

Creation or Evolution: Or both? What are the issues?

A 'foundational question'?

For some, this topic stirs strong passions, as they believe the whole of Christianity rests on it. By now, especially remembering session 1 and the image of the tower of bricks, we should be wary of resting our beliefs on one interpretation of a particular truth. There may be other ways to see it which do not need to throw all things into question. However, given the different views, we should have a look at why people adopt them and how good biblical hermeneutics could address their concerns.



Genesis as science?

Many Christians, including some scientists, are adamant that we should treat the creation accounts in Genesis as presenting scientific truth. They usually hold that this is incompatible with theories of evolution as commonly taught, and that accepting evolution undermines the truth of the Bible and hence the Gospel itself.

Creationists point out that the theory of evolution is just that – a theory, not a proven fact. Instead, they believe that at the beginning all living species were created largely as they are today, with natural selection simply improving and adapting each one to their surroundings, not changing one species into another. The fossil record is seen as evidence of a global flood in the story of Noah. Some believe in a literal six day creation period. Others are less literal with the timing. All believe that since the Bible presents the original creation as 'very good', all creatures originally had genetic code that was perfect and complete. After the 'Fall' and the entrance of sin into the human condition a decline started, including genetic deterioration in all species, leading to imperfections.



Evolution, they say, states the exact opposite – that creation started in 'chaos' and gradually became more orderly and complex. Evolution relies on the idea that genetic mutations led to more complex

creatures over a long period of time. However, there are no known mutations that *increase* the complexity of an organism. All mutations involve the *loss* of information. What is needed, therefore, is an intelligent designer to provide this new information. The laws of thermodynamics state that, without external input, things will always gradually degrade towards greater disorder. Evolution seems to go against this.

Evolution as God's tool?



On the other hand, many Christians argue that God could 'use' evolution to create the many species alive today.

Amongst Christian biologists and geologists, those who reject evolution are very much in the minority. Have the majority been blinded by the weight of non-Christian opinion, tainted as it is by the desire to avoid accountability to God? Are they more concerned with their own credibility and their career paths than about truth? Or have they seen the evidence and found it possible to combine belief in the Bible with belief in some form of evolution?

There are genuine theological challenges to combining the two beliefs:

According to Genesis, death entered the world through the sin of the first humans whereas, for evolution to work, death was a reality for millions of years before humans existed. Creation therefore involves a relentless tide of death and suffering. If evolution is random then life is essentially meaningless. Survival of the fittest means the weak are punished and discarded, which could be (and has been) used to legitimise abortion, euthanasia, eugenics, racism, discrimination against the disabled, etc.

Also, where did Adam and Eve come from? Were they simply advanced apes? Were there other people around at the time? Did they even exist as actual people? The Bible treats them as real historical individuals. If they are not 'real' then how can we believe in other biblical figures, including the 'last Adam', Jesus himself?

If life evolved from chaos with an upward trajectory, then what was the Fall? Don't things have to start from perfection? If we believe in 'restoration' of the creation, what will God restore creation to? 

Creationists are adamant that to refuse their view undermines the whole gospel message. According to Dr. Monty White (2001):

No Adam, no Fall; No Fall, no Atonement; No Atonement, no Saviour.

In other words, if evolution is true then Adam was not a real person and the Fall never happened. Therefore, the need for atonement can be questioned and the truth of Jesus is undermined¹.

Discussion time...

Is it necessary to reject evolution of any kind in order to preserve biblical theology of sin, salvation, the value of life and so on? Why?

¹ See www.AnswersInGenesis.org for many arguments along these lines and some scientific theories to challenge the common evolutionary ones. But see also the following site by Bible-believing Christians who are adamant that the Bible is consistent with evolution and an old earth! <http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/creation.html>

Part 2: How to read Genesis 1

Why was it written?

By now, we know that our understanding of the Bible depends on seeing it first through the eyes of the original writers and readers, before we apply it to ourselves. That is good hermeneutics and the bedrock of TLS!



The first five books of the Bible (the 'Pentateuch'), including Genesis, were traditionally believed to have been written by Moses. However, they contain clues that parts, at least, were written much later. Most scholars (including Jerome in the fifth century) believe that, whilst Moses may well be one of the authors, they were compiled over a long period and reached their final form after Israel's return from exile around the time of Ezra, many centuries after Moses.

So, the Pentateuch (and the Old Testament as a whole) were put together (under divine direction and inspiration) to help Israel reconnect with their national history and be reassured about their relationship with God after the disaster of the exile. Ancient peoples commonly produced accounts to explain their origins, and the creation stories in Genesis are Israel's version of that particular genre. The aim was to explain the 'what' and 'why' rather than the scientific 'how' and 'when'.

Order from chaos

Most ancient creation accounts, including Genesis 1, speak about how order arose from chaos. Whilst God *did* create everything *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), Genesis 1 is not about that (except for verse 1). Rather it records how God brought order from the chaos that already existed. The earth was 'formless and empty' but God brought order and life. It is possible to read verse 2 as 'the earth became formless', and it is worth remembering that the possibility of evil, suffering and death may already have existed at that time, due to the rebellion of Satan. But the main point here is that Genesis 1 is not a scientific description but a theological statement of who Israel's God is. He is portrayed in many ways as superior to the 'gods' in other ancient creation stories.



The creation account in Genesis 1 is about how God ascribed *purpose* and *function* to aspects of creation. The six days are about the establishing of three environments (on the first three days), after which these environments are each in turn filled for purpose (on the next three days). So, on Day 1, God creates light and separates it from darkness – establishing *time*, represented by alternating periods of darkness and light. Three days later, on Day 4, God

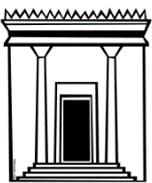
provides sun, moon and stars to fill that environment and mark the days and seasons. On Day 2, God establishes sea and sky – environments beyond human habitation that make possible *weather* and *rain*, which is essential for life. Three days later, on day 5, God fills those environments with fish and birds. On day 3, God creates dry land – an environment where *food* can be grown and humans can live. Three days later, the land is filled with creatures. So the order of the days is not intended to be a scientific process or geological ages but a description of God bringing order from emptiness and making the cosmos a complete functioning system into which he can place the pinnacle of his creation and the apple of his eye - humanity. What was important to the author and the original readers was *what* God did and what that said about God and humanity, not the detailed ins and outs of *how* God actually did it or *when*. That was simply not their concern.



A cosmic temple

The critical piece of understanding we need relates to Day 7, when God *rested* from his work. Ancient peoples, including Israel, saw their physical temples as symbols of the cosmos. So the idea of Day 7, to the original readers, is that, after all the work of creating a functioning and orderly universe, God can 'rest' and *take up residence* in the cosmic temple he has just created which is creation itself. This is a wonderful foreshadowing of the great truth of the incarnation, that God wishes to dwell forever with people – we are his 'temple', both individually and corporately². So, the creation accounts are there to teach us about God and what God has done in providing everything for us, placing us in a position of rule on his behalf, and determining to dwell with us as a benevolent Creator. This should bring us great encouragement!

Adam and Eve and the Fall



Ancient temples almost always contained *images* (eikons in Greek) representing the 'gods' who inhabited them. For God's cosmic temple, he created human beings in his image and placed them, as his representatives, his eikons, in his temple. This is why the Israelites were banned from creating any image to represent God, because the only valid image of God is a living, breathing human being. How wonderful!

To do this, God breathed his life, his essence, into Adam and Eve which set them apart from any animal. But when did this happen? Personally, I am inclined to the view that humans evolved from simpler and earlier creatures, but that at some stage, when they were ready, God took the advanced animals he had created – the vehicles for his divine image –

² See 1 Cor 6:19 and 1 Cor 3:16-17.

and breathed his life into them, raising them to a whole new state of being and consciousness. In my view, it is quite likely that there was one original couple – Adam and Eve – to which this happened. Scripture does use Adam as a 'cipher', a symbolic representative of the whole of humanity, but this does not necessarily mean he didn't literally exist as well.



Because this new image-bearing creature had genuine free will (see last session), there was freedom to choose whether to stay in union with God or to believe the lie of Satan³. In choosing the latter, humanity 'fell' from their intended position and purpose, and *spiritual* death (separation from God) was the result. This does not mean that humanity had been created immortal, or that physical death did not yet exist. In fact, some of the names Adam gave to the animals show that he was familiar with killing by predators. God had already created the 'wild animals' (i.e. carnivores, as contrasted with the herbivores: 'livestock') on Day 6.

The 'Fall' was therefore a fall from their true mandate, a failure to rise above the animal kingdom and their physical origins, a failure to take responsibility for the earth. This had catastrophic consequences affecting the world, both physically – because they were not taking care of it as they should – and spiritually – because humanity had ceded their God-given authority to Satan. Thankfully, all of this was reversed at the cross – and foreshadowed in Genesis 3!

Final thoughts

So, there is no need to insist that evolution leaves no room for the 'Fall', the reality of sin or the need for a saviour. We can (if we wish) believe in *both* evolution *and* creation without compromising our theology or our faith. We are free to look at the evidence without feeling threatened! Ideally, we should hear from Christians who are scientists in a relevant field, but we also need to remain sympathetic and sensitive to those who see things differently, bearing in mind the theological concerns they may



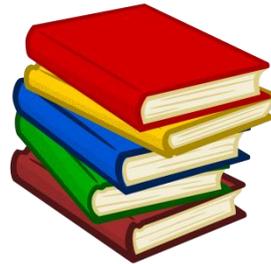
have. By now though, we may be able to gently answer some of those concerns. However, as we saw in session 1, our faith in God does not rest on certain theological statements being true but on a *relationship* and the evidence all around of God's work in the world today. The very existence of the world around us, however it came about, is a key

piece of evidence in itself.

³ Satan told them that they needed to be 'like God' when actually they were already in God's image and likeness and could not be any more 'like him' (Gen 3:4).

"A primary complaint of atheists is that the Bible 'says' that the Earth and the universe is only ~6,000 years old. In reality, the Bible gives no date for the creation of the universe, but implies that the creation days were long periods of time and that modern human beings have been receiving God's law for over 40,000 years. Although young earth creationism is the primary creation theology in the U.S., it suffers from numerous scriptural and scientific problems. In contrast, old earth theology presents a consistent interpretation of all the Bible's creation passages, including Genesis one."

http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/old_earth_creation.html



Book list for further reading (source: David Matthew)

Creation Or Evolution: Do we have to choose? Denis Alexander, Monarch, 2008

The Selfless Gene: Living With God And Darwin, Charles Foster, Hodder & Stoughton, 2009

The Lost World Of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate, John H. Walton, IVP Academic, 2009

The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate, John H. Walton, IVP Academic, 2015

The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins, Peter Enns, Brazos Press, 2012

Creationism And The Conflict Over Evolution, Tatha Wiley, Cascade Books, 2009