

Creation

1. **What** is the story of creation?

The story of creation is all about the origins of the universe and life on Earth. Christians believe that important details about creation are revealed in the New Testament, in the Gospel of John, which go beyond the information provided at the start of the Old Testament, in the Genesis account that they share with Jews. Additionally, some Christians believe that what happened immediately after creation, in Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, helps explain the existence of evil, pain and suffering in the world. This makes the story of creation a really important Christian narrative that helps explain how the universe was created and why it is the way it is today.



The Garden of Eden

Creation

The process through which God brought the universe and living things within it into existence.

Genesis: the first chapter of Genesis contains the most famous account of creation, which informs readers that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit brought the universe and living things into existence over six days and that God the Father rested on the seventh. On the first day, God created light and distinguished day from night. On the second day, God created the sky; then, on the third day, he made the sea, the land, and plant life. On the fourth day, God created the Sun, Moon, and stars. On the fifth day, he made birds and fish; then, on the sixth day, he created land animals and human beings.

John: the Gospel of John does not revisit the details of the Genesis account, but it does inform readers that God the Son was present at creation in addition to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. According to John, God the Father and God the Son brought the universe and living things within it into existence by God the Son acting as the creative agent of God the Father. In summary, this means that the Gospel of John claims God the Son somehow created on behalf of God the Father, an idea not expressed in the Old Testament but revealed to Christians later.

2. **How** does the story of creation work?

For Christians, the story of creation works by demonstrating that all three persons of God were present and active in the process of bringing the universe into being; God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in Genesis, and God the Son in John.

Word of God

The manifestation of the mind and will of God; a synonym for God the Son used in the Gospel of John.

God the Father: Genesis 1:1 reveals God the Father at work during creation with the words, "When God began to create the heavens and the earth..." Likewise, Romans 1:20 contains Paul the Apostle's claim that, "Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature... have been seen and understood through the things God has made." Finally, the Apostles' Creed confirms the role that God the Father had in bringing about the universe in its opening lines, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth."

God the Son: John 1:1-3 introduces the role of God the Son in creation with the words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." The author of John used the word "Word" to describe the manifestation of the mind and will of God, and as a synonym for God the Son (the author of John clarified this a few verses later when he wrote that the Word became flesh, or was incarnated, as Jesus).

God the Holy Spirit: Genesis 1:2 follows on from verse one with the words, "The earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." The phrase, "wind from God", is important because some translations use the term "spirit of God", which sounds like "God the Holy Spirit". Although Jews also read Genesis they don't recognise this translation. For them, the "wind from God" is just a wind; but for Christians, it points towards the role of God the Holy Spirit in creation.

3. **Why** is the creation story important?

The story of creation is important for three principal reasons. First, Christians use it to support the belief in and worship of the Trinity because the three persons of the Trinity all appear to feature in the story. Second, the story of creation forms a major faultline in Christianity: did God bring the universe into being precisely as described in Genesis 1, or is this passage merely a metaphor for a process that looked radically different (maybe even like the Big Bang, or evolution by natural selection)? For liberal Christians, the story of creation didn't take place over six days, but for fundamentalist Christians, it did; the Bible tells it exactly as it happened. The story of creation is important in this regard because whether Christians read it literally or metaphorically can be used as a litmus test to work out whether they are on the liberal or the fundamentalist wing of the religion. Finally, the creation story is not just about the origins of the universe, living things and human beings in particular; it is also about the immediate aftermath of this process, in which Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden for disobeying God.



The Big Bang

George Thinks

Christians have a whole host of beliefs surrounding the creation story, but the most important thing to take away from it is that God, and God alone, is responsible for the creation of the universe and everything in it. If you look closely, it's possible to find God at work in all three persons of the Trinity; however, speaking personally, I think this stretches the text a little. After all, in Genesis, whether the word "wind" should be read as "spirit" remains highly contentious, and God the Son isn't mentioned at all (you've got to wait until the Gospel of John for that). But whatever you think, Christians are unanimous in affirming that God created the universe from nothing (perhaps as stated in the Bible if you're a fundamentalist Christian; perhaps via the Big Bang if you're a liberal one). Creation is the start of it all, and it should be no surprise that thinkers repeatedly return to it to help explain why the world is the way it is. Not least because it's where the seeds of the problem of evil are sown, which is another reason why it's so interesting. According to Genesis 3, by disobeying God and eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve come to know evil and have sufferings inflicted on them. This is why Augustine of Hippo proposes his soul-deciding defence: Adam and Eve have free will, exercising it in disobedience of God has consequences, but apparently this doesn't undermine God's benevolence because we are responsible!

