

Diplomatic Immunity and Covenant Creation

Jeffrey L. Vaughn

In the beginning,
God created
What?

It is commonly assumed that Genesis 1 speaks of the literal creation of the physical universe

This is called concordism

Concordism is the view that the biblical account of creation, when properly understood, will be in agreement with scientific accounts of natural history.

Example of Concordism

Day 1:

Genesis 1:1

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Genesis 1:2

"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

Genesis 1:3

"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

About 15-20 billion years ago

God created matter, space and time.

About 4.5 billion years ago

The matter from which God formed our earth and solar system comprised a shapeless nebula in dark space. God set to work on it to accomplish His intentions.

About 4.5 billion years ago

Sunlight became visible from earth at this time. At some point, God caused the sun to ignite - quite literally as a giant continuously-burning hydrogen bomb. This verse may either refer to this or to when God cleared some of the nebular dust away.

The primary examples of concordism
Young Earth Creationism
Day Age
Gap Theory
Fischer's Theistic Evolution

These views try to find concordance, that is agreement, harmony, similarity, or correspondence on a verse by verse basis between Scripture and the "facts" of physical creation

Each concordist view tends to be all or nothing. Either the view is true or it is false. If a given view is true, the other concordist views are false

There is another class of views called non-concordist

Framework	Apocalyptic
Analogic Days	Prophetic Days
Local Creation	Ancient Near East
Ancient Writing	
some forms of Theistic Evolution	
and of course, Covenant Creation	

Each of these views recognizes a feature of the text that can not, should not be taken in concordance with physical creation

Features such as the literary structure, the apocalyptic nature, the common use analogy in Scripture, the prophetic symbolism, the emphasis of function, the physically restricted form, comparison to ANE literature and ANE archeology, the general or total failure to reconcile the text to science, and the covenant purpose of the text

Non-concordist views offer something that illuminates the text in addition to what the other views offer. If a given non-concordist view is true, the other views may still be true, and likely many of them are true.

Modern Christians are generally not aware of the long histories of non-concordist views

Non-concordist views don't match our modern expectations

Modern Christians tend to outright deny the validity of non-concordist views

Yet non-concordist views all work, and work together, focusing on separate important issues in the text

As Young-Earth Creationism dies, non-concordist views will become more popular

In answer to the question,

In the beginning,

God created

What?

We should first try to settle,

Is the creation account meant to be
concordist? Or non-concordist?

How can we answer that question?

Scripture may not directly help

If the writers assumed concordism, they might not have assumed the same version of concordism we see

If the writers assumed non-concordism, they might have assumed the analogies were obvious

That we have so much disagreement throughout history shows we can not determine the answer from Scripture alone

We need a clear example from history about how the ancients read their creation documents

The history of diplomatic immunity provides the first example

Diplomatic immunity is a form of legal immunity and a policy held between governments, which ensures that diplomats are given safe passage and are considered not susceptible to lawsuit or prosecution under the host country's laws (although they can be expelled).

Diplomatic immunity comes from the principle that an individual is under the law of his country. He has no formal rights or protection under the country he is visiting

In ancient times, a traveler to a foreign country was not under the law of the country he visited. He was not protected

Law was a function of the covenant you were born under

For example, each Greek city-state had its own patron god or goddess. Typically, that city-state had its own creation story where that god created the city, the first citizens, and the law

We call these creation stories cosmologies because we believe they describe the Greek view of the universe

But do they?



Plato and Aristotle developed a true cosmology

Plato recognized that you can't get from here to infinity. Therefore, he reasoned, you can't get from infinity to here. The universe and time were created. Aristotle called this creator the unmoved Mover.

This was the uncreated Creator. The Unknown God.

Aristotle's followers saw no need for an unmoved Mover and developed the cosmology further, developing an eternal universe

This universe developed into Ptolemy's model which stood uncontested for 1500 years. Columbus, Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler took the first chunks out of it. Physicists finally gave up the last parts as a result of the COBE experiments in the 1990's. The rest of the world has yet to abandon the last vestiges of Aristotle's reign.

The Unknown God became a place holder for whatever god or gods actually existed but were unknown to the
Greeks

The Apostle Paul recognized the Unknown God as the
creator of the physical universe

But what is important here is, neither Plato, Aristotle,
nor their followers ascribed physical creation to any of
the gods of the pantheon, the gods of the Greek creation
stories

The Unknown God created the physical universe, but the
gods created the individual city-states

Plato, Aristotle, and their followers did not see the Greek creation stories as texts describing physical creation

They believed the creation stories and used them when discussing law, morals, rights and duties of a citizen, but they ignored the creation stories when they discussed physical creation

With respect to their own traditions, Plato and Aristotle were non-concordists. The creation accounts were the basis of covenant and law

This was the understanding in Greece and essentially all of the Roman world from before Plato until at least the first century

In answer to the question,

In the beginning,
God created
What?

Plato and Aristotle's answer

In the beginning,
god created
the city-state, the first citizens, and the law

This answer is foreign to us

Our answer, a concordist answer, would be foreign to
them

In AD 50, if you became a Christian, you had to
denounce your city's patron god

You traded your creation story for the creation
story of Genesis

You renounced your citizenship and your rights as
a citizen, maybe not a formal declaration, but
often the equivalent result

Officially you were now an atheist, you had no
god to protect you

The Jews went from town to town and persecuted the church

Saul's purpose for going to Damascus. Acts 13, in Antioch. Acts 14, in Iconium and Lystra. Acts 17, in Thessalonica and Berea. Acts 18, in Corinth. Acts 20, in Greece, etc.

If you were a Jewish Christian, you were expected to conform to Jewish law and the Jews could judge you

If you were a Greek Christian, you had renounced your citizenship for a Jewish God. You were now Jewish

This persecution was possible only because of the
legal system back then

The city creation story was a legal covenant that
defined who was in and who was out

It said nothing about physical creation

The citizens had rights. The non-citizens had
none

This was certainly the view of creation texts in ancient Greece and most of the Roman world for over 500 years

But Genesis 1 is 6000 years old. Did the people who wrote even earlier believe what we believe today? Or did they believe what people believed 2000 years ago?

We can't know for sure, but we do have some ancient law codes we can compare

For example, The law code of Hammurabi starts with something that looks suspiciously like a creation account.

It was written around the time of Abraham nearly 4000 years ago

It was written in an ancient language Akkadian, the parent language of Hebrew, and the language Abraham likely spoke

Let's look at the prologue

When Anu the Sublime, King of the Anunaki, and Bel, the lord of Heaven and earth, who decreed the fate of the land, assigned to Marduk, the over-ruling son of Ea, God of righteousness, dominion over earthly man, and made him great among the Igigi, they called Babylon by his illustrious name, made it great on earth, and founded an everlasting kingdom in it, whose foundations are laid so solidly as those of heaven and earth; then Anu and Bel called by name me, Hammurabi, the exalted prince, who feared God, to bring about the rule of righteousness in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil-doers; so that the strong should not harm the weak; so that I should rule over the black-headed people like Shamash, and enlighten the land, to further the well-being of mankind.

Notice the words in common with Genesis 1

The original is in Akkadian, the parent language of Hebrew and shares much of the Hebrew vocabulary

I have not had much success getting a copy of the Akkadian text

The common translation, the translator knew it was a law code and may have embellished the translation. The translation has about 4 times as many words as the original

For example, an Akkadian student told me that the word translated decreed and assigned is not two words, but one occurrence of one word which is the Akkadian equivalent to the Hebrew "*Bara*" which is translated *create* in Genesis 1:1

The prologue to Hammurabi's law code might be an ancient creation account

The Future?

The ancients at the time of Christ had a non-concordist view of their own creation accounts

The ancient law codes from before Christ may have started with creation accounts demonstrating non-concordism

Non-concordist views of Genesis will be considered heavily in the future

There is only one non-concordist view of eschatology,
Covenant Eschatology