

IS THE GENESIS CREATION ACCOUNT LITERAL?

**For a Christian, what are the implications
of the raging public controversy over creationism
versus evolution?**

Much of the Christian world no longer believes Genesis 1 and 2 as a literal account of creation. Since Darwin, natural processes are thought to explain the origin of life, and Christian scholars have attempted to accommodate science by interpreting the Genesis record in the light of the current scientific worldview. So, for example, the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church views the Genesis creation account as symbolic.

Carl Henry said, "The Bible does not require belief in six literal 24-

hour creation days on the basis of Genesis 1–2,"¹ and Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest believe that "the most probable conclusion is that the six consecutive creative acts were separated by long periods of time."²

Prior to Darwin, some theologians referred to Creation days as literal because of the literal Sabbath, or

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referred to the Sabbath in Creation week, or supported the literal days as described in the biblical account of Creation. In 1998, Robert Reymond presented seven hermeneutical principles for interpreting the days in Genesis 1 and 2:

1. The dominant meaning of a term should be maintained unless contextual considerations suggest otherwise. The Hebrew word for *day*, *yôm* in the singular, dual, or plural, occurs 2,225 times in the Old Testament, and the overwhelming majority designate a 24-hour period. No contextual demand is present in Genesis 1 to do otherwise.

2. The recurring phrase "evening and morning" (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31) occurs in 37 verses outside of Genesis (e.g., Ex. 18:13; 27:21) and always designates a 24-hour period.

3. The ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd) used with *yôm* (same texts as above) occur hundreds of times in the Old Testament (e.g., Ex. 12:15; 24:16; Lev. 12:3) and always designate a 24-hour period.

4. The creation of the sun "to rule the day" and the moon "to rule the night" (Gen. 1:16, 18, KJV) on the fourth day suggests literal 24-hour days for days 4–7, and nothing in the text suggests that days 1–3 were different.

5. Scripture best interprets Scripture, where a less-clear passage is interpreted by a clearer passage or passages. The fourth commandment

of Exodus 20:11 (cf. 31:15-17) reflects the Genesis account of Creation, assuming the fact that the biblical Creation days were literal.

6. "Days" plural (Hebrew *yamim*) occurs 608 times in the Old Testament and always designates 24-hour periods.

7. If Moses intended to mean day-age, instead of a 24-hour period, he would have used the Hebrew term '*ôlam*.'³

Opposing Worldviews

What effect might theistic evolution have upon our understanding of the goodness or love of God? In 1991, scientist David Hull of Northwestern University evaluated the evolutionary process as "rife with happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain, and horror. . . . The God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural history . . . is not a loving God who cares about His productions. He is . . . careless, indifferent, almost diabolical. He is certainly not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray."⁴

It should be kept in mind that Darwin's *Origin of Species* is, at least in part, a worldview conceived to explain evil in nature; whereas God created the universe through Christ (Col. 1:15, 16; Heb. 1:1, 2), who later revealed God as love (John 14:9; 17:23), and both were as selfless and loving in creation as They are in sal-

vation (John 3:16; Heb. 13:8).

In stark contrast, Satan is self-centered (Isa. 14:12-15; Eze. 28:12-18). It was he who launched a war against God in heaven (Rev. 12:3-8) and on Earth, which affected the natural world (Gen. 3:1-19). Christ called Satan the “prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11, KJV), and Paul called him the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4, NKJV). Thus evil in this world (moral and natural) must be credited to him, for “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16, NKJV), and His love defeated Satan at the Cross (Rev. 12:9-13; John 12:31, 32). Theistic evolutionists, those who believe God used evolution to create, do not discern the radical difference between these two worldviews.

Why would God use an unjust “survival of the fittest” method to create when justice is the foundation of His throne (Ps. 89:14)? Why would God, who asks that “all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40, NKJV) do the opposite in the torturous processes of mega-time? How is such a model possible in view of His divine providence in history (Rom. 11:36; 8:28-30)? Why would God use death to create humans in His image (Gen. 1:26, 27) when He is love? If He used death to create, then why did He warn Adam of the evil of death (Gen. 2:17) and expose the depths of that evil through dying to save humans from the penalty of death (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23)? If death is the last enemy

to be destroyed at the end of the controversy (1 Cor. 15:26), then how could God use it to create before and after the beginning of the controversy?

Because a “particular doctrine of God is a prerequisite for evolution’s success,”⁵ theistic evolutionists unwittingly promote a view of God that distorts the Bible’s overall view of God as a loving Creator.

Distorted Truth About God

If God chose to create through the natural evolutionary process, in which the horrors of torture and death over billions of years were necessary to create humans, this would be the longest and cruelest holocaust ever. At least Calvary was a holocaust that others brought upon Christ, but this would be a holocaust that He brought upon the animal kingdom.

One must look at all biblical truths in the light of the revelation of God at Calvary. The revelation at Calvary was made in history. It had witnesses. As such it provides empirical (historical) evidence of how loving God is, even asking His Father to forgive those who heaped cruelty upon Him (Luke 23:34). Assuming that this same Christ, by utilizing a systematized way of creating life, heaped cruelty on animals, not for part of a day, but for billions of years, is not a historical datum, but a metaphysical assumption that a belief in Calvary can rightly question.

The fact that the onlooking universe shouted for joy at the creation of this world is inexplicable if Christ involved animal suffering for billions of years. Christ called creation “very good,” and that’s worth singing about. After Christ’s ascension, beings in heaven worshiped God as worthy and deserving of glory because He created all things. That would be impossible if He created through eons of cruelty.

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Christ’s warning to Adam about the tree of knowledge of good and evil, stating that eating its fruit would bring death (Gen. 2:17), indicates that death was not yet a present reality. Here evil and death are associated with disobedience to the Creator. When Christ re-creates the earth, there will be no more curse (Rev. 22:3). Clearly curses and death are linked to disobedience and have nothing to do with Christ’s method of creation.

That’s why Scripture says Adam introduced sin and death to the

world (Rom. 5:12). It was Adam and not his Creator who brought death into the world. It was Christ who came to die to put death to death and liberate a fallen race (Rom. 4:25). It was the one act of the first Adam that caused this death-condemnation, and the one act of the Second Adam’s death that provided salvation (Rom. 5:18).

Christ did not use death to create humans in Eden. Instead, the record is that He died to save humans at Calvary. Given a cosmic controversy in which Satan hates Christ and has engaged in a process of disinformation about God (Eze. 28:15, 16), it makes sense that a natural method of creation through horror is something he (Satan) would promote, for it effectively destroys the drawing power of Calvary. Creation through horror is compatible with Satan’s hatred against Christ at the Cross and not compatible with a loving Creator-Redeemer who dies for others rather than inflicting death upon them.

What a Nonliteral Creation Does to the Sabbath

In Genesis 1 there is a correspondence between days 1–3 and days 4–6, wherein the first three days give the areas formed by *Elohiym*, the all-powerful God, and the last three days give the areas filled by Him.

The climax is not the creation of humans, as it is in theistic evolutionary theory, but the gift of the Sabbath. For the narrative ends with the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1. (It should be remembered, of course, that chapter divisions came into being long after the time of writing.) Karl Barth says that the Sabbath “is in reality the coronation of His work” for “not man but the divine rest on the seventh day is the crown of creation.”⁶

God’s blessing (Hebrew, *barak*) was given only to the seventh day. It was set apart from the other six, and in this way it was made holy.

The word *Sabbath* is derived from the Hebrew word *šbt*, meaning to “cease” or “desist” from a previous activity. On day six, Christ judged creation as “very good” (Gen. 1:31, KJV), and hence complete (2:3). “In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested” (Ex. 31:17, NIV). Therefore His “works were finished from the foundation of the world” (Heb. 4:3, NKJV). Clearly the work of Creation was finished on the sixth day of creation week, contrary to an ongoing

evolutionary process.

Moreover, the Genesis creation record differentiates between God as *Elohiym* (transcendent, omnipotent), who creates (*bara*) by speaking things into existence in Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, from the added name *Yahweh* (imminent, covenant) God who forms (*yasar*) humans in Genesis 2:21, 22. *Yahweh Elohiym* is only introduced in Genesis 2:4, where He is always *Yahweh Elohiym* (11 times). Here is God-up-close creating humans in a way distinct from His creation of all the rest of created reality in Genesis 1, and in contrast to theistic evolution where humans are the product of random mutation. To say God intervened in the process isn’t evolution, nor does the process agree with Genesis 1 and 2.

In Scripture the Sabbath is a celebration of the finished works of Christ in Creation (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11), in the Red Sea deliverance (Deut. 5:15), and on Crucifixion Friday (John 19:30). Christ created Adam on Creation Friday, and on Crucifixion Friday He became the Second Adam for the world in His death (Luke 23:44–24:6).

Crucifixion Friday, like Creation Friday, was a beginning for the race. The Sabbath celebrates: (1) Christ’s finished creation for Adam and Eve; (2) Christ’s finished deliverance for a nation; and (3) Christ’s finished sacrifice for a world. The first finished work of Christ is as literal as the

other two finished works.

Those who deny a literal seven-day Creation week, attempting to found the Sabbath in the Sabbath-keeping practice of Christ, overlook the fact that the preincarnate Christ, who gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Sinai, inscribed the following revelation in stone: “In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Ex. 20:11, NIV).

God created all things through Christ (Heb. 1:1, 2). Christ as “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28, NKJV) made the Sabbath for all humans (vs. 27). In keeping the Sabbath during His life on Earth, Christ endorsed the six-day Creation account. In His death, Christ’s followers “rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment” (Luke 23:56, NIV; cf. Ex. 20:8-11).

So it is not possible to justly ground Sabbath keeping only in Christ’s incarnational practice and teaching without reference to the Creation week, because He began His practice of Sabbath keeping at the end of Creation week and presents the Genesis creation account as literal history in His preincarnate teaching—because He was there. No wonder the incarnate Christ speaks of the creation of Adam and Eve as a literal fact (Matt. 19:4, 5).

Further Evidence for the Literal Genesis Creation Account

The whole Book of Genesis is structured by the word “generations” (*tôledôt*), so the statement, “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth” (Gen. 2:4, KJV) is as literal as “These are the generations of Noah” (6:9, KJV) or as literal as God’s promise to establish His covenant with Abraham, “and thy seed after thee in their generations” (17:7, NKJV).

Scripture presents Creation as one of the mighty acts of God. The phrase “God said” for each of the six days of Creation reveals the power of His creative word. For all but one of the days, “God said” is followed by “and it was so,” proclaiming the power of His commands. Theistic evolution needs to take God’s creative word seriously, as well as His written Word that widely supports a literal creation.

The awesome power of God’s creative word is further demonstrated by the speed with which His commands were fulfilled, for the Creation days were literal, continuous, contiguous, 24-hour periods of time. The Hebrew word for “day,” *yôm*, when used with ordinals (2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc.) is always a literal day. His commands had instant response. That’s why He could say each day the new created reality was “good.”

On the sixth day, “God saw everything that He had made, and

indeed it was very good” (Gen.1:31, NKJV). We are dealing with a literal record that gives one method God used in creation: He commanded, and it was so.

Genesis is only one of five books Moses wrote under God’s guidance. Do his other books interpret the Creation week as literal?

All subsequent references of Moses to Creation week are given a literal interpretation. For example: (1) manna fell for six days but not on the seventh-day Sabbath (Ex. 16:4-6, 21-23); (2) the Sabbath in the fourth commandment is based on the seventh day that God blessed after six days of Creation (Ex. 20:8-11); (3) The Sabbath is a sign between God and His people, “for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed” (Ex. 31:17, NKJV). To interpret the Creation record as nonliteral does not make sense in these subsequent references.

What the Evidence States

The overwhelming evidence in the Genesis creation record, in the other books of Moses, and in the entirety of Scripture leads one to conclude that God created during a literal, contiguous period of six days, followed by a literal Sabbath. Any accommodation of the literal Creation week to an evolutionary worldview (theistic evolution)

replaces God’s Word with the words of humans and concurs with the cosmic controversy at whose heart is the questioning of God’s Word and nature (Gen. 3:1-6). Such an accommodation replaces the love of God with a God who created through billions of years of suffering, which portrays Him in a way incompatible with Calvary and removes a literal Sabbath as the climax of Creation.

Any replacement of a literal Creation Sabbath by a day-age Sabbath makes no sense when Christ wrote in the fourth commandment that He created in six days and rested on the seventh day, and asked His followers to keep the seventh day as Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11).

It is no wonder that Christ Himself referred to the creation of Adam and Eve as literal (Matt. 19:4). □

REFERENCES

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⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), vol. 3, pp. 1, 223.