

Creation of Heaven and Angels

Of The Creation Of Heaven And Angels

The Division Of The Heavens.

The world, or universe, consists of two parts; the one invisible and inaccessible to us, which is the supreme heaven, together with the angels that there inhabit: the other visible, which comprehends the firmament wherein the stars do shine; the several planets that we behold with our eyes; and this terraqueous globe where on we live. This supreme heaven {a} 2Co 12:2 St Paul has called the third heaven, in respect to our distance from it; in which sense the first heaven is the air, or atmosphere of the earth wherein birds do fly, and meteors are engendered; the second is the ethereal region wherein the stars, and other luminous bodies are fixed: the third the empyreal heaven where God himself resides, and more immediately displays his majestic presence.

Created By God

Now he that at all considers the vast bulk and extent of the universe, and how many thousand miles circumference that part of the world which lies open to our sight, must be allowed to take up, will find himself, upon the first reflection, compelled to acknowledge {b} Ps 19:1 that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy-work.. The sun according to the common and lowest computation is one hundred and sixty six time bigger than the earth: {c} (Vid. Monf. de Fontenelle History de l'Academic de Sciences en Annee 1706.) the distance of the fixed stars from us, {d} (Vid. Whiston's Theory, page 32.) according to the best calculations is, six hundred and forty-eight thousand millions of English miles; and if so, what a prodigious extent must the whole be? And what must we think of that invisible world above which still increases, and enlarges its circumference in proportion to its distance? I make no wonder at all therefore, that, upon such a contemplation as this, some philosophers of old have been tempted to believe it so, had not reason come in to their aid, and shewn them that every thing composed of number and parts must necessarily be finite, and can have no more than an indefinite extension, i.e. an extension so large that we cannot conceive it, not set any bounds to it. But now, what mind, less than infinite, what hand, less than omnipotent, could have laid a design so immense, and executed it so successfully? We justly admire the compass of the heavens, the vastness of their distance, and the regularity of their motions; and when we behold the starry region set forth in all its pride and glory, we cannot forbear extolling its great Creator: but could we draw aside the veil, and look into the sanctuary; could we mount above this spangled firmament which is but the out-work, as it were, to that new Jerusalem {e} Re 21:18 whose streets are of pure gold, and the very foundations of whose walls (to accommodate it luster to our apprehension) are of precious stones, which God has prepared for his own habitation; we should soon forget our boasted laws of mechanical motion, and blush, and fall down, and join our acknowledgments with those bright intelligences that cease not day and night blessing God, and saying, {f} Re 4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Whether Moses's Account Extends To Them

It is a great dispute both among astronomers and divines, whether the history of the creation, as it is delivered by Moses, includes the higher heavens, or is only intended to describe the formation of the earth and its dependencies. Those that take his words, in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, for a summary proposition, are of opinion that the entire universe is comprised in the six days works; but others, who rather think them a general preface to his history, imagine that they extend no farther than to this habitable world; as the most, no farther than this planetary system. They suppose, then, that the creation of the heavens was precedaneous to that of the earth, some think, to that of the chaos; that they were made for the reception of angels who were created many ages before the formation of man; and that it is agreeable to the notion we have of God that he should have creatures to communicate his goodness to, and a place to display his glory in, long before the Mosaic account of the time. Though therefore the holy penman mentions heaven as well as earth, in his introduction; yet it does not therefore follow, say they, that he means the supreme heaven, because the word heaven, in scripture language, is often known to signify no more than the region of the air. Thus we read of the {h} Ge 1:20 firmament of heaven, {i} Ge 7:11 the windows of heaven, {k} Job 38:37 the bottles of heaven, and {l} Job 38:29 the hoary frost of heaven; none of which extend beyond our atmosphere; and therefore, when God is said to create the heaven and the earth, we cannot from

thence necessarily conclude that he did, at one and the same time, create everything in the vast extra-mundane spaces: nay, though we should allow heaven, in this place, to be taken in its most exalted sense, yet all that can be inferred from hence is, that Moses is here instructing the Jews, not only that the little globe whose formation he was going to describe, but even the frame of universal nature, and the heavens, with all their hosts, both visible and invisible, were effected by the same Almighty hand: but, at what point of time that they were effected, he no where determines; only he intimates, in the very next words, that they were of an ancients standing than the earth; for the earth, says he (or the chaotic mass out of which the earth was formed) was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, even after he had told us that God had created the heaven. Though therefore we are told, indeed, that in the fourth day {m} Ge 1:16 God made two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, and that he made the stars also; yet the text, they say, does not necessarily denote so much. {n} (Nicholls's Conference, Volume I.) Our English translation interpolates the words (he made) which are not in the original; for the simple translation of the Hebrew is only this, --And God made two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, and the stars; which last words (and the stars) are not to be referred to the word (made) in the beginning of the verse, but to the word (rule) which immediately goes before them; and so this sentence, the lesser light to rule the night, and the stars, will denote the peculiar usefulness and predominancy of the moon above all other stars and planets, in respect of this earth of ours: for it shines out when they only twinkle, and affords a mighty influence in the production and growth of all plants and vegetables; so that it may not improperly be called the {o} (This sense of the words seems more natural; because the moon's being prince and ruler among the stars, and goddess of the night, is the common language of the ancients. Thus Tully tells us that she was called Diana, because she made a day of the night. De Nat Deor. Lib. 2. Horace, Lucidum Coeli Decus, & Syderum Regina Bicornis, Ep. 18. Seneca, Obscuri Dea clara mundi. Hipp. and (to name no more) Statius. Aræanæ Moderatrix Cynthia Lunæ Theb.) that the heaven and heavenly bodies were not created on the fourth day (for that they were long before) but were only then brought to sight and made apparent to the earth, after the superior region of the chaos, which obscured them before, was so far desecrated and made clear as to admit of the rays of the sun.

When They Were Created

Those that take in the whole solar system allow of this interpretation; but such as confine the Mosaic creation to this sublunary world only, have another, viz. {p} (Whiston's Theo.) that the heaven and heavenly bodies were not created on the fourth day (for that they were long before) but were only then brought to sight and made clear as to admit the rays of the sun. {q} (This exposition is thought the more feasible, because the word sacere in the Latin tongue has its derivation from novum facium inducere: so that a thing is then said to be made, when it has another appearance than what it did before: nor is the original word (Gnasah) which is used here, much different: for it signifies, not only any new formation, but any new use, or outward appearance of thing: as might be drawn from several instances. Nicholls's Conference, Volume I.) Though therefore the substance of the sun, moon and stars was certainly before, yet they are said not improperly then to be made, when, the darkness of the intermediate air being dissipated, they became conspicuous to the earth, and began first to serve it in the capacity of sun, moon, and stars. To countenance this exposition they think it unaccountable that the earth with its furniture should take up four entire days at least of those six which were allotted for the whole creation, while the sun, moon, and stars, bodies so immensely large, besides the unknown regions of the empyreal heaven are crowded together into one single day; whereupon they conclude that these innumerable celestial bodies were made at another time.

Whether Out Of Nothing

Whether heaven was created gradually or instantaneously out of nothing, or out of some pre-existent matter; and in the production of it, whether God proceeded in the same method that he did in the formation of the earth, are questions wherein we have no positive evidence, and may therefore admit of no small debate. It seems more agreeable to scripture, however, to imagine that all celestial beings were originally produced out of nothing, because there was not that reason for God's gradual procedure (as we shall see presently) in the formation of them as there was in the disposition of the parts of the earth: {r} (Fiddes's Body of Divinity Volume I.) and if they were made out of nothing, there is no question but that they were made instantaneously, and all in the same moment; for when God commanded that they should exist (there being nothing either to oppose his command or retard the execution of it, nor any medium between non-existence and a state of existence) they must immediately have existed in the form that the scripture represents his Almighty fiat: {s} Ps 33:6; 148:5 He spake the word, and they were made; he commanded, and they were created; for by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the word of his mouth.

Angels When Created

When the angels first received their being, whether they existed before, or were themselves a part of the hexaemeron or six day work of God, is another question much disputed among the ancient doctors, especially those of the Greek church. {t} (Bull's Sermons) Some have thought that these illustrious spirits are mentioned by Moses under the name of {u} Ge 1:3 light, and so were the production of the first day; but it is visible that in that place light is opposed to darkness, and called {x} Ge 1:4 day; which is enough to convince any one that it is not to be understood of angels, but strictly and properly of some luminous body.

Others have imagined that they were not made {y} (Edwards's Body of Divinity) until the sixth day; and that as other parts of the creation rose by degrees from the less to the more perfect, until they came to man, who was not created until the last day; so angels who are the supreme order of created beings, and many degrees more perfect than man, were made (but made after him) the same day, to crown and consummate the work. But this conjecture, how plausible soever, has not the fortune to be countenanced by scripture; for if the {z} Job 38:7,4 morning stars sung together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy when God laid the foundations of the earth, {a} (Curcell Instit.) then were the angels existent, at least on the third day of the creation, {b} Ge 2:2 when God separated the waters from the dry land.

{c} (Bull's Sermons.) Others are again positive that Moses himself (though he does not express on what particular day the angels were made) does nevertheless intimate that they were created some time within the compass of the six, when he tells us that {d} Ge 1:9 thus the heaven and the earth were finished and all the host of them, and on the seventh day God ended the work which he had made; but then what we are to understand by the host of them, this is the question. {e} (Bull's, *ibid.*) The whole host of heaven (taking it in that sense) consists of two parts, the visible and intelligible host of heaven. The visible host of heaven are the sun, moon, and stars, those glorious lights of heaven which we behold with our eyes, and so they are called {f} De 17:3 in several places of scripture. The intelligible host of heaven are the angels; and where-ever we meet with this host {g} Ps 103:21 blessing the Lord, {h} Lu 2:13 praising the Lord, and {i} Ne 9:6 worshipping him, there we may conclude that it is commonly to be taken in this sense; but in the place before us there is no intimation given us how we are to take it, only as Moses makes mention of the sun, moon, and stars, but never of the angels, it seems more probable that the words should relate to them: and this probability is farther heightened, if we consider {k} (Curcell. Instit. and Fiddes's Body of Divinity, Volume I.) how from the fall of the angels, and their seducing man so soon into sin, it seems not a little credible that they had an existence some time, at least, before the creation of the material world. It does not seem reasonable that those glorious being (as they confessedly were in their original state) should immediately have formed and executed a design against their maker; especially considering the nature of such an attempt, the preparations to be made, the numbers to be gained over, and the many previous arts to be practiced (all of which must take up some time) in order to inflame the rebellion. For these and such like reasons then, say they, it seems expedient that those bright and heavenly beings should precede all material things in the time of their creation, as well as they do in the honour and dignity of their nature and employment; which are the next things we are to look into.

Blessings