

Creationists do not only abuse science. They also abuse Scripture. Just as they do not understand the scientific use of the word “theory,” neither do they understand the theological use of “mythology.” A true myth is not simply a made-up story. It is a story of deep and abiding truths about humanity, our relationships with each other, and our relationship with God – originally told in a pre-scientific age.

The two creation stories at the beginning of Genesis share common elements with other ancient stories of creation. Beginning with the first chapter, the Priestly story of creation (early 6th to 7th century B.C.), declares that God brought order out of chaos, created all that is not God from nothing, including those things humanity previously worshiped as gods. (That is why the sun and the moon are not given their names, but instead are referred to as “two great lights.”) The story establishes our responsibility as God’s stewards over the rest of creation, (a commission we need to take more seriously). And the story designates one day out of seven to be hallowed, a day to rest and be recreated in God’s image.

The second creation story, with Adam and Eve, begins at Chapter 2:4a. It is much older, going back to at least 950 B.C. In this story, we meet an anthropomorphic depiction of God. Lacking the space to do this delightful story justice, suffice it to say that Adam and Eve are often described as the original dysfunctional family. The “blame game” and an unwillingness to accept personal responsibility are all too human. The concept of shame is symbolized in the new awareness of nakedness. And Adam and Eve, with their new found knowledge of good and evil, leave innocence behind as they are birthed from the womb-like garden into a hard world. But God’s love does not cease in the face of their behavior. Before they go, God makes clothes for them.

Scripture is a combination of actual history, poetry, legends and myth – all with the aim of depicting our growing understanding of our relationship with God and what God expects of us. Part of its beauty is that it preserves not only the successes, but also the conflicts and stumbles along the way – for that is how we learn. It is a story that continues to unfold. But most important, it is a story of faith, not science.