

The Harmony of the Creation Accounts

To man who has concluded by reason that God exists, there are no more beautiful words than Genesis 1:1. The comfort such a man has knowing that not only does God exist but that He loved man enough to tell him about his origins is immeasurable.

The story of man's creation is found in Genesis 1 and 2. Religious modernists have suggested that there are two creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 that are contradictory to one another. Specifically Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Genesis 2:4-25 are contrasted. These modernists suggest that there are two creations mentioned: of the earth and heavens (Genesis 1:1-19 vs. Genesis 2:4-6); of man (Genesis 1:26-31 and Genesis 2:7-8, 21-22); and of the animals (Genesis 1:20-25 and Genesis 2:19-20). They also suggest that the sequence of creation is contradictory between the two accounts. Are these suggestions legitimate?

In dealing with the question of sequence, we should take into consideration that the ancient's conception of time and sequence was not necessarily the same as our own. Ancient literature often rearranged the sequence of events for special purposes. In that regard, Genesis 1 provides us with a daily account of the creation. The focus of Genesis 2, however, is not upon the creation as a whole, but rather man's relationship with it. The purpose is different, and so the sequence is different (looking at creation from man's perspective instead of God's). This would not have been a problem with the oriental mind, whose conception of time was not always linear. However, with our modern linear conceptions of time, we find "contradictions." Let us not so think!

When we begin to understand that the sequence of the events in chapter two is not necessarily linear, we have cleared our first hurdle in seeing the harmony of these two chapters. There is no difficulty in fitting the creation of man in chapter two within the sixth day of chapter one. The events become complementary, including the creation of both Adam and Eve. The narrative would naturally be included in the events of day six.

What about the creation of the animals mentioned in Genesis 2:19-20? It appears in this section of Scripture as if God created these animals in between His creation of Adam and Eve. There is no problem with such a suggestion. All were created on the sixth day according to Genesis 1:24-28. So long as the creatures were created at some point during that day, there is no conflict. We could look at these passages in several

different ways. First, either the details of Genesis 1:24-28 are not given in sequence, but are given in sequence in 2:19-20, or vice versa. Second, it is possible that both sequences could be correct. God could have created one set of animals prior to Adam's creation and another set afterward. With either interpretation there is no inherent contradiction.

The suggestion that Genesis 2:4 references a separate account of the creation is easily enough explained by understanding that the chapter and verse divisions were not in the original biblical manuscripts. Genesis 2:1-4 really belongs at the end of chapter one. Verse four then becomes a summary of the work of Genesis 1.

It can be challenging to read these ancient documents outside of our own cultural presuppositions. Modernists and rationalists would so criticize. However, wisdom dictates that we consider ancient literature outside of the prevalent philosophies of our day, and in terms understood by the ancients. In so doing, we will avoid wrongfully accusing these ancient words of inconsistencies.