

GENESIS VS SCIENCE...?

ST MARK'S – 8TH JUNE 2019

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

- “Why I’m interested in science and faith”
- The structure of the morning...

PART 1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF SCIENCE

VIDEO – THORNY QUESTIONS: IS SCIENCE THE ENEMY OF FAITH?¹

1. Everything came from nothing
2. Order came from chaos
3. Life came from non-life
4. Minds came from mindless matter

→ *What is the best explanation of all these things? The Creator God, or random chance?*

THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF SCIENCE

Things which must be true in order for science to happen.

1. The existence of a theory-independent, external world
2. The orderly nature of the external world
3. the knowability of the external world
4. The existence of truth
5. The laws of logic
6. The reliability of our cognitive and sensory faculties to serve as truth-gatherers and as a source of justified beliefs in our intellectual environment
7. The adequacy of language to describe the world
8. The existence of values used in science

¹ You can watch on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/EpAoFA8ZoTg>

9. The uniformity of nature and induction
10. The existence of numbers²

→ What would give an appropriate basis for these presuppositions?

GREEK PHILOSOPHY?

"In the world of Kepler, Galileo and Newton, it is assumed that the universe is a fascinating place, waiting to be explored, analysed and understood. Underlying this assumption is the conviction that the universe *can* and *should* be understood, and that the world reflects a rational and divinely appointed order which contains no corners too dark or too sacred for human beings to investigate. In these assumptions we are already very far from the attitudes of much Greek philosophy. As already noted, platonic thought did not encourage experimentation since an object was nothing more than a realization of its form, and matter was the source of its inability to realize that form perfectly. So the only way to understand the actual world was by an intellectual comprehension of the forms of things not, as seems so 'obvious' to us now, by obtaining actual sensory data concerning matter itself."³

- The Greeks in many ways saw the world very differently! What seems like common-sense to us is just because we were born in our time and place.

CHRISTIANITY

"Why was it that, gradually up to 1550, but then with increasing determination, natural philosophers began to probe the secrets of the universe without fear of *hubris*? An important factor in this transition appears to have been the 'demythologizing of nature' which came about not through the secularization of the scientific enterprise, but through a wide dissemination of the Christian doctrine of creation."⁴

"In contrast, the biblical theology of creation, which crops up so repeatedly in the writings of 17th-century scientists, had the following main strands. First, there is one God who is the creator and sustainer of everything that exists... Second, the universe is one of order and consistency... Third, nature itself was seen as being essentially good... The effects on the minds of 16th and 17th century scientists, as they were repeatedly exposed to this Judeo-Christian creation worldview, should not be underestimated... As the Greek passion for logic and mathematics was baptized into a biblical

² Origin: J.P. Moreland, cited here: <https://crossexamined.org/presuppositions-of-science/>

³ Denis Alexander, *Rebuilding the Matrix*, p. 81

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 82

framework of creation, there emerged a new synthesis that was to prove a powerful impetus for the emergence of modern science.”⁵

But as the two great books, of Nature and of Scripture, have the same author; so the study of the latter does not at all hinder an inquisitive man’s delight in the study of the former.

Robert Boyle, *The Excellence of Theology*, 1665

If we hope to understand what it means to inhabit the world of modern science, we cannot afford to be ignorant of the itinerary that brought us to it... the historian’s task is not to grade the past but to understand it.

David Lindberg, 1992

- ➔ It was the Christian faith which allowed modern science to flourish
- ➔ Many famous scientists were / are Christian: Francis Bacon, Galileo, Blaise Pascal, Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler, Michael Faraday, Charles Babbage, James Clerk Maxwell, Lewis Carroll, Louis Pasteur, Francis Collins, and many others.⁶

SUMMARY OF PART ONE

GENESIS GIVES US THE FOUNDATION STONES FOR MODERN SCIENCE. MODERN SCIENCE COULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT THE BELIEFS THAT THE UNIVERSE IS MADE BY ONE GOD, WHO MADE AN ORDERED UNIVERSE. THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT WE FIND IN GENESIS CHAPTERS 1-3.

PART TWO: WHAT GENESIS DOES (AND DOES NOT) SAY

A VERY BRIEF WORD ON BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

How do we interpret the Bible?

“*Literally*” – the most misunderstood and misused word in Biblical interpretation!

Understanding Genre – purpose – context – etc.

When is this important:

- ➔ Does the dawn have wings (Ps 139:9)?
- ➔ Does God have eyes which roam the earth (2 Chron 16:9)?
- ➔ Should we cut off our hands and feet and pluck out our eyes (Mark 10:43-47)?
- ➔ Does Jesus actually have a sword coming out of his mouth (Rev 1:16)?

⁵ Ibid, p. 90-1

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christians_in_science_and_technology

GENESIS 1: A CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED ACCOUNT

“Even reading the chapter in English, we cannot fail to notice the way that the structure of the text is built round the number seven. Apart from the seven days, we have the seven-fold repeat ‘and it was so’ and that ‘God saw that it was good’ (or very good). But this is nothing compared to the detailed attention to a numerical structure for the text that is revealed once the original Hebrew is examined. For example, Wenham points out that the Hebrew verses comprise multiples of 7 words, with the first verse containing 7 words, the second verse 14 words, and the summary in 2:1-3 at the end of the passage containing 35 words. The word ‘God’ is mentioned 35 (5 x 7) times in the passage, whereas ‘earth’ and ‘heaven/firmament’ occur 21 (3 x 7) times each.”⁷

➔ Genesis is a masterpiece of literature. Every detail has been included for a reason.

THE ‘DAYS’ OF CREATION

➔ Can you see any correspondences if the days of creation are laid out as follows?

➔ This is known as the ‘**Framework Hypothesis**’

<i>Genesis 1:1 "Now the earth was formless and empty"</i>			
Day	What happened	Day	What happened
<i>Formless</i>		<i>Empty</i>	
1	Light (day and night)	4	Sun, moon and stars
2	Waters and sky	5	Sea creatures and birds
3	Dry ground Vegetation 'And God saw that it was good' x2	6	Living creatures on the ground Mankind Given every plant for food 'And God saw that it was good' x2
Day 7 – God rested. (Day 7 does not finish!)			

WHEN IS A DAY NOT A DAY?

- The Hebrew word translated “day” (*yom*) can mean:
 - day (as opposed to night)
 - day (24 hour period)
 - time, period (general)
 - year

⁷ Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do we have to choose?*, p. 160

- Genesis 2:4 (NASB): "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the **day** that the Lord God made heaven and earth."
→ *Clearly this does not refer to a 24-hour day!*
- Morning and evening... or evening and morning?

SUMMARY

"It has been unfortunate that one device which our narrative uses to express the coherence and purposiveness of the creator's work, namely, the distribution of the various creative acts to six days, has been seized on and interpreted over-literalistically. Properly understood, Genesis justifies the scientific experience of unity and order in nature. The six-day schema is but one of several means employed in this chapter to stress the system and order that has been built into creation. Other devices include the use of repeating formulae, the tendency to group words and phrases into tens and sevens, literary techniques such as chiasm and inclusio, the arrangement of creative acts into matching groups, and so on. If these hints were not sufficient to indicate the schematization of the six-day creation story, the very content of the narrative points in the same direction."⁸

"In speaking of his creating the world in six days, we do not identify his mode of creation with human creativity nor need we assume his week's work was necessarily accomplished in 144 hours. By speaking of six days of work followed by one day's rest, Gen 1 draws attention to the correspondence between God's work and man's and God's rest as a model for the Sabbath, but that does not necessarily imply that the six days of creation are the same as human days."⁹

- ➔ The six 'days' of Genesis 1 are intended to be read as a literary and poetic device to help us understand creation and our place in it. Their significance is theological, rather than scientific.
- ➔ The distinction between 'How' and 'Why'?

GENESIS 2-3: THE GARDEN OF EDEN

WHAT IS A "LIVING BEING"?

"Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." (Genesis 2:7)

- "Living being" - the contrast between an animal and a human being? Biological vs Spiritual life?

⁸ Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, p. 39

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 40

"In reality, the difference between Biological life and Spiritual life is so important that I am going to give them two distinct names. The Biological sort which come to us through Nature, and which (like everything else in Nature) is always tending to run down and decay so that it can only be kept up by incessant subsidies from Nature in the form of air, water, food, etc. is *Bios*. The Spiritual life which is in God from all eternity, and which made the whole natural universe is *Zoe*. *Bios* has, to be sure, a certain shadowy or symbolic resemblance to *Zoe*: but only the sort of resemblance there is between a photo and a place, or statue and a man. A man who changed from having *Bios* to having *Zoe* would have gone through as big a change as a statue which changed from being a carved stone to being a real man. And that is precisely what Christianity is about. This world is a great sculptor's shop. We are the statues and there is a rumor going around that some of us are some day going to come to life."¹⁰

- *Ephesians 2:1-5* "As for you, you were **dead** in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world ... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **made us alive** with Christ even when we were **dead** in transgressions"

THE NATURE OF EDEN

"Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed." (Genesis 2:8)

- The Garden did not cover the whole earth – mankind was instructed to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28)
- Eden was the place where God dwelt with his people (Temple imagery – ask me for separate handout if you missed it on Sunday)
- Was the purpose of Adam and Eve to extend Eden as they had children and worked the earth?

So... what went on **outside** the garden?

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 159

WHERE DID CAIN GET HIS WIFE?

Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.' (Genesis 4:13-14)

- Cain killed his brother and was driven out from the land.
- Genesis 4 only records Adam and Eve having two children – Cain and Abel. (Of course they may have had many more!)
- But why was Cain worried about others finding him and killing him?
- Were there more people on the earth than simply Adam and Eve's children at that point?

CAN WE SYNTHESIZE THE BIBLE AND SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING?

Exercise Caution!

- **Our understanding has its limits!**
"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law." (Deut 29:29)
- **Science has its limits!** E.g., is evolution a scientific theory in the classical sense of the word (observation)? See e.g. <https://dissentfromdarwin.org/>



Bearing this in mind! – some claim that Genesis and evolution can be brought together:

"A sophisticated model, up-to-date with the genetic evidence, comes from Fazale Rana of the Christian apologetics organization Reasons to Believe (RTB). Rana traces human ancestry to an original woman (Eve) and to one man who comes later (Noah). The overall Reasons to Believe model would place the origin of humanity somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000 years ago. More precisely, Rana suggests,

The RTB model views Adam and Eve as historical individuals – the first human beings – originating by God's miraculous intervention approximately 70,000 to 50,000 years ago. Adam and Eve's descendants formed a small initial population that eventually gave rise to all human population groups around the world."¹¹

¹¹ C. John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve really exist?*, p. 122-3

A FINAL WORD

We should not be embarrassed to conclude with uncertainty: it is a mark of a mature faith, properly based on adequate evidence and serenely bearing the tensions of a pilgrim's progress by faith, not sight. Free from a neurotic need for certainty on every matter, we trust the trustworthy Creator and Redeemer.

Henri Blocher

RECOMMENDED READING

N.B. – inclusion in this list is not an endorsement of everything the book says!

- C. John Collins: ***Did Adam and Eve really exist?***
- Denis Alexander: ***Creation or Evolution: do we have to choose?***
- Denis Alexander: ***Rebuilding the Matrix*** (a few years old but has lots of the history of science)
- Norman c. Nevin: ***Should Christians embrace evolution?*** (A response to Denis Alexander's book *Creation or Evolution*)
- Melvin Tinker: ***Reclaiming Genesis*** (not about science at all, but how we should understand Genesis 1-12)
- Henri Blocher: ***In the Beginning*** (a bit outdated on science but excellent on Genesis)
- John Lennox: ***God's Undertaker: Has science buried God?*** (a good read on science more generally)
- C. John Collins: ***Science & Faith: Friends or Foes?***
- www.biologos.org – for Christians presenting an evolutionary understanding of creation.
- www.answersingenesis.org – for Christians presenting a six-day creationist understanding.