

Creation: Scripture and Science

If you've been wondering where I've been, I have been writing other things, investigating and thinking. Most of the writing came as a result of my participation in two writers' conferences - the Greater Philadelphia Christian Writers Conference and the American Christian Fiction Writers (ACFW) conference. Both of these resulted in opportunities for me to submit work to royalty publishers. In the past few weeks, I prepared proposals for a Bible Study based on the ET&N Coworkers series and for my three novels - *Peculiar People*, *Aspen Leaves on New-Fallen Snow*, and *The Whole is Greater*. In addition, I embarked on a complete re-write and trilogization of *Peculiar People*. Since I had already pre-written several issues of *ET&N*, I kept to my self-imposed schedule for a while, and I intended to return to *ET&N* for the planned October 17 issue. But on October 4, I heard a sermon (delivered on October 1) about the place of the Genesis creation account in the broader Christian story.

In that sermon, the minister at my home church in Newark, DE (who is a good friend and a beloved brother), recommended the literal six 24-hour day interpretation of Genesis 1 partially based on the suggestion that other interpretations undermine biblical authority. I had been in Miami the day our minister delivered the sermon, but I was able to listen on our church website, and when I returned I questioned Steve about this contention because I do not believe a metaphorical understanding (or perhaps even a mythic one) undermines biblical authority.

Since that time, I have done a lot of investigating of and thinking about the various arguments surrounding the six-day debate. In this issue of *ET&N*, I want to examine those issues from a broad perspective. In doing so, I readily admit I entered into the study with a pre-conceived idea, but I tried hard to empty myself of that and examine the issues honestly and with an open mind. In presenting my conclusions, I mean no disrespect for those who believe in a literal six 24-hour day interpretation of Genesis 1-2, nor am I attempting to dissuade those who have reached their opinion through careful study. I think they are wrong, but that certainly does not mean I consider any of them less of a brother or sister.

Then

Genesis and the Early Church

No New Testament writer reinforced the literal six-day interpretation, nor did they suggest, as some literalists do, that the truth of God's Word hinges on the literal interpretation. There is also no evidence that they questioned it either. Jesus used elements of the creation story as the basis for some of his teaching (see, for example, Matthew 19:3-6 and Mark 13:19). Jesus' most dramatic use (Matthew 19:3-6) validates the authentic existence of Adam and Eve, but He says nothing about the rest of the account.

Paul (1 Corinthians 11:7-12, Ephesians 3:8-10, Colossians 1:15-17, 1 Timothy 2:13-14) and other New Testament writers (Hebrews 4:3-4; Hebrews 11:3) also relied on

the creation story, but there is no mention of the six-day creation. If belief in a literal six 24-hour day creation is such a bedrock of truth, you would think they would take the opportunity to say so.

It may come as a surprise that some early church writers questioned or rejected a literal six-day creation. Origen (185-254), admittedly one of the more controversial writers, primarily because of his allegorical interpretations of Scripture, wrote, "... (the *Genesis* creation story) comprehends matters of pro-founder significance than the mere historical narrative appears to indicate, and contains very many things that are to be spiritually understood, and employs the letter, as a kind of veil, in treating of profound and mystical subjects; nevertheless the language of the narrator shows that all visible things were created at a certain time." (*De Principis* III.5.1). Later in the same work, he observed, "I do not suppose that any one doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and not literally" (V.1.16). To Origen, the literal language of the story (six days) had a deeper spiritual meaning.

Augustine, the great fourth century church theologian, also saw a deeper spiritual significance in the creation story than a strictly literal interpretation allowed and specifically warned against a literal interpretation:



"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience. Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking non-sense on these topics; and we should

take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn. The shame is not so much that an ignorant individual is derided, but that people outside the household of the faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and, to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil, the writers of our Scripture are criticized and rejected as unlearned men. If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason? Reckless and incompetent expounders of holy Scripture bring untold trouble and sorrow on their wiser brethren when they are caught in one of their mischievous false opinions and are taken to task by those who are not bound by the authority of our sacred books. For then, to defend their utterly foolish and obviously untrue statements, they will try to call upon Holy Scripture for proof and even recite from memory many passages which they think support their position, although 'they understand neither what they say nor the things about which they make assertion.'" (Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 1, ch.19.

These comments by early church leaders (and there are others) do not carry the authority of Scripture, but they dispel any notion, sometimes claimed by literalists, that the unanimous testimony of the early church was in favor of a six 24-hour day creation. Augustine's comments were made in the fourth century, when

observational methods were limited to the naked eye. How much more emphatically would he repeat the warning today?

The Purpose and Importance of the Creation Story

The primary purposes of Genesis 1-2 are to (1) establish God's sovereignty over everything in the universe, (2) document God's intensely-personal participation in creation, and (3) to illustrate the cooperative participation of that which He created in creation itself. The first two are foundational Judeo-Christian concepts, but none of the three require belief in the literality of the account. The first is seen in God's activity - creating, separating, naming, evaluating, purposing, and giving.

- He **created** (or revealed) light (1:3), the sky (1:7), dry land (1:9), vegetation (1:11; 2:9), heavenly bodies (1:14, 16), animals (1:21) and the human being (1:27; 2:7).
- He **separated** light from darkness (1:4), waters under and over the "expanse" (1:7), water from dry land (1:9), and male from female (2:22).
- He **named** day and night (1:5), heaven (1:8), and earth and seas (1:10).
- He **evaluated** each phase of his activity (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 31) and was satisfied ("it was good").
- He **purposed** the stars (1:14-15), the sun and moon (1:16-18a), the animals (1:22), the human (1:26, 28) and male and female (2:24).
- He **gave** animals to the human (1:28), plants to the animals (1:30), rest to the human (2:3), the garden to the human (2:8), and the male and female to each other (2:19).

In 1:2, we are told that the Spirit of God was "hovering over the face of the waters." This was no distant, half-hearted effort on His part; it was a personal, careful project. In addition, he stopped periodically to evaluate His work, being sure it was right (good).

What is often missed in the creation story is the cooperation between God and what He made in the unfolding story of creation. The **earth** He created brings forth vegetation (1:11-12) and animals (1:24), the **animals** multiply (1:22), the **human** works the earth (2:5), and the human names the animals (2:19). In this last endeavor, God initiates human culture. While God's initiating work is done (2:1), creation continues through the vegetation, earth, animals, and humans. Scripture documents that God has continued to intervene periodically in the continuing creation (e.g., the Flood, the establishment of Israel, the freeing of Israel from Egypt, the giving of the Law, and the culminating incarnation of Christ). All of this was God's plan from the beginning.

The Bible is a collection of writings all concerning God's original relationship with human beings, our rebellion against Him, and His offer of reconciliation through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. It establishes why God had every right to punish Adam and Eve for their sin.

Inherent Difficulties in the Genesis Creation Stories

Genesis contains two descriptions of creation - Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Genesis 2:4-25 - that **appear** to contain several contradictory elements.

Genesis 1:1-2:3		Genesis 2:4-25
The creative process is attributed to Elohim		The creative process is attributed to Yahweh Elohim
The heavens and the earth were created in six days		The heavens and the earth were created in one day
Water first covers the earth before dry land was made on the third day		The earth is dry land before a mist rises to water the earth
Man was created after plants and animals		Man was created before plants and animals
Male and female were created simultaneously		Female was created after male

These are only problems, however, when we insist on a literal interpretation, as opposed to a metaphorical or symbolic one. Jesus and subsequently the church consistently confirm the essential elements of the creation narrative - God's sovereignty, His personal involvement, and His cooperative intent, particularly as it relates to human beings. Just as we were essential participants in creation, so too we are essential participants in the reconciliation (Romans 5:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 1:19-20) and re-creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) after Adam broke the covenant (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Now

Against that backdrop, I embarked on my study and reached the conclusion that belief in a literal six 24-hour day creation is not supported by Scripture. In fact, it undermines divine revelation in some significant ways.

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19-20).

Creational Revelation

One of the biggest mistakes some Christians make is to consider the Bible their only source of information about God and His creation, but Paul clearly states that this is not so. "His attributes," Paul writes, *"have been clearly perceived...in the things that have been made."* In other words, ignorance of Scripture is no excuse. Paul's words also pre-suppose that God expects people to observe and study His creation and, consequently, God can be considered the father of observational science (which is just about **all** science). The notion, held by some, that God and science are opposing ways of knowing, is therefore seriously flawed. Paul's comment to the Corinthians essentially tells us that science is one way of knowing God.

Scripture is, of course, another way of knowing God. Both Scripture and Science are inevitably processed through the filter of individual human understanding. Consequently, both can be misunderstood and abused. There are probably as many examples of the misuse of Scripture as there are of science. After all, the medieval church villified Copernicus, and it wasn't so long ago in this country that sincere Christians used Scripture to justify human slavery. We are all subject to our own prejudices and preconceptions when it comes to understanding the revelations in

both Scripture and Science. In the case of the Bible, that understanding probably relates to our measure of faith. Some read the Bible and see endless inconsistencies, others don't. Some read reviews of scientific studies and accept them with question, others don't.

Because today's science is mostly a secular endeavor, it cannot be considered as reliable as Scripture (although some see the Bible as an equally-human endeavor), but when one insists that only the Bible contains truth, ignoring the testimony of creation, that person is guilty of making the Bible his or her idol.

What does this have to do with the creation story? A substantial portion of the Christian community insists that we **must** accept a literal understanding of Genesis in spite of apparent contradictory scientific evidence. The literalist interpretation claims that the earth (and the entire universe) is about six to twelve **thousand** years old, while geologists say the earth is over four **billion** years old, and astronomers say the universe is fourteen billion years old. Obviously, somebody is misinterpreting one or both of the sources of divine information about creation. Until quite recently, virtually all of the empirical evidence has been on the side of science, and religion has been limited to stubborn insistence in the literal six-day creation story told in Genesis 1.

The Day-Age Theory

Those who attempt to reconcile Scripture with the evidence of scientific observation are referred to as "concordists" because they attempt to harmonize modern geological and cosmological findings with the Bible. The Scriptural debate often rests on the meaning of "day" (Hebrew, **yôm**), "evening" (**'ereb**), and "morning" (**bôqer**). Concordists claim these terms can indicate indefinite periods of time, citing both biblical and extrabiblical passages. One technique of biblical interpretation involves using one portion of Scripture to inform another. Perhaps the best example of this is that the New Testament helps us understand difficult concepts in the Old Testament. Virtually all of the New Testament writers used this technique, reinterpreting Old Testament passages in light of the later revelation through Christ Jesus. It is important to note that the New Testament interpretations were "new" only to human beings - God's meaning communicated through the Prophets and the Law did not change. The coming of Christ served to reveal more of God's truth to human hearts and minds.

There are two passages (one in the Old Testament, one in the New) frequently used to justify an indefinite meaning of *yôm* (day): Psalms 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8). Let's look at each of these in context.

"You return man to dust and say, 'Return, O children of man!' For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers" (Psalms 90-3-6).

"For (scoffers) deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not

overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:5-8).

There is nothing in either of these passages to suggest that they relate to the Creation story. Psalm 90:4 merely tells us that God does not reckon time as we do. 2 Peter 3:8 refers to God's faithfulness in fulfilling his promises. To use either passage as a "Rosetta Stone" for the interpretation of "day" in Genesis 1 is completely unjustified. There is simply no connection contextually or syntactically. Furthermore, even these passages must be used figuratively. If we use the literal meaning, 1 "God-day" = 1,000 "Human-years," we are forced to conclude that Creation took just six thousand years - still a long way off scientific claims.

Literalists have a similar problem, however. Their contention is that **yôm** is always used in the Old Testament (and extrabiblical Hebrew writings) to indicate a single 24-hour period (a human day), further validated by the evening-morning (**'ereb-bôqer**) boundary accompanying each **yôm**. Even though Psalm 90 does not concern creation, this contention is contradicted by 90:5-6 (*"like grass that is renewed in the morning: in the morning [bôqer] it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening ['ereb] it fades and withers"*). Here, **'ereb** and **bôqer** are clearly not the boundaries of a single day, but of an indefinite growing season.

Furthermore, there is a difficulty immediately within the fuller Creation story (Genesis 1:1-2:25) where Genesis 1 describes a six-day creation, but Genesis 2:4 (*"These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the **day** [yôm] that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens"*) seems to describe a one-day event. In addition, the sequence appears to be different. Genesis 1 has plants and animals created before Man, but Genesis 2 seems to have Adam created before animals and perhaps plants. Literalists have answers to these problems, of course (including an appeal to prepositional phrases), but they are not wholly satisfactory and, more importantly, they depend on human interpretations rather than a clear delineation of divine wisdom.

In forbidding Adam to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God warned him that "in the day [**yôm**] that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Adam violated this covenant with God, but he did not die on the **yôm**; instead he lived to the age of 930 (Genesis 5:5). If **yôm** must mean a 24-hour day, God lied; but if **yôm** can mean an indefinite period, God spoke the truth. Are literalists willing to concede that God lied to Adam in order to maintain a six 24-hour creation account?

One more problem for the literalists involves the biblical claim that God's covenant and laws had been proclaimed for much longer than young-earth theories allow: *"He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant"* (Psalms 105:8-10, see also Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Chronicles 16:15). A generation is now generally considered to be about thirty years, but according to the Bible, the earliest generations were as long as one thousand years. By this reckoning, God's covenant with Abraham would have occurred thirty to fifty thousand years ago.

The c Problem

One of the thorniest problems that confronts literalists is the visible universe (the light sources we can see by the naked eye or scientific devices) and the speed at which that light travels (c). In the March 2006 issue of *Nature*, three teams of scientists announced the discovery of a stellar explosion 12.8 billion light years distant from Earth. Even the furthest object generally visible to the naked eye is the Andromeda Galaxy (M31) at 2.5 million light years. Star distances are measured by several methods, depending on its proximity to the earth. Stellar parallax, the simplest method, is useful for stars within several thousand light years. Indirect methods are needed for more distant stellar objects. See article at http://imagine.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/ask_astro/answers/970415c.html) for more information.



The Andromeda Galaxy in a photo taken by the NSF 0.9-meter telescope on Kitt Peak. Source: NOAO/AURA/NSF

One of the more interesting of these indirect techniques for medium-distance stars (up to thirteen million light years for earth-bound observations) involves Cepheid Variables, abundant star types which pulsate in a consistent period. By measuring the brightness and the period, the distance of the Cepheid can be determined with reasonable accuracy and hence that of the galaxy in which it is contained.

The question that hounds creation literalists is how can we see objects more than six thousand light years away. That is, if the universe was created six thousand years ago, the light from stars more than six to ten thousand light years from Earth has not reached us yet. There have been three explanations offered by literalists:

1. **Inaccurate measurement** - the stars aren't really as far as they appear to be; they're all really within six thousand light years, but that's not possible since even the smallest galaxies are a few thousand light years across. If all of the millions of galaxies we can now see with the aid of scientific instruments were within ten thousand light years, we'd be toast!

2. **Created-in-transit** - God created the light from stars on its way to Earth. This theory implies that God created the light to carry information that never happened. The light is only six thousand or so years old, but it appears to portray events that occurred millions or even billions of years ago. In other words, God created a deceptive universe. There are actually a few extreme literalists who adopt this position, citing 2 Thessalonians 2:11 ("*God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false*") as supporting evidence. But if one only reads the immediate context (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12), it is quite clear that the passage has nothing whatsoever to do with creation.

3. **CDK** - The most intriguing explanation is that the speed of light (c) has slowed down (decayed) exponentially since Creation, a concept known as c -decay or CDK. A few years ago, there were tantalizing reports of just such a decay that creating a media frenzy in 1999 and 2002, but according to Rich Deem (*Is the Speed of Light Decreasing?*) at godandscience.org (a believer site), the amount of change in related constants is "incredibly small," and the studies related to CDK contained substantial flaws.

Regardless of the efficacy of science involved in the CDK studies, the more significant objection is that literalists are, in fact, acting as concordists themselves - attempting to harmonize the Scriptural Creation account with scientific theory. The only difference is which scientific data they use. There is nothing wrong with using the information we learn about creation (science). In fact, I believe it vitally important to do so; otherwise, we are limited to our dim understanding (see 1 Corinthians 13:9-12) of the written Word of God. He has given us the ability to learn more about His Creation, and for the uncynical scientist, these discoveries are awe-inspiring and reveal the underlying design of the Creator. Using science to inform Scripture is really no different than using history or culture for the same purpose. Our understanding of Paul's letters, for example, is greatly enhanced by knowledge of the culture in which each group of believers (churches) lived and worked.



The Hubble telescope Ultradeep Field photo revealing nearly 10,000 galaxies, each containing millions of stars.

Uniformitarianism vs. Catastrophism

Uniformitarianism, a foundational doctrine of modern geology, was first advanced by James Hutton in his 1785 work, *Theory of the Earth*, although the term itself was coined by Sir Charles Lyell. According to the *Glossary of Geology*, uniformitarianism is defined as "the fundamental principle or doctrine that geologic processes and natural laws now operating to modify the Earth's crust have acted in the same regular manner and with essentially the same intensity throughout geologic time, and that past geologic events can be explained by phenomena and forces observable today; the classical concept that 'the present is the key to the past'." (Robert Bates and Julia Jackson, *Glossary of Geology*, 2nd edition, American Geological Institute, 1980, pg. 677).



A Catastrophic Event - In 1908, the apparent airburst of a comet or small asteroid destroyed about 60 million trees in central Russia. Some scientist believe this "Tunguska event" was responsible for early 20th century climate changes

By contrast, Catastrophism is the belief that sudden, singular, violent events (such as the Flood, the Tunguska event, or the Chicxulub impact) have been the primary influencers of geological changes on the Earth.



A Uniformitarian Event - The magnificent Grand Canyon was forming gradually by the Colorado River.

In a phrase, uniformitarianism (also known as gradualism) claims that the present is the key to understanding the past, and while uniformitarianism deals only with geological change, it has become the geological corollary to Darwin's theory of evolution. Both theories are excoriated by creation literalists because they are seen as contradicting Scripture. Together, Uniformitarianism and Evolution probably

account for the enmity - perpetrated primarily by Christians - that is perceived to exist between science and the Bible.

I do not care to debate the relative merits of Uniformitarianism and Catastrophism because evidence of both uniform, gradual geological changes and sudden, world-changing catastrophes exists. As a result, a dogmatic reliance on geologic strata and the so-called fossil record is unjustified. It may be interesting, however, to note that our knowledge of the existence of dinosaurs is based on fossils, while many theories of their extinction involve catastrophic events. It should also be noted that most geologists today recognize that catastrophic events occur in concert with gradual changes.

Radioactive Dating

Even though many geologists may rely on the fossil record, we are not dependent on that for information about the age of the earth. Matter consists of a variety of chemical elements, some of which are nuclides (atomic isotopes that differ from the base element in the number of neutrons in the nucleus). Some nuclides decay at a measurable rate known as the half-life. Since the half-life of a nuclide is not affected by any external factors, it can be used to measure the age of an object. Current dating, usually using a mass spectrometer is inherently quite accurate, although care must be taken to avoid contaminating the target.

Sin and Death

One of the primary defenses of a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-2 is the introduction of sin and death into the world. Two major biblical creation theories are the targets of this defense: the Gap Theory and the Day-Age Theory (see above for contextual comments)

The Gap Theory posits an indeterminant period of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. God created the heavens and the earth, and then perhaps millions and millions of years passed before God resumed an active creative role. The standard objection to the Gap Theory is that it presupposes an imperfect world before the creation of human beings - a world filled with death, extinction, suffering, and cruelties.

One christiananswers.net article (*Is the Age of the Earth a "trivial" doctrinal point?*) puts it this way: "According to old-Earth creationism, when wolves eat lambs and when bears kill baby sea lions, this is exactly the way things were meant to be by God. Is this what we should be teaching our children?" This argument reveals **human** sentimentalism, not **divine** wisdom. The author pre-supposes that a loving God would not create a world with predators, but this assumes that such behavior is sinful. Where in Scripture does God suggest that **any** actions of animals, who are **not** created in His image, are considered sinful? Only human beings, with our God-given sense of the infinite are capable of sin. To equate the natural behavior of animals to the sinful behavior of human beings is a human invention.

There is also no compelling reason to assume that animal death did not exist before the Fall. The death referred to in Genesis 3 and related passages seems to refer exclusively to human death through sin (destruction of the immortal potential). To be sinful, the perpetrator must be capable moral judgment and of perceiving the sinfulness of an action. That is why young children are incapable of sin. Jesus said, "*Truly, I say to you, unless you turn [from sin] and become like children [lacking mature moral judgment and therefore incapable of sin], you will never enter the*

kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Like young children, animals are not capable of sin nor are they apparently imbued with immortal potential. Any predation, disease, or disasters that inflicted animals prior to the Fall may offend the PETA crowd and others, but one can't apply such thinking to God. Remember, God says, "*my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts*" (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Is God Omnipotent and Omniscient or Not?

The problem lies in the false assumption that God's creation was perfect from a human perspective - Scripture never says this, and it is arrogantly presumptive. God created the heavens and the earth, land and sea, vegetation, animals, and human beings all for HIS purposes. More importantly, the literal interpretation appears to violate two basic Scriptural doctrines about the nature of God - His omniscience (Job 37:16; Psalm 147:5; 1 John 3:19-20) and His omnipotence (Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Matthew 19:26).

If God created the garden with the intent that Adam (and later Eve) would remain there forever if they followed His rules, and if God was surprised when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He is not omniscient. If His divine intent was thwarted by the serpent's temptation of Adam and Eve, He is not omnipotent. Since God is both omniscient and omnipotent, He was not surprised and His will was not thwarted. He knew Adam and Eve would eat, and He could have prevented their temptation.

The point is that when God created, He did so knowing - with His perfect knowledge - what was needed to fulfill His ultimate will, not what you and I might envision as a paradise. The garden of Eden was never described as "paradise" in the Bible - that's a human invention. Those of us who are in Jesus and will therefore avoid the inevitable verdict of sin are going to a restored garden of Eden, we're going to a totally different place, one that God has prepared for us in His wisdom.

Two Interpretative Errors

Interpretive Error 1 (Scientific Blindness) - Using a personal understanding of science to discount biblical revelation.

Skeptics use scientific observation (i.e., night and day are caused by the rotation of the earth away from or toward the sun) and personal experience (i.e., never encountering a talking serpent) to inform their interpretation of Scripture. The internet is peppered with self-professed one-time Christians who have seen the light, so to speak, and joined the chorus of Scripture slanderers/libelers. The centerpiece of many of these malignant websites is Genesis 1-2, citing as prima facie evidence the kind of discrepancies I listed above. In my opinion, creation literalists provide fodder for these enemies of God. Here are just a few of such sites (I'm not recommending that anyone visit them, but they serve to prove the point:

- Skeptics Annotated Bible at skepticsannotatedbible.com
- Skeptical Views of Christianity and the Bible at members.aol.com/JAlw/joseph_alward.html
- The Skeptic's Dictionary at skepdic.com
- Skeptic's Corner at www.inu.net/skeptic/
- The Skeptic Friends Network at www.skepticfriends.org

- The Rejection of Pascal's Wager at www.geocities.com/paulIntobin/

Some of you may want to pass off such people simply as lost unbelievers who will go to hell for their sin, but God loves them just as much as the rest of us, and he desires reconciliation. Some of their points are valid about the fractured, misguided church and Christians. These best way to learn how to reach such people is to understand their thinking.

Interpretive Error 2 (Exegetical Blindness) - Using a personal understanding of Scripture to discount creational revelation.

This is a pervasive error in Christian fundamentalism. We rightly call the Bible the "Word of God," but too many conservative Christians fail to recognize that the Universe is also the Word of God. The Bible is the written record of God's interaction with the world. The Universe is the visual record of God's "*invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature*" (Romans 1:19). When Paul discusses the defenseless of ungodly and unrighteous men before God, it is not their ignorance of Scripture that leaves them "without excuse," it is their refusal to honor a God clearly perceived through creation.

It may seem that Scientific Blindness is more serious than Exegetical Blindness because it leads the individual to reject the God of the Bible (and therefore, in many cases, any God at all), but does Exegetical Blindness lead the individual to reject the God of Creation?

That there are errors in both creational and scriptural interpretation should be readily apparent. If there were not, all scientists would agree on all scientific theories, and all Christians would agree on scriptural doctrines.

Furthermore, stubborn enmity toward science threatens to leave science in the hands of unbelievers, some of whom will then use findings that seem to contradict literal interpretations of the Bible to denigrate written revelation. It is only through (critically) embracing scientific findings the reveal more about God's creation and helping others fit this information into biblical truth that we can effectively influence a lost world. This is not an easy task since it requires us to handle Scripture accurately (2 Timothy 2:15) and to assess the reliability of scientific information.

Conclusion

First of all, I readily admit that I am as subject to interpretive errors as anyone, so feel free to hammer away!

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15-17, see also Hebrews 1:1-4 and 11:3).

Scripture is clear - God creating **everything** through Christ Jesus. He created nuclides with half-lives as "clocks." He created Cepheid stars that allow us to measure interstellar distances. He created the speed of light. He created the Grand Canyon and the meteor or asteroid that caused the Tunguska event. He created puppies and roses alongside predators and viruses. He even created Satan. We may want to stuff God into a box of human dimensions, but it can't be done. We may

wonder why He created disease and tsunamis, but if we're going to believe in omnipotent God, we can't pretend these are human creations resulting from the Fall. God created everything.

The Bible contains historical and even scientific information, but it is not an historical or scientific textbook. The primary purpose of God's written revelation is to let us see how we humans can find one way out of our otherwise insolvable sin problem. Everything in the Old Testament, including the Genesis creation stories (maybe particularly them) points toward Christ. We are saved through a relationship with Christ, not any particular belief about biblical interpretation. That one fact matters, and only it matters. The cornerstone is Christ Jesus, and everything else is built on that.

But we are also called to spread the good news of the Gospel to those who do not yet know Christ. If we hold to antiquated science that is contradicted by both written (Scripture) and visual (Creation) revelation, we dramatically reduce our ability to be taken seriously. Every day, new discoveries of the awesome wonders of God's creation - from the irreducible structures of primitive life forms to the unimaginable size of the universe - give us the opportunity to describe the otherwise invisible attributes of our God. By helping others see the intricate design of everything He created - a design that clearly reveals love for His creatures - perhaps we can then help them see God's ultimate act of love.

Footnote: Admittedly, sorting out the conflicting scientific and theological information is difficult, but the failure to do so - either personally or through trusted sources - is spiritually and intellectually dishonest and has potentially serious consequences, perhaps not for the individual but certainly for a skeptical world.



Unsure about or don't agree with something in Ekklesia Then & Now? First, be a Berean (Acts 17:10-11). If you still disagree, respond so we can all share in the discussion!

NEXT ISSUE: All Hallow's Eve (Oct 31 - maybe)

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