
Why We Believe in Creation

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The Historical Nature of Genesis

I am often asked why the creation/evolution controversy is so important. Tempers flare, sometimes explosively, over this issue. Some people think, there are enough problems with the image of evangelicals without creating unnecessary controversies. Is it just a matter of interpreting Genesis? If so, then let the theologians debate the issues and leave me out. But let's not obscure the simple message of the gospel. Others wonder, is it just a scientific argument? If so, then why should I care about the controversy? I'm not a scientist. Well, I think much more is at stake than that. It has to do with the very nature and character of God!

We must realize that the book of Genesis is the foundation of the entire Bible. The word Genesis means "beginnings." Genesis tells the story of the beginning of the universe, solar system, earth, life, man, sin, Israel, nations, and salvation. An understanding of Genesis is crucial to our understanding of the rest of Scripture.

For example, Genesis chapters 1-11 are quoted or referred to more than 100 times in the New Testament alone. And it is over these chapters that the primary battle for the historicity of Genesis rages. All of the first eleven chapters are referred to in the New Testament. Every New Testament author refers somewhere to Genesis 1-11.

Jesus Himself, on six different occasions, refers to each one of the first seven chapters of Genesis, thus affirming His belief in their historical nature. He refers back to Adam and Eve to defend His position on marriage and divorce in Matthew 19:3-6. He makes His argument a historical one when He says that "from the beginning" God created them male and female. Jesus affirms that Adam and Eve were real people. Jesus' comments are in an historical context.

Jesus affirms the historicity of Cain and Abel in Matthew 23:29-36. In this passage, Jesus connects the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of the prophet Zechariah. The murder of Zechariah at the door of the Temple was within the last 400 years and was clearly historical. If this was historical, then so was the murder of Abel!

Jesus confirms the historical nature Noah and the Flood in Matthew 24:37-39. The time before Noah is related to the time that Christ returns. If the flood is just a story to communicate a pre-New Testament vision of the gospel, then is Jesus' return just another story to communicate some other spiritual truth? The historicity of Genesis 1-11 is tied to many aspects of Jesus' teachings.

In many ways it is difficult to separate the book of Genesis, even the first eleven chapters, from the rest of Scripture, without literally rejecting the inspiration of Scripture and the divine nature of Jesus. It is hardly possible to assume that Jesus was knowingly deceiving these pre-modern people in order to communicate the gospel in a context they understood.

How can the first 11 chapters be separated from even the rest of Genesis? The time of Abraham has been verified by archeology. The places, customs, and religions spoken in Genesis related to Abraham are accurate. The story of Abraham begins in Genesis 12. If Genesis 1 is mythology and Genesis 12 history, where does the allegory stop and the history begin in the first 11 chapters? It is all written in the same historical narrative style.

The Nature of the Evolutionary Process

Many believers do indeed call Genesis 1-11 allegory or myth. They boldly declare that God simply used evolution as His method to create! The purpose of the creation account is only to promote God as a transcendent all-powerful God who is completely different from the gods of the surrounding Near East cultures of that time. This is called theistic evolution. Without question, God could create by any means He chose. But is the God of the Scriptures the god of evolution?

My simple answer to that question is no! At least not the evolution which is communicated in today's textbooks and university classrooms. The nature of the evolutionary process is contrary to the nature of God.

The principles behind evolution are ideas such as the selfish gene, and survival of the fittest. An offshoot of evolutionary thinking is the relatively new field of sociobiology. In another essay (Sociobiology: Evolution, Genes and Morality), I defined sociobiology as the biological basis for ALL social behavior. In other words, our behaviors are the result natural selection as much as our physical characteristics.

For instance, if you ask a sociobiologist the question, why do we love our children, he or she will answer that "we love our children because it works." It is an effective means to raise productive offspring, so it was "selected for" over time. Ultimately, then, from this perspective, all behavior is selfish. Everything we do is geared toward furthering our own survival and the production and the survival of our own offspring. Our behaviors have been selected over time to aid in our survival and reproduction and that's all.

Evolution is a wasteful, inefficient process. Carl Sagan says that the fossil record is filled with the failed experiments of evolution. Evolutionary history is littered with dead-ends and false starts. Stephen Jay Gould characterizes the nature of the evolutionary process as one of contingency history. Organisms survive primarily by chance rather than some inherent superiority over other organisms. There is no purpose, no goal, no meaning at all.

The question has to be, would God use such a method? A person's character is reflected in his or her work. Not just in what is produced, but the process also is indicative of the mind that is at work. For instance, the paintings of Vincent van Gogh reveal a troubled mind, not just in the subjects he painted but also in the colors he used and character of the brush strokes. And you don't have to be an art critic to see this in his paintings, particularly those just before he took his own life.

God is a person and thus has character. We should see God's character in His work as well as in His method. First, let's take a brief look at the revelation of God's character.

Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God's character. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9-11). Not only that, but Jesus is the Person of the Godhead that brought about the creation. Colossians 1:16 reads, "All things were created by Him, for Him, and through Him." John 1:3--"Nothing came into being apart from Him." Hebrews 1:2--"By Whom and through Whom the worlds were created."

Since Jesus is a person and is also the creator, then if Jesus used evolution as his method to create, then we should see a correlation between the character of Jesus and the process of evolution.

The Personal Character of Jesus the Creator

If Jesus used evolution as His method of creation, then His character must be reconcilable with the evolutionary process.

We discussed above the nature of the evolutionary process. Now I want to take a brief look at the character of God. A detailed unveiling of Jesus' character is found in Matthew 5. This is not an ideal we are to strive for, but a picture of what can happen in the life of a believer who is fully yielded to Christ.

In Matthew 5:3, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This phrase describes one who allowed himself to be trodden down. Jesus exemplified a security in Himself that did not become offended when He was put down. An evolutionarily successful organism seeks its own interests, not the interests of others.

In verse 5, Jesus says, "Blessed are the gentle." The mild, patient and long-suffering are not likely to succeed in an evolutionary world. The meek are pushed aside by the self-assertive. Ultimately it is the strong, the fit and the selfish that are the ones who succeed!

In verse 7, Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful." The struggle for existence is never motivated by mercy. Mercy could only be tolerated if shown towards a member of the same species that shares a significant proportion of their genes. To be merciful outside your immediate family unit may compromise your survival or the survival of your offspring, neither of which is productive in an evolutionary world.

In verse 9, Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Jesus also said we should love our enemies. In many mammals, such as lions and gorillas, the first act of a new dominant male following his ascent to power is to kill the younger offspring sired by the previous dominant male. This has the double effect of removing offspring from the group that are not his, and bringing their mothers into heat so he can mate with them to produce his own offspring. This is selfish natural selection at work. Where is the mercy, the gentleness, the peacemaking in these events?

The struggle for existence among living organisms today is a result of sin entering a perfect creation and is not the method of bringing that creation into existence.

Romans 8:19-22 reveals that nature is groaning in the pains of childbirth, because of being subjected to futility, for redemption from the curse. Nature is in turmoil. Organisms do struggle for survival. Competition is often fierce. While there are many examples of cooperation in nature, it can always be explained in terms of selfish gain and cooperation is the easiest way to obtain the desired end. Organisms do act selfishly. But to hear nature's groaning and interpret it as the song of creation is to be ignorant of both God and nature!!

Some Christians debate the effects of the fall and how far back into earth history the effects can be realized. But the point is that something happened at the fall. This passage makes clear that the creation does not function today as God intended it to and it is not the creation's fault. The creation was subjected to futility because of man's sin.

When we take the time to investigate whether the God revealed in the Scriptures is the same God who created through the evolutionary process as it is currently understood, the answer is clear. The God of the Scriptures is not the god of evolution.

A Modern Twist on Theistic Evolution

In a modern formulation, some theistic evolutionists are declaring that not only could God use evolution, but He must use some form of evolution to create. These individuals indicate that there is a "functional integrity" to the universe that God created initially and for God to intervene in any way, is to admit that He made a mistake earlier. And of course, God does not make mistakes. Physics professor Howard van Till from Calvin College describes:

...a created world that has no functional deficiencies, no gaps in its economy of the sort that would require God to act immediately, temporarily assuming the role of creature to perform functions within the economy of the creation that other creatures have not been equipped to perform." [Christian Scholars Review, vol. XXI:I (September 1991), p. 38].

Diogenes Allen from Princeton Theological Seminary put it this way:

According to a Christian conception of God as creator of a universe that is rational through and through, there are no missing relations between the members of nature. If, in our study of nature, we run into what seems to be an instance of a connection missing between members of nature, the Christian doctrine of creation implies that we should keep looking for one" [Christian Belief in a Postmodern World (Louisville: Westminster /John Knox Press, 1989), p. 53].

A loose paraphrase might be, "If you find evidence of a miracle, you need to keep looking for a naturalistic explanation." This view of creation seems awfully close to deism or semi-deism. Theistic evolutionists deny this, of course, by reminding us that, unlike deism, they firmly believe that God continuously upholds the universe. If He were to completely withdraw as deism holds, the universe would come apart.

But the Bible, particularly the gospels, is full of miracles. The Lord Jesus was born as a human baby in a stable, He changed water into wine, healed blindness and leprosy, fed multitudes on scraps of food, raised people from the dead, died on a cross, and rose from the dead Himself. The response is that this is salvation history which is entirely different from natural history. Diogenes Allen put it this way:

In general we may say that God creates a consistent set of lawlike behaviors. As part of that set there are the known physical laws. These laws apply to a wide variety of situations. But in certain unusual situations such as creating a chosen people, revealing divine intentions in Jesus, and revealing the nature of the kingdom of God, higher laws come into play that give a different outcome than normal physical laws which concern different situations. The normal physical laws do not apply because we are in a domain that extends beyond their competence.

It is true that we do not invoke God to account for repeatable observable events such as apples falling from trees. But what could be more unusual and beyond the competence of physical laws than the creation of life, the creation of coded information in DNA, the creation of a human being? Even in this framework, it seems reasonable to assume that these events could also be a part of salvation history. What we end up with, however, is a view that says that the activity of the Creator cannot be detected in any of the workings of nature. Once again, the God of the Scriptures is not the god of evolution.

The Theology of Romans 1

The world of nature that is left to us by those who believe in theistic evolution is indistinguishable from that of the philosophical naturalist or even the pantheist. Whether you accept Genesis 1 and 2 as being historical or not, the clear tenor of the narrative is of a God who interacts with his creation, not one who just lets it unwind according to some preconceived plan. How is a scientist supposed to see God in the creation if all there is, from his perspective, is natural mechanisms?

The pantheist could see this perspective as compatible with his view of the natural world as well. The pantheist sees god as an impersonal force that is present all throughout nature. god is all and in all. All is one. Matter itself contains the inherent ability to bring about complexity according to the mind which permeates all of nature. Similarly, theistic evolution requires that matter contains within itself, by God's creative design, the full capacity to actualize all of the physical and biological complexities that exist. The distinctions of Christian theism become blurred.

Finally, if God created through evolution, what are we to do with Romans 1:18-20? Paul says:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (NASB)

The fact that God exists, and even a few things about His power and nature, is clearly understood by observing the natural world, that which He created. If God's method of creation is indistinguishable from that of a naturalist or a pantheist, where is this so-called evidence?

Princeton theologian, Diogenes Allen, says that "even though nature does not establish God's existence, nature points to the possibility of God. That is, it raises questions which science cannot answer and which philosophy has been unable to answer" (Christian Belief in a Postmodern World, p.180). But Romans declares that his invisible nature, eternal power, and deity are clearly seen through what has been made! This is more than raising questions! If God has created through naturalistic evolution then men and women have quite a few excuses. If natural processes are all that is needed, who needs God?

One final note. It has been interesting to me that, as I have observed theistic evolutionists throughout my academic career, I have found that evolutionists have little tolerance for theistic evolutionists because if you accept evolution, then why do you need God? Perhaps even more importantly, they are puzzled about why one would continue to believe in the God of the Bible if you have concluded that He used inefficient, chancey, contingent, and messy natural selection as His method. Even they see the incompatibility of the two.

In summary, Genesis and creation are central to Scripture and Jesus appears to have believed in an historical and interactive creation. Evolution is contrary to the nature and character of God. And, if natural processes are all that is needed for creation, then men are indeed full of excuses to the existence of God, contrary to Romans 1.

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