "there is no evidence, however, that the author conceived of it as a solid mass, a 'firmament' (AV) that supported a body of waters above it." Rather, as shown by later uses in this chapter, the "expanse" is phenomenological in terms of what a human standing on Earth would see. These would include looking up at the Sun, Moon, and stars (1:14–17) and

birds flying (1:20). As such, the expanse would be the atmosphere, and the waters "above" the expanse would be the clouds which produce rain (Mathews, 1996, p. 150).

We see a similar pattern in the second half of the Creation Week. On Day Four, God said "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens. . ." (1:14). In this section verbs describing the outcome might seem to suggest processes: "God made the two great lights;" "God placed them in the expanse;" "God created the great sea monsters;" "God created man" (Westermann, 1984, p. 128). But that understanding derives from our human experiences where "made" implies manufacture, "placed" suggests physical movement, and "created" is understood to represent a physical working out of an idea much as David describes the heavens as "the work of [God's] fingers" (Ps 8:3).

Since each of these creation "acts" begin with the declaration "Then God said," it would seem that the understanding was that God created these in the same manner as noted in 1:3; that is, He spoke and "it was so." In other words, the stress is on the result as a final state. Not only is the process God used irrelevant, apparently there was no process.¹⁷ God spoke and it existed in a fully functioning completed state.

17 This statement must be qualified at certain points with regard to the creation of mankind and the placing of mankind in the garden. In Genesis 1:27–28, the final result of making man in the image of God is that there were two individuals, male and female. However, Genesis 2:5–25 seems to amplify the sixth day (Ross, 1988, pp. 117–119) adding several nuances. For example, Genesis 2:7 specifies that the man was "formed of dust from the ground," which apparently served as a typological step to emphasize the physicality of mankind. Likewise, Genesis 2:21–22 specifies that the woman was fashioned from a rib removed from Adam, again serving typologically to

However, that completed state was not static, but one which was highly dynamic from the beginning. While beyond the scope of this study, when created every living creature likely would have been in an adult state and in motion. This produces several interesting matters for speculation, especially for Days Three, Five, and Six, such as how many different copies and variations of each "kind" instantly appeared globally in appropriate ecological niches? All in all, the result is a realm of living creatures that is of incomprehensible complexity.

The Matter of Time

Given the infinite capacities of the Creator God demonstrated through the declarations which instantaneously produced fully functioning highly complex systems, could not God have completed the entire cosmos instantaneously as Augustine suggested (Augustine, 2002, pp. 271–273)? This raises the difficult and controversial matter of the description of Creation as a six-day process. Whether one takes the view that a "day" is a literal 24-hour period or an abstract long period of time, there is a problem with the word "day." For example, in either case, if physical light¹⁸ came into existence

emphasize the unity of the two. Similarly while Genesis 2:8 states that God "planted" a garden, it would seem to be that He filled a region with mature plants, not that He planted seeds. The focus is on a completed, fully functioning system.

18 Presumably Genesis 1:3 refers to what we know as the entire electromagnetic spectrum, although for the original audience the understanding would be what we call visible light. Subsequently in the following verses, the reference would be to the visible portion of the spectrum as opposed to darkness, the absence of light. Regardless, this raises a conceptual question regarding how God IS light (1 John 1:5,

immediately upon God's declaration, there is difficulty in explaining how the creation of light and separating it from darkness correlates with "one day" (or more properly "Day One"). Likewise, in either case, there is difficulty in understanding how physical light exists (Day One), giving life to plant life (Day Three) if the physical light emitters are not brought into existence until Day Four.¹⁹

Part of the problem is that there is a presumption that God's labor was constrained by time. The Biblical evidence indicates, and thus our understanding of God is, that He is outside of time—in fact that time is something that God created.

So if God spoke and the final product resulted, then why does the text use "days" to describe the creation? Here I would give two preliminary thoughts. First, the Bible hints that aspects of the creation were intended to serve as guidance for mankind. For example, while the concept of day is delineated in verse 5 (evening and morning), the idea of time delineation defined by the Sun, Moon, and stars is not described until verse 14. There we read that the various heavenly lights (the Sun, Moon, and stars) were intended to serve not only to separate the light from darkness, but to "be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years." This indicates that there are both social

and theological aspects to creation that need to be teased out a bit more (see Seiss, 1972, and Bullinger, 1967, for interesting speculation).

Second, the material God gave Moses we include as Genesis 1–Numbers 9 not only became the foundational national document for Israel preparing it for its march to the Promised Land which begins in Numbers 10, it provided the nation which was going to produce the Messiah with mankind's first divinely directed corporate worship system (Harbin, 2024, p. 136). Thus, the six-day creation process followed by a day of rest becomes the model for the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:11. There, God tells the Israelites that they were to observe the Sabbath because in the creation process God rested on the seventh day. This builds into the human calendar a portion of life which must be offered to God. This is indicated by the differentiation between time markers such as days, months, and years which are measured by the astronomical bodies, and the seven-day week which is both arbitrary and unique to the Israelite culture (Halla, 1977, pp. 12–13; see also Sarna, 1989, pp. 14–15).

Conclusion

The extremely compressed discussion of the Creation given in Genesis 1:1–2:4 raises matters which we have not been able to address in this brief study. The basic problem that tends to be overlooked is that when one looks at an event and attempts to describe a process which led up to the situation at hand, any number of possible processes may be given, some more feasible than others—with feasibility determined by one's world view. As noted, this material cannot be described as history as we understand it (Long 1994, pp. 27–38). Rather, it seems best to be described as a deposition—the testimony of the One who did it. The bottom

line seems to be that this text describes God creating through a sequence of verbal declarations which expressed directives that various aspects of the cosmos should exist (focusing on the Earth and culminating in the creation of mankind), and they existed. These declarations tell the reader several vital items including: there is a Creator who created the entire cosmos; the Earth and its contents were judged as very good; we as human beings were created by Him; and while created beings like the rest of life on Earth, we have been given a very heavy corporate responsibility. However, as the creation account continues, we read about what happened to that "very good" creation (Harbin, 2021, pp. 223–233). Today we live in a culture that seems to echo the question with which the Serpent challenged Eve in the garden, "has God said...?" May we not be deceived.

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see also Revelation 1:23 and 22:5), but that light as we know it is created.

19 This may not be the problem it is presented as being. If God created all of the vegetation in one day, the fully mature plants could have easily handled a couple of days in physical darkness. As a gardener in a climate with significant winters I have learned that I can place my potted patio plants in an unlit, windowless shop for a few days without problems. In fact, this may be a corroborating datum to a literal six-day creation. Again, we get stuck in the matrix of physicality.

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