

How did we get here?

The Doctrine of Creation

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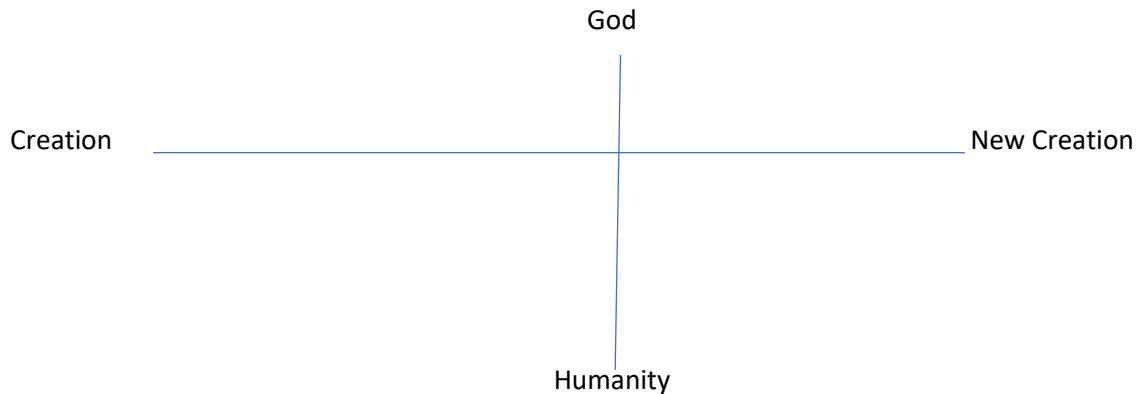
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1 The lies we believe about Creation

Introduction

What we believe affects how we live. This includes what we believe about four key things:



We are now going to take some time to look at what we believe about Creation. We're going to do this in four parts:

1. The story of Creation. We will start by looking at the first three chapters of Genesis and doing some detailed exegesis of the text. The aim of this is to find out what Scripture actually says. We will then go on to look at the themes found in the Creation account and trace them through the rest of Scripture (Biblical Theology). This section will also include a short discussion on how to interpret Genesis 1-3 which we will pick up again in more detail in Section 2.
2. Rivals to Creation. Throughout history there have been various rivals to the Bible's account of creation of which atheistic evolution is only the latest. We will be exploring these and finding out how the Bible not only offers a positive account of God's creation acts but also a polemic that challenges false beliefs.
3. A theology of Creation. Here we will look at how Systematic Theology deals with the question of Creation and God's providence.
4. Implications of Creation. Finally we will talk about the pastoral significance of what we have discovered. As always, throughout our investigation we will keep asking our usual question, "How does what we believe affects how we Live? "

Creation Truth and Lies

When we looked at the Doctrine of God, we started by seeing that each of us chooses either to believe truth or lies about God. When we believe lies about God, this means two things.

First of all, we are idolatrous; we fail to worship the true God. Believing lies about God is wrong in and of itself. However, when we believe lies about God, the second thing that we also want to say is that it affects and hurts us too. Often the mess that people struggle with from addictions through to broken relationships stems from sinful behaviour rooted in false beliefs about God.

The same is true with Creation. If we believe lies about this World, then because this is God's World, first of all our beliefs will be sinful and idolatrous. Secondly, we will find that we do not know how to live rightly in this World and so find ourselves in all kinds of self-induced trouble.

What are some of the lies that people believe about Creation? I want to suggest a few here. These include

1. That this World is just here by accident or chance. In earlier times, people saw this World as being the by-product of the wars and love affairs of gods. In modern times, we are more likely to see the world as it is resulting from atheistic evolution.
2. That the World around us and God are one and the same thing. This is sometimes called pantheism. This leads to people worshipping nature.
3. That God is distant from this World. He may have been the first cause, but he has just put the rules in place and left the Universe to get on with running itself. This is usually referred to as Deism.
4. That “matter” (physical creation) is evil and that only the spiritual world is good. This is known as Dualism and is particularly associated with Gnosticism.
5. That Creation is still completely good. That the Fall has not happened or is not that significant.

Now, I want to say two things about these lies. First of all, whilst you may not consider yourself a pantheist, deist or atheist, what we are going to see is that those types of world view can end up influencing our thinking, even as Christians. We will see how this happens as we go on.

Secondly, the result of these types of beliefs is either fatalism or superstition. Again, as we work through the question of origins, we will see how this happens and discover that when our world is governed by either fatalism or superstition, then it is a very scary place to be.

Discovering the Truth about Creation

Now, the other thing we have been discovering is that the only way we can know truth about anything is because God reveals it to us. So, the starting point for our investigation is going to be the Bible. We’re going to start by simply finding out what God’s Word tells us about where we have come from. In other words, we’re going to start with the book of Genesis and work our way through the first few chapters.

2. How Should we interpret Genesis 1-3?

One of the big questions we will have to consider is “How should we interpret Genesis 1-3. . Of course, whenever we think about interpreting and applying Genesis 1-3, the question of Creation and Evolution is never far from my minds. Or to put it another way, how do we interpret the Bible’s account of origins in the light of modern scientific understanding?

We can suggest 3 possible ways of interpreting Genesis 1-3.¹

1. It is a literal account that tells us about material creation over 7 (24 hour) day period. This account can be harmonised with what we know about science. However, it cannot and should not be harmonised with evolutionary accounts. If this is correct, then it is evolutionary theory itself that fails to stand up to the test of scientific evidence. Usually, those who take this view assume a “Young Earth” creation whereby the Universe began around about 6000 years ago.
2. The account is primarily a stylised and poetic attempt to tell the story of origins. It may well be intended as a polemic account both drawing on and responding to the contemporary myths of its time. We should not necessarily attempt to match the account precisely to modern cosmology as the author accommodated his language to fit the cosmological understanding of his time rather than to challenge it. This view is likely to accept in principle evolutionary theory but argue that God must be involved providentially and intimately in the evolutionary process. It may be possible to harmonise the Evolutionary process with the structure of the creation account. For example, this might mean treating the 7 days as epochs lasting millions of years.
3. The account never was intended to be harmonised with modern scientific theory. It serves a different purpose because its intention is to make theological points. One example of this is Walton’s argument that the account describes functional creation not material creation. This approach is essentially neutral on the question of evolutionary theory arguing that the Bible does not tell us about material origins. The point of the account is that the author is describing how God names and assigns meaning and purpose to each aspect of creation. Essentially the account is about God ordering his creation for the purpose of worship and culminates with his enthronement in his Garden Temple.²

In order to consider this question properly and reach a conclusion between these three options, it is important to consider two vital questions.

1. Have we read and understood the Biblical data properly. Are we exegeting what it says or reading in (eisegesis) our own ideas and opinions? Are we making it say more or less than what it really says.
2. Have we understood the Scientific data correctly? This means have we made correct observations and have we distinguished accurate observations from the interpretations extrapolated from them which again may include eisegesis as philosophical assumptions shape theories and interpretations.

We will need to consider both questions although primarily our focus here will be on the first part of the question. In order to be best placed to do this, there are two specific things we need to do. First of all, we need to do the detailed text work and therefore, the next three chapters will focus on

¹ Note that each viewpoint may include variant sub-options within it.

² See John Walton, *The Lost world of Genesis 1: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 2009), 36-52.

textual exegesis as we find out what Genesis 1-3 actually say. We also want to follow the maxim that Scripture should interpret Scripture and so following that, we will develop a biblical theology of Creation examining how the themes we find in Genesis 1-3 are drawn out and understood throughout the rest of the Bible.

This will then enable us to think more clearly about how Genesis 1-3 have been understood historically, and specifically how the book would have been heard and read by its first recipients long before the idea of evolution was on the table. Whilst Evolution has not always been around, there have long been rival creation accounts. Therefore, we will examine some of the rivals to Biblical Creation before coming to the main contemporary rival -atheistic evolution.

This then will provide a foundation to move from interpretation to application. We'll examine the Doctrine of Creation as a Systematic Theology discipline thinking about what it teaches about God, us and the World. This will lead to application as we consider how what we know about Creation affects us pastorally.

3 The Beginning of the Story (Genesis 1 -2:3)

The story of Creation starts right at the beginning of the Bible. The stage is set, the main characters introduced and we begin to read about who God is and what he is doing in time and space. In Genesis 1, we are told that God creates the world over a 7 day time frame.

The Creation Week

Day 1

In the beginning, God creates (1:1).³ We are taken right back to the start of time. If you have read the whole story, you will immediately be alert to future echoes of this and their significance. In particular, John 1:1 tells us that “In the beginning was the Word.” Jesus, God the Son, was present at creation. If he was there at the beginning of time, then he pre-exists time. In other words, Jesus is the eternal Son. Creation’s condition at the start is described as “formless and void” and dark. The starting point is without shape and empty. It is waiting to be shaped, ordered and filled. God’s Spirit is present “hovering” and again we may immediately think of later imagery that echoes this: the dove that hovers over the flood and the Spirit himself again seen in the form of a dove at Jesus’ baptism.

God creates light (v3-5). He simply speaks and it happens. Creation is obedient to his command. God separates light from darkness. We begin to see the forming, shaping and ordering process at work. God names light “day” and darkness “night.” Here we see ordering happening in the beginning of measured time.

Naming is significant in Genesis 1.

“Seven times a subsequent divine word either of naming (vv5 [2 times]. 8, 10 [2 times]) or blessing (vv22, 28) follows an act of creation... In the OT, to name something is to assert sovereignty over it; c.f. 2:20; 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17. Here darkness, though not said to have

³ Note there are 4 possible interpretations of v 1. For a detailed discussion of the options, see Gordon J Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC1. Word: 1987), 7-13. Grammatically, it could either be a main clause or a subordinate temporal clause. If it is the main clause “In the beginning God created...,” then it is either the first act of creation or a heading for the whole thing. If it is subordinate, then either “In the beginning when God created...the earth was...” So that v2 is the main clause or “In the beginning when God createdGod said” with v 3 as the main clause and v 2 in parenthesis. This is theologically important: does God create from nothing, or should we “presuppose the existence of chaotic pre-existent matter before the work of creation began?” Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 11. The grammatical issue is whether the word Hebrew word for “beginning” can be used in an absolute sense in the main clause or whether it is only used in temporal clauses. Some scholars think it is only used in temporal clauses. Wenham concludes with the majority of commentators that it is the main clause and the start of the acts of creation: Gordon J Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC1. Word: 1987), 12-13. I agree with Wenham on this both because of his exegetical arguments, but also because of the theological implications. We will discuss this later. However, at this point note that John 1:2 and Revelation 4:11 require us to conclude that God created from nothing. Everything exists because he created it. Additionally, as Blocher explains, “The verb which we translate ‘create’ (bara) carried very considerable force in Hebrew. The Old Testament uses it most sparingly and in that form, exclusively of the God of Israel. Never is any material mentioned.” Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1984), 61. This does not leave room for uncreated primordial matter.

been created, is still named by God. Giving names also defines roles, and the naming of the day and night here is an aspect of separating darkness and light.”⁴

God evaluates what he has created. He sees that it is good.

Day 2

Creation of an expanse (V 6-8 -). Sky separates waters above from waters below. Wenham comments:

“Put another way, the firmament occupies the space between the earth’s surface and the clouds. Quite how the OT conceives the nature of the firmament is less clear.”⁵

The point is this. Once again, God is giving form and structure. He is putting clear boundaries in place between the earth and the rest of the Universe. Once again, God names his creation.

Day 3

God divides water from land (1: 9-10) and names them “sea” and “earth”. Once again, he sees that it is good.

God causes vegetation to grow (1:11-13). He is beginning to fill the land. The living things, plants, trees, animals etc. each reproduces “after its kind.” Like produces like.

Day 4

Lights are made to populate and rule in the heavens (1:15-19). These are the sun, moon and stars.

“The creation of the sun, moon and stars is described at much greater length than anything save the creation of man. The description is also quite repetitive. The fullness of the description suggests that the creation of the heavenly bodies held a special significance for the author.”⁶

So often in ancient religion and mythology, the celestial bodies were seen as divine and to be worshipped, but here is a clear reminder that God made them.⁷ They are beautiful and serve a purpose, but they are not to be worshipped.

“Rule” here means to give order and structure to the day and night and the different seasons. These are governed by where the earth is in relation to the sun and where the moon is in relation to the earth.

Day 5

The sea and the sky are populated with fish, other sea creatures, birds (1:20-23). God blesses them. In this context, we start to learn that blessing has something to do with fruitfulness. They are told to multiply and fill out the heavens and the seas.

Day 6

⁴ Wenham *Genesis 1-15*, 19.

⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 19. Note that Calvin is insistent that this really should be thought of as an “expanse” and not as a solid firmament. John Calvin, *Genesis* (Latin Edition, 1554. Tr. John King. Rpr. London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 79. He also relates the “waters above” to the sky being filled with clouds but says that we should not treat this as a technical scientific description. “Whence I conclude that the waters here meant are such as the rude and unlearned may perceive.” Calvin, *Genesis*, 80.

⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 21.

⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 21.

God makes living creatures of all kinds (1: 24-25).

Mankind are made in God's image (1:26-27). This includes both male and female. Men and women are equal in nature, both reflecting God's image. In verses 28-30, they are blessed. As well as being fruitful and multiplying, they are to rule over and subdue creation.

God's image here reflects something of his character. Prior to the Fall this would include "righteousness and true holiness"⁸ along with authority to rule and subdue.⁹ It may also include the idea that man acts as God's vice-regent on earth.¹⁰ I agree with Calvin that "image" and "likeness" are not two different things but two words reinforcing the same point.¹¹

In verse 31 God surveys the whole of his creation. It isn't just "good" – it is very good.

Day 7

Creation is complete (2:1-3). On day 7, God rests. He blesses the 7th day. This gives us more clues as to what it means "to bless." Blessing also has something to do with completeness, rest and enjoying the fruits of your work. Blessing involves taking delight in the goodness of things.

Creation Themes

As we've worked through the passage, we've noticed some important themes that begin to tell us more about God and his work of creation. First of all, as already alluded to, an important theme is that God forms, shapes and orders his creation.

This may even be seen in the process of creation and the structure of the passage. Wenham suggests that we can see the chapter fitting into two parts. The first part is to do with the ordering and shaping on days 1-3 and then on days 4-7, the forming and filling parallels the first 3 days. This can be shown as below.¹²

Day 1	Light	Day 4	Luminaries
Day 2	Sky	Day 5	Birds and fish
Day 3	Land	Day 6	Animals and Man
	(Plants)		(Plants for food)

The structure of the passage sends a clear message. God is a God of order, not chaos. God is the great and intentional designer who plans, wills and decrees.

Another way that the passage conveys its message is through the repetition of key words and phrases. We've already noted that the phrase "God called" is repeated throughout the passage as God names things, exercising his dominion and authority over his creation. There are three other phrases that get repeated: "God said", "And it was so", "God saw that it was good."

"God said..." God creates by speaking. This reminds us of his authority particularly as this is coupled with "and it was so..." Creation responds obediently to his voice. There are important theological implications here. First of all, this chimes with the point John makes: the Word is present and involved

⁸ Calvin, *Genesis*, 94.

⁹ Calvin, *Genesis*, 94.

¹⁰ See Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 30 & 31-32.

¹¹ Calvin, *Genesis*, 94.

¹² Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 7. See also Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 51 & 54-55.

in Creation. Secondly, we see that God is sovereign. Thirdly, we are reminded of the trustworthiness of God's Revelation. God's Word is true and when God says something, it comes to pass.

Conclusion

It should be no surprise to see that the way that God creates the World fits with all that we have seen about who God is and what he is like. We see that it is the Triune God who creates. All three persons are present and involved. The Sovereign God demonstrates his greatness as all creation is obedient to his voice and the Good God creates a good and beautiful Universe.¹³

We also see that Creation results from God's voice. It is an act of revelation and we can only truly understand His World through revelation.

¹³ See Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 67.

4 The Garden (Genesis 2:4-25)

Introduction

We now get what many scholars take to be a second and possibly contradictory creation account.¹⁴ By the way, I think it is unlikely that someone would just stick two contradictory accounts side by side: common sense tells me that. There are also good reasons found in the text itself for rejecting that suggestion and we will see them as we work through the passage.

What I believe we have here is the continuation of the story picking up on Genesis 1's grand big picture of creation and focusing in on a specific time (day 6) and location.

God and Man the Gardeners

"This is the account" (2:4). The Hebrew phrase *"Eleh Toledot"* can literally be translated as "These are the generations." It's the phrase used to punctuate the whole book of Genesis and mark out each section (including the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob).¹⁵ Each section usually includes a family tree listing the descendants of the chosen focal point. The idea is that we are about to discover what became of certain key people and, in this case, creation itself personified. Bandstra renders it "These are the outcomes of the heaven and earth when they were created."¹⁶

When we turn to the New Testament, Matthew echoes this style by providing the lineage of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-7). This is one of the ways that he signals that he is writing new Scripture. It also signals that he sees in the coming of Jesus a new creation.

Sometimes, Hebrew writers used syntactical devices to highlight important points in the text or to link passages together. Wenham identifies one of those devices here: a "chiastic" pattern.¹⁷

Chiasms take a phrase, sentence or paragraph and then repeat it, but reversing the word or phrase order. So here in verse 4 we have "...when the heavens and earth were created" reversed in the second part of the verse with "when God created/ made the earth and heavens."¹⁸

The pattern signals a close link between ch1 and ch 2, suggesting careful and intentional editing.¹⁹ In other words, as I suggested above, these are not two accounts that have been carelessly stuck together by a negligent editor. Now, if there's intentionality to the structure and content of Genesis, then this is important because it makes it much less likely that the aforementioned careless editor had missed some obvious contradictions between the two passages.²⁰ If that is so, then the apparent differences between chapters 1 and 2 are not contradictions between two different accounts, but examples of a single account giving different perspectives on the same event.

¹⁴ For discussion on this see Westermann 1: 186-90 and Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 51.

¹⁵ See Genesis 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2. Note also an echo of this in Exodus 1:1 "These are the names..."

¹⁶ Barry Bandstra, *Genesis 1-11 A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco Tx.: Baylor University Press, 200), 116-1

¹⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 55.

¹⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 55.

¹⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 55.

²⁰ NB This is not the time for a detailed discussion of authorship and whether or not there were separate written sources that were later edited into one book. However, I take the traditional view that Moses was the main author of the Pentateuch. I don't believe that this view or belief in the inspiration of Scriptures precludes the possibility that Moses made use of existing written and oral sources when drawing up the account or that others may have been involved in editing the book into its final form.

“There were no people to cultivate the soil” (2:5-6). This meant that plants were not yet growing. Two types of plant are described here, “shrubs” and “plants” (probably distinguishing inedible – by humans – from edible: vegetables, salad etc.²¹) This links to a distinction between types of agricultural land, pasture for animals to graze and fields for growing crops. As Wenham puts it,

“Gen 2.5 therefore distinguishes two types of land: open, uncultivated ‘plain’ or ‘field,’ the wilderness fit only for animal grazing, and the dusty ‘land’ where agriculture is possible with irrigation and human effort.”²²

There is no rain yet, but there are springs of water. However, this still needs human effort to develop irrigation systems and to cultivate the land. Wenham notes that “this fits in well with a Mesopotamian setting for Gen 2-4.”²³

This probably helps make sense of what is happening and helps us to harmonise chapter 1 where it appears that vegetation is already present and chapter 2 where it is not. Chapter 1 gives us the big picture of the whole earth where God has caused trees and plants to grow. Now, we know that in many contexts, plants will grow naturally by themselves. However, if you go to the Middle Eastern setting of the Old Testament, you find dry dusty land dependent upon human intervention to prepare it for plant life. So chapter 2 takes us to Day 6 and focuses in geographically on the location where Adam will live, a place that needs cultivation.

Man is formed from the dust of the ground V7. Note here the play on words. Adam is the one who comes from Adamah (from the ground). God breathes life into him.

God plants a garden (2:8 -14). This is a cultivated place. We have two clues to its location. First of all, it is “in the East.” Remember that the original hearers are being told this by Moses as they prepare to go into the Promised Land and that later readers would have been in the land of Canaan. East takes us towards Mesopotamia. We are then told about four rivers, two of which are still there today: the Tigris and Euphrates. By the way, we tend to think of gardens being like our back yards, but this is God’s garden, not my back garden, and so it could well have taken in a significant part of the whole region and may refer to the whole fertile crescent.

The Garden seems to be described in a way that functions symbolically and “there are many...features of the garden that suggest it is seen as an archetypal sanctuary, prefiguring the later tabernacle and temples.”²⁴ However, “The mention of the rivers and their location in vv10-14 suggests that the final editor of Gen 2 thought of Eden also as a real place even if it is beyond the wit of modern writers to locate.”²⁵

The garden is rich in resources including minerals, precious metals, vegetation and fruit. The fruit trees are pleasing to the eye and the fruit is good to eat. Note that the exact same description is given to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in chapter 3. This suggests that:

1. It wasn’t out of need or even the idea that this tree offered better fruit or was more attractive than the other trees that Adam and Eve were tempted. It was purely the craving for power and status and the desire for something forbidden that led to their downfall.

²¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 57-58.

²² Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 58.

²³ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 58.

²⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 61

²⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 61-62.

2. We must always give the tree its full title. It isn't just the Tree of Knowledge. Adam is already able to know and discern things (see later in the passage). Nor does Adam need to eat from it to know goodness. He already knows goodness and can delight in it. The specific issue is the knowledge of good and evil or good from evil. Eating the fruit means that you will know evil as well as good.

At the centre of the Garden, alongside the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, is the Tree of Life. We are not told much more about the Tree of Life except that at the end of Chapter 3, Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden to prevent them eating from it²⁶ and then it makes a further appearance at the end of Revelation.²⁷

The land needs a man to care for it, but note also that the Garden comes pre-planted, just as when the people of Israel come to the Promised Land they are promised

¹⁰ "The LORD your God will soon bring you into the land he swore to give you when he made a vow to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land with large, prosperous cities that you did not build. ¹¹ The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land..."²⁸

The man is placed in the garden (2:15-17) and given permission to enjoy its fruits. He is told "to tend it and keep watch" or "to till and to keep." Work is presented here as a good thing but notice that this is worship language too. A similar phrase is used to describe the work of the Levites in the Tabernacle.²⁹

Adam is given one restriction. He is not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. He is told that if he eats from it, he will "surely die."³⁰

Wenham suggests that the knowledge of good and evil together is to do with wisdom and how we acquire it. "The acquisition of wisdom is seen as one of the highest goals of the godly according to the book of Proverbs."³¹ However, "the wisdom literature also makes it plain that there is a wisdom that is God's sole preserve, which man should not aspire to attain (e.g. Job 15:7-9, 40: Prov 30:1-4)" and "To pursue it without reference to revelation is to assert human autonomy and to neglect the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7)."³²

With this command, God puts boundaries in place. Adam is to rule and subdue creation, but it remains God's creation and Adam remains under God's rule.

Remember that everything God has said so far has come to pass. We can trust this warning to be fulfilled if Adam disobeys.

If there is an explicit command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, nothing is said explicitly about the Tree of Life. However, this must be included within the permission to eat from all the other trees. Indeed, perhaps there is an implicit invitation here to eat from the right tree. The

²⁶ Genesis 3:22-24.

²⁷ Revelation 2:7 and Revelation 22:2, 14 & 19.

²⁸ Deuteronomy 6:10-11. 22:2.

²⁹ See Numbers 3:7-8; 4:23-24, 26 and Deuteronomy 4:19. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 67.

³⁰ This is emphasised by the use of the infinitive form of the verb "to die" followed immediately by the indicative.

³¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 63

³² Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 63.

Book of Proverbs picks up the imagery of a Tree of Life and links it to wisdom (Proverbs 3:18) righteousness (Proverbs 11:30) hope (Proverbs 13:12) and a gentle tongue (Proverbs 14:4).

If taking from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represents the desire to cross boundaries set in place by God and to acquire wisdom and knowledge for oneself, we may see eating from the Tree of Life as representing complete trust in and dependency on God for wisdom and righteousness, living by his rules and following his ways.

Eating from the forbidden Tree is literally to choose death rather than life. God's people are later told to choose life.³³

Alone and Together

"It is not good" (2:18). This is the first time that something is described as "not good".³⁴ Note that the issue here is of being alone and not about loneliness.³⁵ It is possible to be alone and not lonely. It is also possible to be deeply lonely in a crowd.

God says that Adam needs a helper like him. Literally, the Hebrew phrase talks about someone "like but opposite to."³⁶ In other words, he needs someone who is similar but also distinct from him.

God forms animals from the ground (2:19-20). Humans and animals share the same material origins. It is not our genetic structure that distinguishes us from the beasts. He brings them to Adam to be named. Remember the significance of naming from chapter 1. God names his creation to demonstrate his sovereignty over it. Now man names things. This is part of subduing and ruling over Creation.

No suitable helper is found.

God makes a helper (2: 21-25). He puts the man into a deep sleep and forms (literally builds) a woman from one of his rib bones. When the man wakes up, he sees her and identifies her as the one suitable for him.

"For this reason..." (2:24). This is an editorial comment by Moses. He identifies theological and therefore ethical implications for marriage. It is something from God, something that is meant to be lasting. A relationship distinct from all other relationships.

They were both naked (2:25). Nakedness will later become associated with shame and shaming, of being exposed and vulnerable. This is not the case here.

³³ Deuteronomy 30:19.

³⁴ Blöcher, *In the Beginning* 96.

³⁵ See Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 107.

³⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 68.

5 The Challenge

At this point, all looks well. God has created a good creation, fit for purpose. Humans live in that Creation, enjoying a garden paradise under God's rule and blessing. They are responsible for caring for and ruling over creation. Then things start to go wrong

The Enemy

The Serpent's cunning (v1). The snake is introduced as a new character in the narrative. It is described as "more crafty"³⁷ than the other creatures or "the shrewdest"³⁸. This suggests a quality associated specifically with that animal. Different creatures take on particular metaphorical characteristics. For example, we are told to be "wise as serpents, gentle as doves."³⁹ Wenham notes that "explicit characterisation of actors in the story is rare in Hebrew narrative"⁴⁰ In other words, labelling the serpent as shrewd is significant to the story and meant to get our attention. It suggests that "Perhaps we should not take his words at face value as the woman did."⁴¹ There is also some word play between nakedness (*arom*) – the human condition and shrewdness (*arum*) -what they aspired to.⁴²

It is still a creature however, made by God. This will be important to remember as the story unfolds and we decide whether or not we can believe its claims. This also reminds us of the vital theological distinction between Creator and creature.

Who is the snake? At first glance, we might take it to be simply a creature speaking in its own right. However, there are a few other options.

- That it is simply a creature, acting and speaking for itself. This would mean that animals were able to talk before The Fall.
- That it is a spiritual being taking the form of and possessing a dumb animal and speaking through it.
- That it is a spiritual being who speaks with Eve and that we are not intended to think of it as appearing as a snake but rather that its cunning is "snake-like." In other words we have metaphorical personification similar to Jesus' description of Herod as "that old fox"⁴³ or John's announcement of Jesus as "The lamb of God."⁴⁴ Ancient Israel may then have associated the snake/serpent symbol with other surrounding powers and opponents such as the Ancient Egyptians or the Canaanites and with their associated creation myths.⁴⁵

I believe that the second option fits best both with the immediate narrative and what we learn from the rest of Scripture because

- God chooses to specifically curse the snake -so that this creature is historically associated with The Fall
- We know from the rest of Scripture that there is a spiritual power, Satan, who is hostile to God and his people.

³⁷ ESV

³⁸ NLT

³⁹ Matthew 10:16

⁴⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 72.

⁴¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 72.

⁴² Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 72.

⁴³ Luke 13:32.

⁴⁴ John 1:29.

⁴⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 72.

- Scripture shows that spiritual beings are able to take on physical form and to speak through creatures. This includes angels and God himself appearing in human form and even speaking through a donkey⁴⁶

The Temptation

“Did God really say?” (3:1b). Genesis now reports a conversation between the woman and the serpent. Note the repetition of the verb *amor* “To speak” echoing ch 1 where God repeatedly speaks. Here however God is silent until v 9. It is just the woman and the serpent speaking. God’s words are reported (or misreported) and challenged but they do not listen directly to him.

The Serpent specifically challenges God’s command. “Did he really tell you that he could not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?” Wenham notes also a distancing of God. Elsewhere he is Yahweh Elohim, Lord god -symbolising his covenant lordship and love for his people, here he is simply Elohim.⁴⁷

Eve responds, *“of course we may eat”* (3:2-3) “but we cannot eat or even touch from the tree in the middle of the Garden.” This seems to include an added, stricter prohibition than what is given in chapter 2. It is possible that this is part of the general gist of God’s instruction summarised as “do not eat” in chapter 2 but it is also possible and likely that she is adding her own restrictions, misreporting God leads to a more legalistic view.⁴⁸

“You won’t die” (3:4-5). The phrase is usually translated emphatically as “You surely will not die” or “you certainly will not die” though it is also possible that the serpent is introducing some ambiguity and the phrase could be “It’s not certain that you will die.”⁴⁹ The truth of God’s word is challenged. And God’s motive is challenged. “God has said this because he knows you will become like him.” The temptation is to become as God or to be gods. Remember though that there is a sense in which the man and woman are already like God – made in his image

“She saw...” (3:6). In Genesis 1, it is God who looks and evaluates, declaring his creation to be good. Here, the woman now looks and evaluates. She observes three things about the tree, that its fruit was good for eating, that it was pleasing to look at and that it was desirable for gaining wisdom and insight. So, she responds, takes and eats, giving some to her husband who *“was with her.”* Up until this point, Adam has gone unmentioned. We may have been tempted to assume that he was absent and that the woman was left to make her own independent decisions. However, it is clear from the text that he was present, albeit silent and passive.

The Consequence

“Their eyes were opened...” (v 7). They do acquire new knowledge. The serpent may be right about new knowledge but the affect is negative not positive. They see their nakedness and now it causes shame. They attempt to make clothes from fig leaves.

⁴⁶ E.g. Genesis 18-19 and Numbers 22:21-39.

⁴⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 73.

⁴⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 73.

⁴⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 74.

"The man and his wife heard the Lord..." (v8) God makes his presence known, walking in the garden⁵⁰, literally in "the breath of the day" or the evening which the NLT captures as "when the cool evening breezes were blowing." This is the first time in this chapter that God's voice is heard.

He calls to the man and woman *"Where are you?"* (3:9). Adam responds *"I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked."* (3:10). God draws the link for them, that their awareness of nakedness has come from eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. What does it mean for humans to know evil as well as good? It means to know shame and guilt.

"It was the woman..." (3:12) The next consequence of disobedience is blame and blame shifting. The man blames the woman who in turn blames the snake. There is surely some irony in that the man and woman who were made in God's image and told to rule over and subdue the creatures have listened to and obeyed a creature.

Judgement

"Because you have done this..." (3:14). Having heard from the man and the woman, God now casts judgement. He starts with the serpent. It has risen up and sought an exalted position in the creation order, now it is brought low. It must crawl in the dust. As mentioned earlier -this suggests that the enemy is not merely a metaphorical snake but rather in some way is embodied by a literal serpent.

"I will cause hostility between you and the woman." (3:15). There will be generational conflict *"your seed and her seed."* Is this simply about a phobia of snakes? No, there's also the promise that *"He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel"* which Christian commentators down through the ages have read as being the earliest prophecy of Christ's coming.⁵¹

The woman is told *"I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy..."* (3:16). Pain and suffering enter into the very heart of the positive blessings and duties that God has given to humans. In chapter 1, they were blessed and told to be fruitful and multiply. Now the woman is told that as she fulfils that command to multiply, her pain will be multiplied.

"Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you" is a fairly literal translation of 3:17. Some interpreters read it as negative and a further sign of judgement with pain and struggle entering to the very heart of human relationships. This is because the wording and syntax are echoed in Genesis 4 where God warns Cain regarding sin that it is crouching at his door and again, literally:

*"its desire is for you and you must rule over it."*⁵²

So, for example, the NLT reads:

"And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you."

In that case, "desire" here would be about the aim to possess and control whilst Adam's rule" over woman would be a case of enforced subjugation, a battle of the sexes if you will.

⁵⁰ Leviticus 23:13 and Deuteronomy 23:15 use the same verb *halek* to describe God's presence in the Tabernacle sanctuary reinforcing the sense that Eden is a first Temple. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 74.

⁵¹ See Romans 16:20, Hebrews 2:14, Revelation 12.

⁵² Genesis 4:7.

However, in other places, both these concepts of “desire” and “rule” are treated positively so that a number of commentators think that there is actually an element of grace here in the midst of judgement.⁵³

I think that we would be wise to be cautious, particularly as the whole concept of a “battle of the sexes” with male-female relationships as a problem that needs solving is a fairly recent, modern concept.⁵⁴

“Since you listened” 3:17). Now God addresses the man. A Key theme in the passage has been who speaks and who pays attention. Adam chose to listen to other voices (his wife and implicitly the serpent) over God’s voice.

As with the woman, creation duties and blessings now become a struggle. The earth is cursed. He must battle with thorns and thistles. Food and eating will come only with sweat and toil

Death is coming as promised. So first of all, there is death because the land is cursed. Secondly, he will experience physical death. He will know mortality.

“...until you return to the ground from which you were made.
For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.”⁵⁵

“Then the man—Adam—named his wife Eve” (3:20) There is another naming event. Eve means life - and the woman is the mother of all human life.

“And the LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.” (3:21) There are two hints of grace here in Genesis 3. The first is when God promises a saviour -the descendent of the woman who will crush the serpent. The second is here when God clothes Adam and Eve covering their shame.

“Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil” (3:22). There is one sense in which the serpent was right, that eating the fruit would enable the humans to know something (good from evil) in the same way that God knows the two things. This does not mean that they have become equal with God knowing all things perfectly -simply that they have new knowledge which belonged to God.⁵⁶

“What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!”(3:23). Remember that we’ve said that the knowledge was provided not through magical or drug like properties but through what it symbolically represented. It is likely that the two trees function in the same way. If so, then the issue is not that there are properties in the fruit from the tree of life that will preserve their life. Rather, eating the fruit fulfils the condition for ongoing life without death. It

⁵³ See , Susan T Foh, *Women and the Word of God. A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Phil.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 67-69, Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984),182 and Gordon J Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1. Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1987), 82.

⁵⁴ Cf. Geneviève Fraisse, “A Philosophical History of Sexual Difference” in *A History of Women in the West Volume IV Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War* (Ed. Geneviève Fraisse and Michelle Perrot. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 73.) 5

⁵⁵ Genesis 3:19

⁵⁶ Wenham treats this as a conversation n God and the heavenly hosts so that it is not that the man has become” like God’ himself but ‘like one of us,’ that is like one of the heavenly beings including God and the angels in so far as man knows good and evil.” Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 85.

represents outwardly trust in God in the same way that circumcision (for Israel) and baptism and communion (the church) do.⁵⁷ Such a situation is not tenable.

The solution is *physical banishment* (3:23) Adam and Eve are driven out of the garden and an angel put in place to guard it. The third aspect of death then is exile from God's loving presence and the source of eternal life. Exile as death is seen when certain Israelites are banished from the camp during the Exodus (Leviticus 13:45)⁵⁸ and when the people of Israel are exiled from the land to Babylon and Persia.

Conclusion

We started with God's good creation but now the land is cursed. We started with man and woman safely protected and provided for in a garden paradise but now they are in exile, banished from the Garden. We started with humans blessed and told to be fruitful and multiply and rule over creation but now their calling and work comes with the curse of pain, sweat and toil.

⁵⁷ Note Wenham thinks that Adam hasn't yet eaten from The Tree of Life. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 85. I think that works on the assumption that eating would be a one off event leading to immortality. I don't think that this is necessarily the case and particularly when you trace the imagery through to Revelation 22, it may well have been there as something to eat from daily and habitually as a statement of trust.

⁵⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 74.

6 Creation and Biblical Theology

The first few chapters of Genesis are setting up the rest of the book. So, just as a film or novel will return to key places and characters and just as a particularly melody will keep appearing in a musical, so too, we can look forward to the themes we discover in these first few chapters being repeated and built upon throughout Scripture.

To understand better how this is happening, we need to know a little about something called Biblical Theology.

What is Biblical Theology

We already know what Systematic Theology is because that's essentially what we've been doing as we've looked at the Doctrines of Revelation and God. As Graeme Goldsworthy explains:

“Christian doctrine (systematic or dogmatic theology) involves a systematic gathering of the doctrines of the bible under various topics to form a body of definitive Christian teaching about man, sins, grace, the church, sacraments, ministry and so on.”⁵⁹

So, what we do, is to look across the whole of Scripture and for every issue, we attempt to summarise, explain and defend it. Biblical Theology does something a little different. Here's Goldsworthy again:

“Biblical theology as defined here, is dynamic not static. That is, it follows the movement and process of God's revelation in the bible. It is closely related to systematic theology (the two are dependent upon one another), but there is a different emphasis. Biblical theology is not concerned to state the final doctrines which go to make up the content of Christian belief, but rather to describe the process by which revelation unfolds and moves towards the goal which is god's final revelation of his purposes in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁰

So, Biblical Theology will follow the whole storyline through discovering how the Bible's message of Redemption is progressively revealed over time. It will pick up on specific threads, themes and characters and follow them through Scripture until they find their fulfilment and explanation in Christ.

““Biblical theology seeks to understand the relationships between the various eras in God's revealing activity recorded in the Bible”⁶¹

Biblical and Systematic Theology should not be seen as rivalling each other but as complimentary. We need Biblical Theology to help us do the necessary Biblical groundwork before drawing our systematic conclusions. We need Systematic Theology to provide the framework for our Biblical Theology and to ensure that we reach useful conclusions.

“It is on the basis of biblical theology that the systematic theologian draws upon the pre-Pentecost texts of the bible as part of the material from which doctrine may be formulated.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Graeme Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” pages 1-148 in *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 44-45.

⁶⁰ Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” 45.

⁶¹ Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” 45-46.

⁶² Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” 46.

In other words, for the believer who wants to help encourage, teach, challenge and care for his fellow believers there is a process to follow in order to ensure that our care and advice is Biblical.

This could be shown as follows:

Textual Exegesis → Biblical Theology → Systematic Theology → Pastoral Theology

Our aim is to apply Scripture to the hearts of others. Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology are part of the process that takes us from the text to the heart.

So what does a Biblical Theology of Creation look like?

The Big Picture

In Genesis 1-3 we have seen that God creates and rules his Creation by his powerful word. At the heart of Creation, he places humanity.

“The creation of man in the image of God distinguished man from the animals. Man is not the end of a chain of evolution for he is qualitatively distinct from the animals. Man was created in fellowship with God and with dominion over the rest of the created order.”⁶³

Humans are special. They reign over creation under God. They are told to fill and subdue the Earth. Adam is given responsibility for naming and classifying the animals. The trees provide fruit for his nourishment and enjoyment. However, human rule is not unfettered. As Goldsworthy explains,

“However, we cannot ignore the similarity between man and the animals -man is never more than a creature and, as such, totally dependent upon the creator. For instance, the word of God to Adam forbidding him to eat from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil expresses the fact that man, the creature is bound by the limits of his creaturehood. There are real limits set by the Creator. As such they are expressions of the sovereignty of God -of his absolute Lordship. But this Lord is good and he establishes his creature-man in a relationship which brings both rule and blessing. God is king, man his subject and the place where all this happens is the very best place of all -it is the garden paradise of Eden.”⁶⁴

Goldsworthy sums this up as being the first experience of God’s Kingdom or

- (a) “God’s people
- (b) In God’s place
- (c) Under God’s rule”⁶⁵

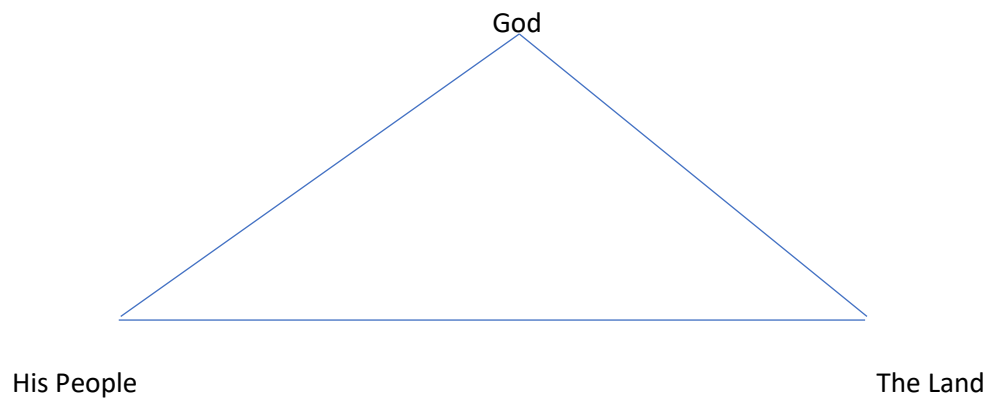
Chris Wright sees this as providing a paradigm for life in God’s creation that will be followed throughout the Bible. He represents this as⁶⁶

⁶³ Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” 51.

⁶⁴ Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” 51.

⁶⁵ Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” 54.

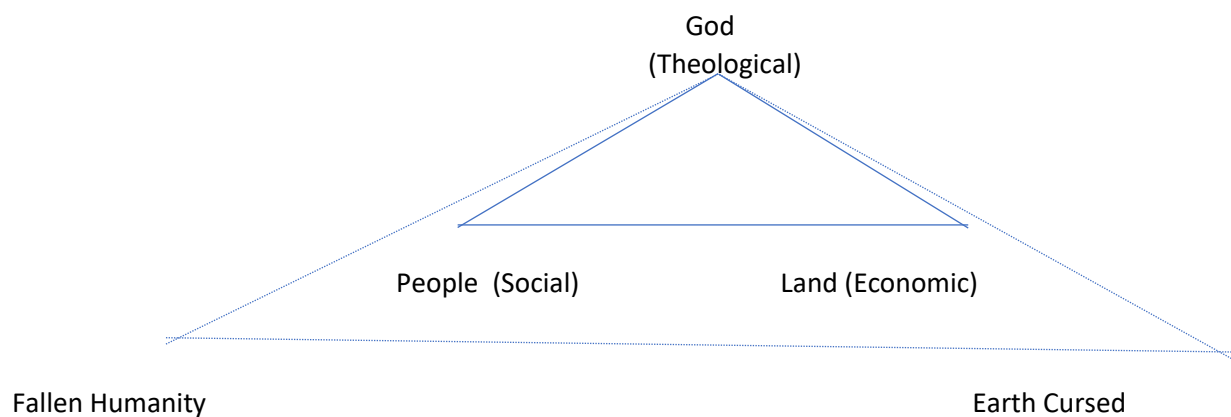
⁶⁶ Adapted from Wright, Christopher JH, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (IVP, Nottingham: 2004), 19.



The Fall then can be seen as a rebellion by God's people against his just reign. They reject the rules and boundaries that he has created for living in The Land and seek to use its produce for their own fulfilment without him and in rivalry to him.

The consequence of the Fall is death which includes exile from the paradise garden of Eden. "Dead man is man outside of the Garden."⁶⁷ Human rebellion results in "progressive exile from Eden, the arable land (adamah) and climatically the world itself in a deluge."⁶⁸ However, there is still grace and mercy because "Even in the Fall, God's grace permits the world to continue and sustain an order in which man may live and multiply."⁶⁹ However, The Land is now cursed so that "The world becomes a fallen world for fallen man to live in."⁷⁰

Wright represents this as:⁷¹



Note that each of his categories now relate to a broader theme. Under "God", we can think about what it means to know and worship God,⁷² what does it mean to live under his rule in a fallen

⁶⁷ Goldsworthy, "Gospel and Kingdom" 61.

⁶⁸ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1992), 57.

⁶⁹ Goldsworthy, "Gospel and Kingdom" 52.

⁷⁰ Goldsworthy, "Gospel and Kingdom" 52.

⁷¹ Adapted from Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 184.

⁷² See Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 23-47.

world.⁷³ “People” represents the social order, how we relate to each other and the rules for a good society. “The Land” represents God’s provision for us, it also relates to the world of work and so this gives us an “Economic” perspective on life.⁷⁴

Creation and the Storyline

We can now see how those themes are developed through the Bible storyline. Here we are going to primarily focus on what happens to the Land and we’ll pick up on the detailed story of people later. However, we will also see that the three themes are closely interrelated so that we cannot completely separate them out.

The story of “Land” or Creation is all about what happens when those that God has placed in his world to populate it and care for it rebel against his rule. This brings consequences for the wider creation.

By Genesis 6, we discover that there has been a partial fulfilment of God’s Creation mandate. Humans are multiplying and filling the earth but because of sin, they are filling creation with wickedness not goodness.

Just as in the Garden of Eden, there is a crossing of boundaries when “The Sons of God” have sexual relations with “The Daughters of Man.”⁷⁵ This looks like an example of the order and separation that God’s creative word brings being breached.⁷⁶ There are echoes of Eve’s sin here as “the sequence of ‘saw....good...took’ parallels most closely the terminology in 3:6 and suggests the sinfulness of the actions of the sons of God.”⁷⁷ Meanwhile, the acquiescence or consent of the women and presumably their families reflects Adam’s passive acquiescence in the Garden.⁷⁸

The growth of wickedness as exemplified here leads to God’s decision to send a great flood. This is important because what we are seeing here is a reversal of the ordering, separating and bringing forth life that we see in Genesis 1.

“The flood, in essence, represents an undoing of creation. Back in Genesis 1, the creation was narrated as God’s shaping the formless mass (*tohu vabohu*) by moving back the waters that completely surrounded the world. The flood is thus a reversal of creation.”⁷⁹

After the flood, there is an act of recreation as the land re-emerges from the waters and Noah becomes a new Adam with the responsibility of multiplying and filling the earth.⁸⁰ We may even see echoes of God’s Spirit hovering in the Dove that Noah sends from the ark.

⁷³ See Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 48-75.

⁷⁴ See Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 76-102.

⁷⁵ There are a number of interpretations offered for what this might mean -either spirit beings (fallen angels) with humans or possibly the godly line of Seth and the ungodly line of Cain. See Wenham for discussion on this.

⁷⁶ Nb Longman connects this incident with Jude’s description “of the angels who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place where they belonged.” (Jude 5). Tremper Longman III, *How to read Genesis* (Downers, IL.: IVP 2005), 116. Though this verse may be referring to the wider context of Satan’s fall and I don’t think this is necessary for us to note the sense of boundary crossing and temptation here.

⁷⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 141.

⁷⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 141.

⁷⁹ Longman, *How to read Genesis*, 117.

⁸⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 207.

We then have find Abraham who is also called to multiply with the promise that he will be the father of many nations.⁸¹ Goldsworthy notes that

“God’s promise to Abraham involved:

- (a) a people who are his descendants
- (b) a land in which they will live,
- (c) a relationship with God in that they shall be God’s people”⁸²

Once again, the themes of God’s rule, people and land re-appear. However, Abraham will find that for long periods he is forced to leave the land because of drought, taking refuge in Egypt and later his descendants will again find themselves taking refuge from famine in Egypt where eventually they become slaves to Pharaoh. Just as Adam’s death means exile from the Garden, so “death” for God’s people means exile from the land, “the land of promise is far off and inaccessible”⁸³ This becomes the paradigmatic too with God’s people later exiled because of sin to Assyria, Babylon and Persia.⁸⁴ The promise to Abraham can only come through rescue and redemption as seen in the Exodus and the later return to the land under Ezra and Nehemiah.⁸⁵ This is also important for our New Testament reading where the “Now and Not Yet” of New Creation means that God’s people have been redeemed but are often both physically and spiritually portrayed as a diaspora of exiles and aliens.⁸⁶ Practically, it will also challenge our concern for and approach to both economic migrants and political refugees in our own time.

God acts to deliver the Israelites from Egypt by first bringing de-creation. The order and structure of the land breaks down as frogs, insects and darkness break the boundaries of their natural habitats and the land produces death instead of life culminating in the death of the first-born.⁸⁷ On the darkness, Fretheim comments:

“It is the darkness of chaos, a pre-creation state of affairs. That is why it is the most serious plague but one. God is at work in the darkness, however, and God’s new creation will burst forth in the light of day”⁸⁸

This is a stark message to the Egyptians about the powerlessness of their own so-called gods to rule over creation.

Exodus 20 sets Torah obedience firmly in the context of Creation. The Creator-Creation distinction is enforced as Israel are told not to worship representations of created beings⁸⁹ and the Sabbath commandments follow the 7 day pattern of Creation and rest.⁹⁰ The book of Deuteronomy enlarges on the roots of Israel’s existence in the Genesis narrative. James Robson explains,

“At critical moments in Deuteronomy Moses refers back to the promises Yahweh made to Abraham. These form the bedrock of the claims to the land, whether in Moab or after the Exile...There are glimmers of a history behind these promises in Deuteronomy with talk of

⁸¹ Genesis 12:1-3 and Genesis 17:4-5.

⁸² Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” 53.

⁸³ Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” 70.

⁸⁴ Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” 100.

⁸⁵ Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Kingdom” 72-73.

⁸⁶ 1 Peter 1: 1. C.f. Karen H Jobes, 1 Peter (BECNT. Grand Rapids MI.: Baker Academic, 2005), 61-66.

⁸⁷ See Terrence E Fretheim, *Exodus* (Interpretation. Louisville, Kentucky: 1991), 129.

⁸⁸ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 129.

⁸⁹ Exodus 20:4.

⁹⁰ Exodus 20:11.

creation (4:32) and of Yahweh referred to as Most High, allocating nations and receiving Israel as his inheritance (32:8-9)...This (his)story consists in a large measure of a cycle of Yahweh's creative activity, humanity defying that order, Yahweh's judgement and, finally, Yahweh's fresh (re-)creative act. Together, humanity's defiance and Yahweh's judgement constitute a kind of 'decreation', with death, exclusion and fragmentation of relationships in stark contrast with the very goodness of creation."⁹¹

Robson cites a number of "Creation" or Genesis echoes in Deuteronomy including:

"The analogy of Yahweh's 'hovering' like an eagle matches the Wind of God 'hovering' over the water (rhp; Gen, 1:2; Deut 32:11); the 'formlessness' of creation matches the formlessness of the wilderness (tohu; Gen. 1:1; Deut 32:10); so at the end of Deuteronomy God's act of redemption is associated with his act of creation."⁹²

As well as the observation that:

"Deuteronomy describes the land in creation terms as 'good' (Deuteronomy 1:25-35; cf. Gen 1), with Edenic abundance."⁹³

He also notes Dumbrell's observation that:

"Like Adam (Gen 2:8), Israel was formed outside of the land. Placed in the land by God she was given a code which was to regulate life there..⁹⁴

Then in the Covenant re-affirmations, there are further echoes of Eden as choosing good or evil, life or death mirrors the choice between the two trees at the centre of the Garden (Deut 30:15).⁹⁵

Robson sees in Deuteronomy's use of Genesis an important reminder that God's plan to redeem Creation goes back to the start and God's concern for "Land" "There is always a 'where' a place where humanity's relationship with God is lived out."⁹⁶

This brings us on to a vital point, the story is heading to a conclusion. The cycle of creation-recreation-recreation is not eternal, rather, the New Testament takes us to a final "New Creation." This is seen in the description of believers as a "New Creation"⁹⁷. It is also seen in Paul's description of Creation as experiencing birth pangs.⁹⁸ Finally, it is seen in the last pictures of the book of Revelation where the New Heavens and New Earth are described as a place of goodness, peace and beauty.⁹⁹ There, we discover the New Jerusalem (a picture of the Church) as like a Garden City, a new and better Eden with the Tree of Life at its centre.¹⁰⁰

⁹¹ James Robson, *Honey from the Rock* (IVP), 73. Nb. Robson cites Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Uncreation, Re-Creation: A discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (London: T& T Clark), 2011.

⁹² Robson, *Honey from the Rock*, 76.

⁹³ Robson, *Honey from the Rock*, 76.

⁹⁴ William J Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: Its Expressions in the Books of the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1988), 56. Cited in Robson, *Honey from the Rock* 76

⁹⁵ Robson, *Honey from the Rock*, 77.

⁹⁶ Robson, *Honey from the Rock*, 77.

⁹⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

⁹⁸ Romans 8:19-22.

⁹⁹ Revelation 21:1-8.

¹⁰⁰ Revelation 22.

7 Rivals for Creation

The contemporary discussion about origins is usually polarised between Atheistic Evolution and some form of Creation or Intelligent Design approach. Later on, we are going to have a look at the Creation v Evolution debate; however, it is worth noting that, for most of history, atheistic evolution has not been the primary rival to the Biblical account of Creation.

Rather, when the Bible accounts were first written, each ancient culture had its own Creation myth or story. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that the Genesis account of Creation, Fall and Flood is an Israelite copy or adaptation of either the Babylonian or the Canaanite origins myth.¹⁰¹ Such a view is a little simplistic and not without its problems, however, and we will come back to that later.

Ancient stories

Most ancient stories about where the world came from have a common thread. They start with a watery chaos from which the world emerges and is formed and shaped by the gods, often in the context of bloody conflict between rival dynasties.¹⁰²

For example, Tremper Longman III describes the dominant Egyptian mythology as follows.

“The primeval waters are called Nun and it is out of the waters that creation emerged. One prominent idea was that the creator god, sometimes Atun and other times Amon-Re, emerged from the waters through an act of self-creation and through him developed the other gods and goddesses who represent the various parts and forces of nature. The form of the emergence from Nun was the primeval mound, perhaps mythically reflecting the fertile soil that was the source of life after the annual Nile floodwaters receded.”¹⁰³

Perhaps the best-known ancient Near Eastern Myth is the Babylonian story of how the god Marduk rose to power. The story starts with Tiamat, a great mother goddess representing the Ocean salt waters and other gods who live within her.¹⁰⁴ There is conflict among the gods and goddesses after Ea, one of the gods, kills her first husband, Apsu, the fresh water god. Tiamat creates a series of monsters to attack the other gods in revenge. However, Marduk, Ea’s son, rises to the position of chief god. The other gods submit to him in return for his promise to bring peace.¹⁰⁵

Marduk goes into battle with Tiamat, a mother goddess. Tiamat is defeated and her body cut in half to form the heavens and the earth.¹⁰⁶ Her second husband is also killed and with his blood drops, Marduk creates humans to work for him.

The Babylonian myth goes on to tell how later, the noise and nuisance from human beings becomes too much for the gods and so they have them wiped out in a flood. In the Gilgamesh and Atrahasis epics, one man is warned to build a boat in order to save his family. As Blenkinsopp explains

“For ancient Mesopotamia the basic mythic-historiographical pattern is set out in the Atrahasis text... The sequence of events is as follows. After the begetting of the gods, those of the lower order, the Igigi, go on strike and refuse to continue their onerous service to the high

¹⁰¹ Herman Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval era and the eschaton*. A religious historical study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12. (Trans. K William Witney Jr. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2006), 6-7.

¹⁰² Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 14.

¹⁰³ Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 2005), 73.

¹⁰⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/En%C3%BBma_Eli%C5%A1

¹⁰⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/En%C3%BBma_Eli%C5%A1

¹⁰⁶ Veronica Ions, *History of Mythology* (London: Chancellor Press, 2000), 19.

gods. The solution to the problem is found in the creation of humans, initially seven male and seven female by Belet Ili, mistress of the gods, assisted by Enku. Their task is to take over cultic work, thus solving the problem that had arisen in the divine sphere. In due course however the noise and tumult of humanity on the overcrowded earth led to the decision by the gods to reduce the population by a series of disasters at intervals of 1200 years. When these Malthusian measures failed in their effect, the decision was taken to destroy the human race by a deluge.”¹⁰⁷

Similarly, the classical Greek origins myth also describes the ascent to power of the senior god. This time it is Zeus who attains authority in much the same way as Marduk won power for himself in the Mesopotamian story.

In this story, “Night” and her brother Erebus (depth) give birth to Eros followed by Gaia, the earth mother.¹⁰⁸ The earth comes from her and then Uranus the Sky-father also comes into existence.¹⁰⁹

“Then subtle Eros brought the Earth Mother and Sky Father together in love and from them in the course of time were born a series of strange and monstrous creatures.”¹¹⁰

One of the gods, Zeus, rises to power as the chief god through war. He then apportions the world out by lot to his fellow gods.¹¹¹

Man was made by a god called Epimetheus who made all the creatures. However, Epimetheus lacked wisdom and foresight so that:

“He began with the creation of the animals and he was so lavish with the gifts he gave them – gifts of strength and speed and cunning, strong claws and sharp teeth, warm coverings of feathers and fur – that there was nothing left over for man, his poor shivering last creation so Epimetheus called upon his wise brother to repair his mistake. Prometheus not only made man upright and beautiful but he decided to use his craft to win other advantages for man from Zeus, the king of the gods.”¹¹²

It is, therefore, Prometheus who steps in to rescue the situation. Blessed with foresight, he is the one who rescues humankind and takes their side against Zeus. He uses trickery to gain fire for them from Zeus.¹¹³

Woman is formed from the earth by Zeus to punish Prometheus and humanity for their trickery – she is called Pandora.¹¹⁴ She is sent among the men to cause trouble. Pandora comes as a little girl with a jar or box containing all the worst the gods could give. Curiosity leads to her opening it and letting out evil into the world.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1992), 55.

¹⁰⁸ Northrop Frye and Jay MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths: The Mythological Framework of Western Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 279.

¹⁰⁹ Frye and MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths*, 279.

¹¹⁰ Frye and MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths*, 279.

¹¹¹ Frye and MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths*, 282-284.

¹¹² Frye and MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths*, 287.

¹¹³ Frye and MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths*, 288.

¹¹⁴ Frye and MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths*, 289-290.

¹¹⁵ Frye and MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths*, 290.

Now, these ancient myths may well be closely related due to contact through trade and conquest between civilisations. However, fascinatingly, a similar story also turns up from much further afield.

Veronica Ions tells us that:

“Aztec myth also speaks of a female or bisexual earth monster with countless mouths swimming in the primordial waters where she devoured all its creatures. Quetzalcoat and Tezatlilpoca tore her apart, thus releasing the bounty of nature.”¹¹⁶

Something in common?

As we’ve noted above, there are some common themes in these stories including a watery, chaotic origin, a chief god that rises to power and a great battle leading to the creation of the heavens and earth.

Scholars also want to draw our attention to common themes with the Biblical account. In particular, note the way that Creation appears portrayed as a watery and formless entity.¹¹⁷ Some scholars have even speculated that the Hebrew word “Tehom” (formless) has its roots in the goddess Tiamat’s name.¹¹⁸ Additionally, the story of a great flood with a single man warned and rescued has its obvious parallels in the story of Noah (Genesis 6-9).

So, for example, Blenkinsopp concludes that

“Even a fairly casual reading of the first eleven chapters will confirm that the Atrahasis pattern is reproduced with modifications to a remarkable degree.”¹¹⁹

The Babylonian story is dated to between 1800 and 1200 BC

“The version found in Ashurbanipal’s library consists of seven tablets and dates to the seventh century BC, but it is recognized by scholars that the story itself is much older. Determining the precise age of the story is based on a combination of linguistic and historical factors, but a date sometime in the second millennium BC is the consensus position. Specifically, the earliest likely date is the eighteenth-century BC, for it is around this time that the god Marduk (mentioned prominently in Enuma Elish) seemed to be raised to a prominent status. Some scholars suggest a slightly later date (i.e. fourteenth to twelfth centuries).”¹²⁰

It is then assumed that the Hebrew account is younger and in some way dependent upon the older myths of Egypt and Mesopotamia. As Peter Enns comments:

“We must begin our thinking by acknowledging that the ancient Near Eastern myths are almost certainly older than the versions recorded for us in the Bible.”¹²¹

Why does he believe this? Well, he offers three reasons.

1. “Israelite culture is somewhat of a latecomer in the Ancient Near Eastern world.”¹²²

¹¹⁶ Ions, *History of Mythology*, 19.

¹¹⁷ Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 6-7.

¹¹⁸ Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 78.

¹¹⁹ Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch*, 57.

¹²⁰ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2006), 25.

¹²¹ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 50.

¹²² Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 50.

2. An oral culture and the written language comes later.¹²³
3. The oral stories would be influenced by the culture around them.¹²⁴

He goes on to argue that:

“If pressed, one could attempt to mount the argument that the Israelite stories were actually older than all the ancient Near Eastern stories but were only recorded later in Hebrew. Such a theory -for that is what it is, a theory – would need to assume that the biblical stories are the pristine originals and that all the other stories are parodies and perversions of the Israelite original, even though the available evidence would be very difficult to square with such a conclusion. But could it have happened this way? Yes, I suppose one could insist on such a thing, but it would be very difficult for someone holding to such a view to have a meaningful conversation with linguists and historians of the ancient world.”¹²⁵

This suggested dependency upon other Ancient Near Eastern myths should not be seen as a mere copying. First of all, because as well as commonality between the accounts, there are also significant differences.¹²⁶ As Gunkel observes:

“The difference between the Babylonian creation account and that of Genesis 1 is quite great. It could hardly be conceptually greater! In the former there is totally wild and grotesquely titanic, barbaric poetry. In the latter there is the solemn elevated tranquillity of a specious and at times rather temperate prose. In the former, the gods arise in the course of things. In the latter, God is the same from the very beginning. In the Babylonian myth, it is the god, who in the heat of battle, slays the monster and from the body forms the world. In the Hebrew account, it is a God ‘who spoke and it was so.’ The poetry of the myth is certainly a bit attenuated in the Hebrew account. We don’t regret it though, since in return it is filled with the thinking of a higher religion.”¹²⁷

Enns also comments that:

“I should be quick to point out, however, that Genesis did not simply copy from Enusma Elish, as if the Hebrew author of Genesis had a copy of this Akkadian text in front of him and borrowed from it. Furthermore, at each of the points mentioned above, the Babylonian and biblical stories are both similar and dissimilar. Hence the consensus scholarly position is to not draw a direct line of dependence from Genesis to Enuma Elish.”¹²⁸

So, Enns doesn’t want us to imagine a Jewish exile walking into the library in Babylon, picking up a manuscript and beginning to copy and adapt it. Rather,

“Whether or not the author of Genesis was familiar with the text known as Enuma Elish, he was certainly working within a similar conceptual world. So as unwise as it is to equate the two, it is also ill advised to make a sharp distinction between them that the clear similarities are brushed aside.”¹²⁹

¹²³ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 50

¹²⁴ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 51.

¹²⁵ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 52.

¹²⁶ Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 80.

¹²⁷ Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 80.

¹²⁸ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 26.

¹²⁹ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 27.

Or, in other words, ancient stories are similar because ancient minds thought alike. “The Genesis story is firmly rooted in the worldview of its time.”

Ancient peoples had their own questions that they tried to answer from their worldview.

“Where does the sun go at night – or how did it get up there to begin with, and what keeps it from falling down like everything else does that gets tossed up in the air? Why are there seasons? Why does the moon move across the sky? Where does rain come from and why does it seem not to be there when we need it most?”¹³⁰

As you looked out on a wild and violent world and tried to make sense of it with your limited cosmology and a sense of enchantment, you were likely to construct similar stories about where things came from. Not only that, there would have been some shared oral traditions along with shared ancestral roots.

“Ancient peoples composed lengthy stories to address those types of questions, and on some level the cause was attributed to unknown powerful figures.”¹³¹

Then over time, as cultures came into contact with each other, there would have been shared access to written accounts leading to convergence.

At the same time, Enns remains convinced that if there is a dependent relationship between the Bible and the other stories, then it is the Bible that depends upon the Babylonian story and not vice-versa.

Where does this leave us?

At this stage, we have a bit of a conundrum to deal with. If the Genesis account is simply a variant Ancient Near Eastern myth, then where does that leave the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture?¹³² We may be further confused to discover that a number of those who have come to this conclusion are self-professing Evangelicals including Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns.¹³³

So, is it possible to treat Genesis 1-11 as an Ancient Near Eastern origins myth, drawing on the stories of the cultures around it and still treat it as inspired Scripture? Those who believe that we can give two main reasons for doing so:

- a. Our understanding of what myths and mythology are all about

We tend to draw a distinction between myth and history. To our modern minds, this is the same distinction as between fact and fiction. Not so for the original writers and readers of Genesis 1-11 argues Enns.

“Taking the extrabiblical evidence into account, I question how much value there is in posing the choice of Genesis as either myth or history. This distinction seems to be a modern invention. It presupposes – without stating explicitly – that what is historical, in a modern sense of the word is more real, of more value, more like something God would do, than myth.” So, the argument goes,

¹³⁰ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 40.

¹³¹ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 41.

¹³² Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 41,

¹³³ Though Enns appears to have shifted firmly away from a traditional conservative Evangelical position on Scripture and Inspiration. See Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why defending Scripture has made us unable to read it* (New York, NY.: Harper One, 2014) He would probably not be recognised as Evangelical by many now. However, at the time he wrote *Inspiration and Incarnation*, he was still recognised as within the mainstream of Evangelical scholarship.

if Genesis is myth, then it is not 'of God.' Conversely, if Genesis is history, only then is it something worthy of the name 'Bible.' Again, it is interesting to me that both sides of the liberal/conservative debate share to a certain extent these kinds of assumptions."¹³⁴

Enns defines Myth as "an ancient, premodern, prescientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories. Who are we? Where do we come from?"¹³⁵ He argues that if myth was an acceptable literary category, a means of asking questions, telling shared stories and finding answers to big questions, then:

"One might ask *why* it is that God *can't* use the category we call 'myth' to speak to *ancient* Israelites."¹³⁶

b. The function that a Hebrew Creation myth would have fulfilled at the time

At this point, we are asked to pay attention to the great differences as well as the similarities between the different texts. Yes, on the one level there is a common story of chaos leading to order followed by rebellion and a return to chaos again. However, there are undeniable differences.

For example, in the Biblical account, "There is no Theogony."¹³⁷ There is only one creator God and he creates effortlessly by the word of his mouth, not in conflict with other gods.¹³⁸ This also means that "The creation of the World is therefore followed by human instead of divine rebellion."¹³⁹

In the Biblical account, whilst humans are given work to do in God's creation, they are not mere slaves, but are created to rule and to have a relationship with the God who walks and talks in the Garden with them. As Longman observes:

"The Genesis Creation texts treat humanity with considerably more respect than their Mesopotamian counterparts. To be sure, Adam and Eve are created for manual labor to tend the garden, but they are also created in the image of God, and the relationship with their God seems to be more personal."¹⁴⁰

The differences, suggests Longman, create a polemic that enables the people of Israel to challenge the dominant theological worldview of their day.

"From the time of the Patriarchs down through the rest of the period of the Old Testament, the children of Abraham lived in the midst of a pagan world. Only Israel worshipped Yahweh, while the rest of the nations had their own gods and goddesses -and they also had their own creation accounts. Since God's people were constantly tempted to worship the deities of other nations, we shouldn't be surprised that the biblical accounts of creation were shaped in such a way as to provide a clear distinction from those of other nations."¹⁴¹

Or as Enns puts it

"The reason the biblical account is different from its ancient Near Eastern counterparts is not that it is history in the modern sense of the word and therefore divorced from any similarity

¹³⁴ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 49.

¹³⁵ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 50.

¹³⁶ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 50.

¹³⁷ Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch*, 57.

¹³⁸ Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 80.

¹³⁹ Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch*, 57.

¹⁴⁰ Longman, *How to Read Genesis*, 78.

¹⁴¹ Longman, *How to Read Genesis*, 72.

into ancient Near Eastern myth. What makes Genesis different from its ancient Near Eastern counterparts is that it begins to make the point to Abraham and his seed that they God they are bound to, the God who called them into existence is different from the other gods around them.”¹⁴²

Evaluating and responding to the hypothesis

I want to take some time now to think through the implications of what we’ve just observed in a little more detail. This will include some appreciation of helpful analysis along with some challenges to the conclusions drawn by Enns, Longman and others. I will go on from there to argue for an alternative explanation for both the commonality and the dividing lines between the Genesis Creation account and other stories of origin.

Appreciation – vital dividing lines

By setting the Genesis account alongside other ancient stories about where the Universe and humanity came from, we can see how different Israelite beliefs were from the World around them. We would miss those vital and illuminating insights if we rushed straight to defending Genesis 1-11 as factual, scientific history over and against Atheistic Evolution.

Remember that we constantly think in terms of how what we believe about God, Creation, Humanity and New Creation affects how we live. By setting the Biblical account alongside the other stories, we see sharp differences in theology. Whilst scholars talk about a “shared worldview” between Israel and other ancient cultures, it becomes clear that at most this is a mere shared cosmology (an attempt to understand the shape and structure of the Universe based from the observational tools available to them at that time). The Israelite-Jewish Worldview was, in fact, sharply different to the worldview of ancient civilisations. Let’s demonstrate that now by taking a closer look at ancient theology.

God: The gods of the ancient world were numerous, finite in their powers, liable to error and of questionable morals. Their primary concern was their own individual pleasure. This put them in conflict with one another. These gods are mortal.

Creation: The ancient world saw Creation as essentially the accidental by-product of the gods’ schemes and conflicts. Furthermore, the world was created from pre-existent matter. Indeed, we see a world shaped from the dead carcass of a failed goddess, though strictly speaking, the goddess Tiamet had already acted as a world, a place where the gods lived. Creation then is not so much about life coming from nothing as it is about a new mode of existence. Instead of gods inhabiting a living, powerful cosmos, mere mortals, the slaves of the gods, exist on a corpse.

Humanity: Humans exist to serve the gods. In the Mesopotamian account, they become too noisy, too troublesome and have to be destroyed. In the Greek account, they are pawns in one god’s attempts to make mischief with the other gods. It is no surprise that in a Universe where the gods are constantly at war, constantly unreliable, that rather than humans being made for one another, they too are the cause of rivalry and trouble for each other from the off. In the Greek Creation account, rather than being a helper, the woman is made and sent to men to cause trouble.

¹⁴² Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 53.

New Creation: As I alluded to above, the world we live in is already a “new creation,” perhaps part of a cycle of creations. This creation is less than the former creation. The original creation was a living goddess inhabited by gods; the new creation is a dead goddess inhabited by men.

Such narratives contrast sharply with the Bible’s account. There, we discover that there is one eternal and immortal God. Creation exists by his powerful word. God makes man to rule over his creation. As God’s image bearers, humans are sent to fill and to subdue the earth giving a sense of ongoing creative work in which humans share. Yes, humans are made to work, but work is not a negative, lesser thing. God himself is a worker who plans, forms and evaluates. Human work is an act of partnership with the God who does not stand remote from his creation and his creatures but

“... exchanges the royal decree for a garden spade. The God from on high becomes the God on the ground, a down and dirty deity.”¹⁴³

“God is found grubbing about in the soil, planting trees and fingering clay.”¹⁴⁴ Humans follow a pattern of work and rest that God himself has modelled. In the New Testament, we discover that work is something that marks you out as a loved son:

“So Jesus explained, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.”¹⁴⁵

It is no surprise then to see Adam described in the New Testament as “the son of God.”¹⁴⁶ As we saw in our study of Genesis 2, human work cultivating the land is portrayed as a priestly duty, an act of worship.

Whilst we might not initially look to Genesis for a portrayal of New Creation, we do see something of the promise hinted at in these early chapters. Genesis 1-11 recognises that the Fall brings death and decay into God’s good Creation, but at the same time offers hope that

- The enemy of God’s Creation will one day be defeated.¹⁴⁷
- That God will renew his Creation and a time will come when judgement will end.¹⁴⁸
- That God will call a people to himself, give them a place to live, bless them and bring blessing through them.¹⁴⁹

This high view of Creation and confidence in a good and loving sovereign God is helpful not just because of the contrast it draws with the ancients and their beliefs, but also because it begins to show us a way in which the Genesis narrative offers a biting critique against modern stories about origins. We will return to this point later.

Challenging assumptions – just another myth?

I am not convinced by Enns’ argument that Genesis 1-11 is a derivative myth. I appreciate that in saying this I am going against what appears to be the dominant scholarly position. However, I am not convinced by the arguments made.

¹⁴³ William P Brown, “Manifest Diversity: The Presence of God in Genesis” 3-25 in Nathan Macdonald, Mark W Elliot & Grant Macaskill (eds), *Genesis and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2012), 23.

¹⁴⁴ Brown, “Manifest Diversity,” 23.

¹⁴⁵ John 5:19.

¹⁴⁶ Luke 3:38.

¹⁴⁷ Genesis 3:15.

¹⁴⁸ Genesis 9:1-17.

¹⁴⁹ Genesis 12:1-3.

Enns begrudgingly concedes that it is possible that the Hebrew account is in fact the older story but quickly crushes the possibility.

“If pressed, one could attempt to mount the argument that the Israelite stories were actually older than all the ancient Near Eastern stories but were only recorded later in Hebrew. Such a theory – for that is what it is, a theory – would need to assume that the biblical stories are the pristine originals and that all the other stories are parodies and perversions of the Israelite original, even though the available evidence would be very difficult to square with such a conclusion. But could it have happened this way? Yes, I suppose one could insist on such a thing, but it would be very difficult for someone holding to such a view to have a meaningful conversation with linguists and historians of the ancient world.”¹⁵⁰

Yet, here is the problem. He hasn’t really argued sufficiently or convincingly for the primacy of the Mesopotamian stories. The whole basis of his argument is that the story of Marduk belongs to a culture that is older than the Hebrew culture and a language that is older, but that does not mean that the story itself is older.

Consider the following points:

1. As we hinted at above, Babylonian mythology and theology was something that evolved. The particular version of the myth which has Marduk as its central protagonist dates to somewhere between 1800 and 1200BC because that is when Marduk worship rose to prominence. However, presumably before that point, a version of the story would have existed with other deities or another deity taking centre stage as the hero of the story.
2. The Hebrew Bible introduces Abraham, the father of the Israelites, as coming from Mesopotamia. Surely, he would have brought with him some form of origins story. Given that Abraham’s departure from Ur would have predated the ascendancy of Marduk, we should at least entertain the possibility that he would have brought with him an older form of the Creation story. It makes sense to suggest then that rather than the Israelite Creation account being dependent upon the story of Marduk that both accounts are rooted in a common source. At this point, we have to consider the possibility that Genesis 1-11 may well be as close or even closer to the original Mesopotamian origins story than the version that the Babylonians passed on.
3. The presence of other Creation and Flood narratives from around the world such as the Aztec story that bear similarities to Ancient Near Eastern myths, but without the obvious cultural or literary dependency that comes with geographical proximity.

I would add to this three final points. First of all, by confusing a possible shared cosmology with shared worldview, Enns has skewed the evidence. The story of Yahweh as creator God belongs to a different worldview entirely. Enns is asking us to assume that to understand the Bible, we must leave our modern worldview and enter the shared world-view of the ancient world. However, whilst our cosmology may have changed and matured, the Worldview we inhabit as moderns is not that different to the ancient world. In our modern worldview, this is a world that has emerged out of chaos, a Universe built on re-used matter. This is a Universe in which humans exist not because of a purposeful loving plan, but by accident. In other words, our world view has more in common with that of those ancient civilisations. Babylonians, Egyptians, Canaanites and Greeks would have had to travel just as great an intellectual distance to cross from their worldview to that of the Old Testament as we do today.

¹⁵⁰ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 52.

Secondly, I want to suggest that Enns is too quick to try and incorporate myth into our list of acceptable literary genres for Scripture. His assumption is that God can and maybe even should accommodate himself to human communication by using mythology as an appropriate literary vehicle for revelation.

Now, on the one hand, we want to recognise that Scriptural infallibility already allows for poetic language and for language that accommodates to human understanding. We are not expecting a Scientific textbook in Genesis 1-11. This may include the possibility that the historical story is told in a figurative manner (for example by using days and lifespans to represent years and epochs). We may not expect the same level of precision in a Biblical summary of events that we would see in a modern textbook. However, that is quite different from treating a genre as myth. Remember that under this analysis, myths are stories that humans create to answer the questions that they have. In other words, mythology is a “Revelation of the Gaps.” It fills in what we cannot know for certain. Why would God provide us with modified human stories when he is able to tell us for himself what happened? Whilst some authors may claim to allow for mythology within Scripture and still identify as Evangelicals, this is a deeply un-evangelical view of Scripture, God and his relationship to us. Scripture becomes a human attempt to understand God, us and the Universe. It is no longer God’s revelation to us.

Thirdly, the position taken by scholars like Enns incorporates a particular theory about the history and development of religion. The assumption is that religion has evolved from many competing gods to a belief in one single God (you can see where atheists will take the next step to at this point). Religion therefore involves evolution from complex to simple.

I am now going to argue that this is not the case and that better understanding of the history of religion starts with original monotheism.

An alternative proposal

What if the view that Enns so quickly dismisses is right? What if the original story is the one that we find in Genesis 1-11? This was the viewpoint taken by key Christian thinkers in history including spiritual and intellectual giants such as Jonathan Edwards. This approach assumes two things.

1. Original Monotheism

Rather than humans starting out worshipping multiple gods and then evolving a more rationalistic religion with a single transcendent deity, this view argues that humans started out by worshipping one God. This God provided the explanation for everything. However, over time, our view of God fragmented. Humans began to look to different deities to account for different aspects of life. As human life became more tribal and fragmented, different tribes began to look to their own individual gods for security and protection.

Dan Strange in his magisterial *Theology of Religion “For Their Rock Is Not Our Rock”* argues for this position citing Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954), a key figure in the science of religion who also argued strongly for original monotheism:¹⁵¹

“Schmidt put an original monotheism on sound footing by being able to demonstrate that those societies that manifested a solid monotheism along with a solid moral code, with relatively little ritual, magic, or reference to the spirit world, were in fact those societies that reflect the earliest stages of human development.”¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Strange, *‘For their rock is not as our rock’*, *‘For their rock is not as our rock’ An evangelical Theology of Religions* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2014), 110.

¹⁵² Winfried Corduan, cited in Strange, *‘For their rock is not as our rock’*, 111.

Strange goes on to note that “it is difficult to find an African traditional religion that does not include some conception of a Supreme God, at least in memory.”¹⁵³ It is worth adding at this point that often seemingly polytheistic religions including Hinduism may offer many gods for worship but when you trace back, you discover that underpinning the many gods is a single, all powerful but distant deity. The many immanent gods are needed because the transcendent deity is too remote to know.

As well as being supported by anthropological evidence as highlighted above, such an account makes the most logical sense. In our experience, rather than simplifying, knowledge, ideas and systems tend to move towards greater complexity and greater fragmentation over time, especially in the context of an increasing population.

Such a history of religion fits with a world where humans have turned their back on the one true God and so have been banished from his loving presence. Such humans still need to make sense of the World around them. Even within their history there will be memories, traditions and stories that speak of a Creator, but those memories become fragmented and distant as time goes by. This leads us to our second assumption.

2. Original Revelation

This narrative assumes that there was an original story about who God is and what he does. That story told the account of Creation, Fall and Redemption. This is sometimes referred to as the Prisca Theologia,¹⁵⁴ “a remnantal revelation of God disseminated and preserved universally in humanity but distorted and degenerated over time.”¹⁵⁵

Now note two things. First of all, such an understanding of religion and revelation fits with the Old Testament narrative of humanity, not least the events at Babel where humans are scattered and their language confused. Strange notes that where Genesis 11 talks about their language or “lips” being confused that the idea here may be as much ideological as linguistic. It is not just that their language diversified, but also that their worship fragmented.

Secondly, this is exactly what Paul tells us in Romans 1. People exchanged the glory and worship of the living God for idols made in the image of created things. They exchanged truth for a lie. They suppressed God’s Revelation.

Now, if we can give an account for the origin of Genesis 1-11, and the divergent origin myths which fit with anthropological observations is the most logically coherent explanation and even more importantly reflects Scripture’s own testimony, then don’t we as Evangelicals have a strong responsibility to follow that line? Doesn’t this make the assumption that Genesis offers the original account worthy of more consideration than Enns et al are willing to give?

Why this matters

Why does all this matter? Well, I want to suggest it matters for 2 important reasons that we have already considered in earlier studies. First of all, we started out by asking “How do we Know?” and we insisted that we can only know truth about God, Creation, Humanity and New Creation through Revelation. It is important that when we start the task of understanding Creation that we don’t depart from that understanding and try to create our own account of origins.

¹⁵³ Corduan, cited in Strange, *‘For their rock is not as our rock’*,

¹⁵⁴ C.f. Strange, *‘For their rock is not as our rock’*, 108-114.

¹⁵⁵ Strange, *‘For their rock is not as our rock’*, 108.

Secondly, we have been learning about who God is. We have seen that God is good, wise, truthful and knowable. A Creation account that is reduced to mythology robs us of the God who speaks truth to us. We are left with a distorted account. We are left with a God at a distance who leaves us to guess what he is like.

A better understanding of what we have in Genesis 1-11 takes us back to the one true God who made us, who loves us and reveals himself and his plan to us. It is no surprise that when people have rejected God that they have exchanged his Revelation for myths. Those myths may at times echo and reflect fragments of the original account, but they are poor and inadequate copies.

However, God is faithful. He has preserved a true and faithful memory of his original revelation and he constantly uses Scripture and the preaching of his word to call fallen and deceived humanity back to the truth.

8 Rivals for creation part 2: Evolution

We've looked at some of the ancient myths about the origin of the Universe. Now it's time to come to the contemporary rival for creation: evolution.

Note that there have been significant attempts to harmonise the evolution narrative with the Biblical one, just as there have been serious attempts among scholars to harmonise ancient myths with the Bible too. As part of our consideration of this question, we will be asking whether or not it is possible to find common ground between Creation and Evolution. But first of all, let's have a look at what the theory of evolution is and the case for it.

A brief history of time

Everything has a start point, including the Universe. This remains the mainstream conventional view although there are some who think that the Universe is in some way eternal. In fact, all through history, there have been people who have argued that the Universe and matter are in some way eternal – without beginning – although it may well have been through several incarnations.

The starting point for the Universe is often traced back to what is known as the Big Bang. This provides a fixed point beyond which we cannot investigate back any further. Stephen Hawking, in his classic book "A Brief History of Time," argues that belief in the Big Bang theory of origins rests on two key assumptions; first, that the Universe is finite, but secondly, that it is not static.¹⁵⁶

He notes that this hasn't always been assumed:

"It is an interesting reflection on the general climate of thought before the twentieth century that no-one had suggested that the universe was expanding or contracting. It was generally accepted that either the universe had existed for ever in an unchanging state, or that it had been created at a finite time in the past more or less as we observe it today. In part, this may have been due to people's tendency to believe in eternal truths, as well as the comfort they found in the thought that even though they may grow old and die, the universe is eternal and unchanging."¹⁵⁷

However, observations show that the stars are moving further and further apart.¹⁵⁸ We live in a non-static, expanding universe. This is because the gravitational pull between stars and planets means that a fixed universe would be unstable.¹⁵⁹

"in an infinite static universe nearly every line of sight would end on the surface of a star. Thus one would expect that the whole sky would be as bright as the sun, even at night."¹⁶⁰

Hawking observes that Christians have long believed in a finite Universe with a beginning, but that Greek philosophers like Aristotle disliked the idea of divine intervention from outside, so thought of the Universe as eternal.¹⁶¹

The process of Universal expansion must have started at a given point:

¹⁵⁶ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam Press, 1988), 6.

¹⁵⁷ Hawking, *A Brief history of Time*, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Hawking, *A Brief history of Time*, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Hawking, *A Brief history of Time*, 7.

¹⁶⁰ Hawking, *A Brief history of Time*, 7.

¹⁶¹ Hawking, *A Brief history of Time*, 8.

“Hubble’s observations suggested that there was a time, called the big bang, when the universe was infinitesimally small and infinitely dense. Under such conditions, all the laws of science, and therefore all ability to predict the future, would break down. If there were events earlier than this time, then they could not affect what happens at the present time. Their existence can be ignored because it would have no observational consequences. One might say that time had a beginning at the big bang, in the sense that earlier times simply would not be defined.”¹⁶²

For these reasons, Hawking argues that this Universe had a start point, many billions of years ago. He has, however, to some extent modified his views in recent years, arguing that the Big Bang accounts for a start point in terms of Space and Time. This, however, leaves us with a big question. We still haven’t explained where the matter and energy within the Universe came from.

“It seems that Quantum theory, on the other hand, can predict how the universe will begin. Quantum theory introduces a new idea, that of imaginary time. Imaginary time may sound like science fiction, and it has been brought into Doctor Who. But nevertheless, it is a genuine scientific concept. One can picture it in the following way. One can think of ordinary, real, time as a horizontal line. On the left, one has the past, and on the right, the future. But there’s another kind of time in the vertical direction. This is called imaginary time, because it is not the kind of time we normally experience. But in a sense, it is just as real, as what we call real time.”¹⁶³

This makes it possible to talk in terms of a finite Universe, but with all the resources and energy it needs contained within it.

“Space and imaginary time together, are indeed finite in extent, but without boundary. They would be like the surface of the Earth, but with two more dimensions. The surface of the Earth is finite in extent, but it doesn’t have any boundaries or edges. I have been round the world, and I didn’t fall off.”¹⁶⁴

In other words, we are not meant to attempt to investigate back beyond the Big Bang. The Universe is self-contained and we should not look outside it or before it for answers.

The Selfish Gene

There are two parts to the evolution narrative. The first part is to do with Physics and Quantum Physics etc. This describes the origins of the Universe, stars and planets.

The second is to do with biological evolution. This is portrayed as starting with a primordial soup of matter which led to the formation of atoms and molecules which through various processes and interactions began to string together into DNA. Replication and then mutation of these organisms then lead to diverse life forms.

Mutation may be in response to changing environmental factors. This is about adaption or natural selection which is sometimes referred to as “survival of the fittest.”

Why would this happen? What drives evolution? Richard Dawkins answers that this is all down to the genes and their survival. It’s all about how the Universe moves from simplicity to complexity:

¹⁶² Hawking, *A Brief history of Time*, 10.

¹⁶³ <http://www.hawking.org.uk/the-beginning-of-time.html> (accessed 15-06-2017).

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.hawking.org.uk/the-beginning-of-time.html> (accessed 15-06-2017).

“Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection is satisfying because it shows us a way in which simplicity could change into complexity, how unordered atoms could group themselves into even more complex patterns until they ended up manufacturing people.”¹⁶⁵

He elaborates on Darwin’s theory of Natural Selection:

“Darwin’s ‘survival of the fittest’ is really a special case of a more general law of survival of the stable. The universe is populated by stable things. A stable thing is a collection of atoms that is permanent enough or common enough to deserve a name.”¹⁶⁶

At some point after the formation of the earth, the raw materials for our existence would have been present in the so called primordial soup.¹⁶⁷

“We do not know what chemical raw materials were abundant on earth before the coming of life, but among the plausible possibilities are water, carbon dioxide, methane and ammonia: all simple compounds known to be present on at least some of the other planets in our solar system.”¹⁶⁸

Then chemical reactions started to happen so that atoms “combined into larger molecules.”¹⁶⁹

“At some point a particularly remarkable molecule was formed by accident. We will call it a replicator. It may not necessarily have been the biggest or the most complex molecule around, but it had the extraordinary property of being able to create copies of itself. This may seem a very unlikely sort of accident to happen. So it was. It was exceedingly improbable. In the lifetime of a man, things that are that improbable can be treated for practical purposes as impossible. That is why you will never win a big prize on the football pools. But in our human estimates of what is probable and what is not, we are not used to dealing in hundreds of millions of years. If you filled in pools coupons every week for a hundred million years, you would very likely win several jackpots.”¹⁷⁰

The replicator then acts as a mould for further replications.¹⁷¹ However, copying of cells leads to errors, just as when we copy text, we make mistakes.¹⁷² He says:

“We do not know how accurately the original replicator molecules made their copies. Their modern descendants, the DNA molecules, are astonishingly faithful compared with the most high fidelity human copying process, but even they occasionally make mistakes, and it is ultimately these mistakes that make evolution possible. Probably the original replicators were far more erratic, but in any case we may be sure that mistakes were made and that these mistakes were cumulative.”¹⁷³

Eventually, there would have been a variety of different replicators, some more stable and some greater in number.¹⁷⁴ The ones that survived would have been those that were able to replicate

¹⁶⁵ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 12.

¹⁶⁶ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 12.

¹⁶⁷ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 14.

¹⁶⁸ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 14.

¹⁶⁹ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 14.

¹⁷⁰ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 15.

¹⁷¹ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 15.

¹⁷² Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 15.

¹⁷³ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 17.

¹⁷⁴ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 17.

quickly, producing a greater population of organisms that were able to replicate accurately, leading to greater stability.¹⁷⁵

He explains further:

“If you already know something about evolution you may find something slightly paradoxical about the last point. Can we reconcile the idea that copying errors are an essential prerequisite for evolution to occur with the statement that natural selection favours high copying-fidelity? The answer is that although evolution may seem, in some vague sense, a ‘good thing’, especially since we are the product of it, nothing actually ‘wants’ to evolve. Evolution is something that happens, willy-nilly in spite of all the efforts of the replicators (and nowadays of the genes) to prevent it happening.”¹⁷⁶

In an evolving Universe, there would have been competition between molecules for survival and space¹⁷⁷

“Replicators began not merely to exist but to construct for themselves containers, vehicles for their continued existence. The replicators that survived were the ones that built survival machines for themselves to live in.”¹⁷⁸

These replicators “go by the name of genes and we are their survival machines.”¹⁷⁹

So, in effect, our existence is down to selfish genes. Just as the ancients believed that humans existed as a by-product of the priorities, conflicts and errors of the gods, so too with evolutionary theory. Our existence is a by-product – this time, of our genes.

Evidence for Evolution and Dating the Universe

Evolutionary Theory requires an old Universe and an old earth to allow time for all of these processes to happen and for the rules of probability to work. Denis Alexander¹⁸⁰ says that “Biological evolution is a slow process taking place over many millions, in fact billions of years.”¹⁸¹ He goes on to note that,

“The best current estimate for the age of the material which forms the earth is 4,566 million years. The universe is three times older at 13,700 million years.”¹⁸²

How do we know that the Universe is old? Well, evolutionists believe that there are three pieces of evidence that support this and they are all to do with rocks and fossils.

First of all, there is the distance of the stars from the earth. When we look at the night sky, we are observing stars that are light years away from us. It would take millions of years for light to travel from even the nearest stars so that we could observe it here.

¹⁷⁵ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 17.

¹⁷⁶ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 18.

¹⁷⁷ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 19.

¹⁷⁹ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 20.

¹⁸⁰ A Christian who believes that Evolutionary Theory is compatible with the Genesis creation account.

¹⁸¹ Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 49.

¹⁸² Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 49.

Secondly, we are able to observe the process of evolution through the fossil record. Different layers of rock would have been laid down at different times. We can observe fossils in each rock layer and their progress from simple to complex organisms.¹⁸³

The third means of dating evolution is to do with radiometric dating using radio-isotopes. Alexander explains:

“The decay of radioisotopes provides one of the most important methods for dating the age of the earth as well as the dates of rocks and events since the earth began. This method relies on the fact that many atoms have unstable nuclei (the ‘parent’ nuclides) decaying spontaneously to a lower energy state (the ‘daughter nuclides’). For example potassium-40 (the ‘parent’ nuclide) decays to argon-40 (the ‘daughter’ nuclide) at a fixed rate so that 50% of the parent is lost every 1,260 million year. This is known as the ‘half-life’ of the isotope, meaning the time it takes to lose half of the parent nuclide. This rate of decay is independent of physical and chemical conditions such as pressure, temperature and chemical binding forces, so radioisotopes make excellent ‘clocks’.”¹⁸⁴

This provides us with a method for dating the age of rocks found on the earth. The age of the earth is calculated by measuring uranium-lead ratios using ore samples from the earth’s crust. These are then compared with results from meteorites which enable scientists to calculate what the starting ratios would have been,¹⁸⁵

“because such meteorites have remained isolated as they travelled through space since the formation of the solar system, they record the original isotopic ratios of the material which initially came together to form the earth.”¹⁸⁶

Summing Up

The argument for evolution is that we observe an old Universe characterised by the vast distance between earth and our nearest observable stars. The age of the Universe can be measured by dating rocks and fossils. The progress of evolution can be observed in the fossil record which traces the development of complex organisms from simple organisms. The argument is that the Theory of Evolution provides the narrative which best fits the evidence we observe.

¹⁸³ See Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* 120-125.

¹⁸⁴ Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 50.

¹⁸⁵ Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 51.

¹⁸⁶ Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 51.

9 Challenging Evolution

The case for evolution is based on looking at the data and evidence provided within the Universe. The argument is that what we observe about the age of the earth, solar system and galaxies, along with the patterns we can observe in the fossil record, point to gradual evolution over time.

However, it is worth remembering that this case is based on one interpretation of the data presented. Others have taken time to look at the data and to challenge the case for evolution. The basis for the challenge is that the data is not always consistent with evolutionary theory and that another narrative, such as Biblical Creation, may provide a better fit with the evidence.

We can identify the following challenges to evolutionary theory.

1. Questions about infinity and eternity

Atheistic Evolution cannot give a compelling account for “before time.” There is a need to recognise eternity and infinity. Evolutionary theory without God simply does not do this.

The Big Bang theory simply explains the expansion of material matter within the Universe, not the presence of that matter in the Universe, let alone the very existence of the Universe itself. It is not good enough to say that the Universe is a closed system and that everything needed by the system is generated from within the system. We still lack an explanation for the origins of the system.

Atheistic evolution fails to remove the need for an originator and therefore fails in its purpose of denying the need for a God. Resorting to theories about a third dimension and the perhaps unwise choice of the label “imaginary time” still fall short in answering the questions, “Where did the gases come from that caused the Big Bang?” and, “doesn’t the existence of matter and energy assume the existence of space and time?”

We are left with a choice. We must either declare that matter (and by implication, the Universe) is eternal, or we must state that something, somehow, existed before time and outside of space, but that we don’t know what that something was.

In the end, true “atheism” is not helped out by evolutionary theory. We are left with two alternative options. We must either choose to believe in some external cause to the Universe, even if that cause was remote and impersonal, or we must give to the universe the characteristics of infinity, eternity and aseity so that we describe it as in some way divine. In other words, the alternative to theism is a choice between deism and pantheism.

2. Questions about the data and what it shows

The traditional method for dating rocks looked at their fossil content.¹⁸⁷ The fossil record was also seen to provide a historical record of the evolutionary progress from simple to complex organisms. Back in the 1970s, Henry Morris pointed out the serious flaw in this argument:¹⁸⁸

“Here is obviously a powerful system of circular reasoning. Fossils are used as the only key for placing rocks in chronological order. The criterion for assigning fossils to specific places in that chronology is the assumed evolutionary progression of life; the assumed evolutionary

¹⁸⁷ Henry Morris, *Scientific Creationism* (San Diego, CA.: Creation Life Publishers, 1974), 132-134.

¹⁸⁸ Carol O Dunbar, *Historical Geology* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1949). Cited in Morris, *Scientific Creationism*, 135.

progression is based on the fossil record so constructed. The main evidence for evolution is the assumption of evolution.”¹⁸⁹

As we have seen, dating methods have moved on since then and today, much greater reliance is made on radiometric dating methods. We will come on to that shortly. First of all, we need to note a few other problems with relying on the fossil record to provide us with the historical evidence for evolution.

First, there is a lack of what are known as “transitional forms.” We would expect to see examples of intermediate development between the different stages of evolution. According to Paul Garner,

“However, convincing examples of such transitional forms are rare; there are far fewer than evolutionary theory would predict.”¹⁹⁰

Garner believes that where such forms exist, they “may be better explained by creation theory than by evolutionary theory.”¹⁹¹

Secondly “The fossil groups do not seem to occur in the order that evolutionary theory predicts.”¹⁹² In other words, evolutionary theory provides a hypothesis about the order in which rock layers and fossil content would have been laid down. The rock strata should match the proposed stages of evolution. However, “in a study by palaeontologist Kurt Wise, only five out of 144 test cases showed a significant agreement between the fossil order and the predicted evolutionary order.”¹⁹³

Thirdly, when we look at the fossil record, what we see is that at a specific point there seems to have been a sudden explosion in the number and variety of fossil groups.¹⁹⁴ This linked to the suggestion that a fossil record was created not by slow deposits of sedimentary layers over time but rapid deposition¹⁹⁵ has led some geologists to link the appearance of many fossils not to billions of years of evolution but [a] catastrophic event[s] in more recent history. As Garner explains:

“Creationists propose a very different interpretation of the fossil record based upon the historical events described in the book of Genesis...The most geologically significant event in the history of the Earth was the global flood of Noah’s day.”¹⁹⁶

Current attempts to date the earth rely primarily on radioactive dating. There are two things we have to consider when determining the reliability of this method.

First of all, this form of dating assumes that we can determine the makeup of rocks at the point that they were formed. We assume that we are dating back from current half-life measures to the full life. As we saw in the previous section, this relies on comparison with material from meteor showers, but that assumes that the meteor data is in fact comparable with data that originates from our planet.¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁹ Morris, *Scientific Creationism*, 136.

¹⁹⁰ Paul Garner, *The New Creationism*, 197.

¹⁹¹ Garner, *The New Creationism*, 197.

¹⁹² Garner, *The New Creationism*, 197.

¹⁹³ Garner, *The New Creationism*, 197.

¹⁹⁴ Garner, *The New Creationism*, 198.

¹⁹⁵ Garner, *The New Creationism*, 84-86.

¹⁹⁶ Garner, *The New Creationism*, 199.

¹⁹⁷ Garner, *The New Creationism*, 93. Note that “Isochron dating” is seen as a methodology that can help overcome these challenges. However, Garner notes problems with this methodology too. See Garner, *The New Creationism*, 93-96.

Secondly, this method assumes that the rates of decay have been consistent throughout time and not affected by external factors.¹⁹⁸ A number of attempts have been made to test these assumptions, most notably the RATE project sponsored by the Institute for Creation Research and the Creation Research Society since 1997.¹⁹⁹

Garner notes that RATE's tests have found evidence that environmental factors can affect and accelerate the pace of radioactive decay.²⁰⁰

"The RATE research has strongly supported the young-age timescale derived from the Bible and suggests that radiometric dating methods vastly overestimate the true age of rocks and minerals."²⁰¹

3. Alternative explanations for apparent aging

Does the appearance of age in the Universe definitely mean that it is as old as it looks? Evolutionists²⁰² are often quick to discount this on the basis that appearance of age in a young creation would be deceptive. There are, however, a number of situations where realistically we might expect appearance of age within a young earth creation.

First of all, divine creation would require God to make things that appeared to show signs of age and development. John Frame offers three examples. First of all, the light from the stars.

"Presumably when God made the stars to light the night, he did not have to wait millions of years of years for their light to reach the earth. Rather, he created light waves to illuminate the earth that would be replenished by a light source, the stars. Similarly, when he created plants, he created them mature and nourished, together with a source of their nourishment, the rain."²⁰³

Secondly, Adam and Eve would have been created mature as adults. They would have appeared physically older than the chronological appearance.²⁰⁴ This means that they would seem to have a history in terms of their growth and development that wasn't actually present if God created them as adults. Indeed, Frame notes that, "Any newly created being, whether star, plant, animal, or human being, if created mature, will contain data that in other cases would suggest events prior to its creation."²⁰⁵

Thirdly, the formation of soil, rocks and fossil fuel may well provide further examples of a planet created mature. Frame cites James B. Jordan on this:

"But what about dead stuff? Did the soil [during the original creation week – JF] have decaying organic matter in it? Well, if it was real soil, the kind that plants grow in, it must have had. Yet the decaying matter in that original soil was simply put there by God. Soil is a

¹⁹⁸ Garner, *The New Creationism*, 93.

¹⁹⁹ Garner, *The New Creationism*, 97.

²⁰⁰ Garner, *The New Creationism*, 100-104.

²⁰¹ Garner, *The New Creationism*, 104.

²⁰² I am using the term "evolutionist" here in the popular sense noting that often a distinction is made in technical language between biological evolutionary theory and wider questions about the origins of the universe.

²⁰³ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 305.

²⁰⁴ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 309.

²⁰⁵ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 309.

living thing, and it lives through decaying matter. When Adam dug into the ground, he found pieces of dead vegetation...

This brings us to the question of 'fossils' and 'fossil fuels' like oil and coal. Mature creationists have no problem believing that God created birds and fish and animals and plants as living things, but we often quail at the thought that God also created 'dead' birds and fish and animals and plants in the ground. But as we have just seen, there is every reason to believe that God created decaying organic matter in the soil. If this point is granted, and I don't see how it can be gainsaid, then there is no problem with God's having put fossils in the ground as well."²⁰⁶

The second significant explanation for apparent aging is the Fall. The Bible tells us that Adam and Eve's sin and the resulting judgement had a massive impact on the whole Creation including climate and geology. Paul puts it this way in Romans 8:

"For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. ²⁰ Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, ²¹ the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. ²² For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."²⁰⁷

The third factor we need to consider is the potential impact of a world-wide flood on climate and geology. The description of significant upheaval in Genesis 7 suggests geological changes as well as a deluge.²⁰⁸ Flood waters covering the earth may have included an ice-age and glaciers in colder regions of the planet. The sudden, catastrophic death of plant and animal life would have contributed to fossilisation. The world after the Flood would have been a very different place to the world Noah left behind when he boarded the ark.

This reminds us that there are all sorts of reasons why people and things look old in life. People can age quicker (or more slowly) based on their genes and the environment. We can also choose to make things and then age them for aesthetic reasons or practical reasons including medical treatment. For example, corneal cross linking:

"uses ultraviolet light and vitamin B2 (riboflavin) drops to stiffen the cornea. Used together, they cause fibres within the cornea to cross-link – or bond more tightly. This treatment mimics the normal age-related stiffening of the cornea, which is known as natural cross-linking."²⁰⁹

4. The difficulty of reconciling Theistic/Old Earth Creationism with the problem of suffering and death

This requires death before the Fall. Yet the Bible is very clear that death entered the world through sin. This is made explicitly clear in two places. First of all, in the Genesis account itself God tells Adam that if he eats from the forbidden tree, then he will die. Then in Romans 5 we are told that,

²⁰⁶ James B Jordan, "Creation and the Appearance of Age" *Open Book 45* (April 199): 2.34. Cited in Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 309-310.

²⁰⁷ Romans 8:18-22.

²⁰⁸ See Genesis 7:11-12.

²⁰⁹ http://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/Corneal%20cross-linking_3.pdf accessed 16-06-2017

“When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.”²¹⁰

The onus is therefore on those who believe in Theistic Evolution to explain how death could have happened before sin. John Walton makes the case as follows:

“Not only does the verse (Romans 5:12) not make a claim for death in general, everything we know logically repudiates the absence of death at any level prior to the Fall. Day three describes the process by which plants grow. The cycle of sprouting leaves, flowers, fruit and seeds is one that involves death at every stage. This system only functions with death as part of it. Likewise, with animals; we need not even broach the topic of predatory meat eaters to see that the food chain involves death. A caterpillar eating a leaf brings death. A bird eating the caterpillar brings death. Fish eating insects brings death. If animals and insects did not die, they would overwhelm their environment and the ecology would suffer. Furthermore, if we move to the cellular level death is inevitable. Human skin has an outer layer of epidermis – dead cells -and we know that Adam had skin (Gen 2:23).”²¹¹

This is a reasonably strong argument, but there are one or two problems with it including:

- Romans 5:12 needs to be read in conjunction with Romans 8:19-22. Creation is subject to God’s curse because of sin. There is a qualitative difference to the state of planet Earth before and after the Fall.
- This means that assumptions about ecological sustainability that don’t take into account the impact of the Fall are likely to be faulty.
- Walton assumes that creatures living prior to the Fall were carnivorous, yet it is possible that as with humans all other creatures relied on fruit and plant matter for their diet.
- Walton does not allow for a distinction between non-sentient plant life and sentient animal life. Whilst we may use the word “death” to describe part of the life cycle of plants, this stage in the process is obviously quite different from the experience of suffering and death that humans and other animals now endure.

Having said that, even if we allow for the possibility of death as a process experienced by all non-human creations, we still need to consider the experience of humans prior to the Fall. Additionally, if humans were not a special creation but evolved from other similar creatures, then those creatures would have died and so the experience of death would already be in the human conscience.

Walton goes on to suggest that the reason that humans were immune from death was not due to having immortal bodies but because

“an antidote had been provided to our natural mortality through the mechanism of the Tree of Life in the garden.”²¹²

This is possible, but as we saw earlier when looking at Genesis 2-3, whilst some people have suggested that the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil contained some form of magical or medicinal properties, a better Biblical understanding of the function of the tree is that it acted in a sacramental way; eating its fruit represented a decision to live outside of God’s care and

²¹⁰ Romans 5:12.

²¹¹ Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis 1*, 99.

²¹² Walton, *The Lost Word of Genesis 1*, 99.

provision. In the same way, we saw that the Tree of Life would function sacramentally too; eating its fruit represented dependence on the Lord God who had breathed life into Adam and Eve.

Therefore, I am as yet unconvinced that suffering and death for humans and animals would have been permitted prior to the Fall.

Conclusion

For the reasons identified above, I, on balance, do not see the need to move away from a literal understanding of Genesis 1-3. There are problems with evolutionary theory which mean that it does not give us the best fit.

The Biblical account, on the other hand, gives us the grand narrative which best fits with what we know about God, the Universe and human nature.

10 The Doctrine of Creation – Systematic Theology

So far, we have sketched out the story of Creation as we find it in Scripture and we have compared it to other Creation accounts, both historical and contemporary. Now, we can start to think through the implications of Creation.

First of all, we want to look at the doctrinal implications. What are the important truths we must believe about Creation and how do they relate systematically to other beliefs, especially to what we have seen so far about how we know God (revelation) and who God is?

We will then move from this to thinking practically and pastorally. How does a right doctrine of creation and Fall affect how we live?

So, in this section, we will highlight some of the key doctrinal beliefs that the Bible teaches about the Creation. We will then go on in the next section to look at the Doctrine of the Fall.

Creation and God's Revelation

Creation is an act of Revelation. As we saw in "How do I know?" God reveals who he is both through Special Revelation (Scripture, Christ) and General Revelation. Creation gives us General Revelation.

This General Revelation happens because the Universe itself is a declaration of God's glory, his goodness and power.²¹³ General Revelation shows God's loving providence²¹⁴ so that no-one is without excuse for ignoring him.²¹⁵ If we fail to see the truth about God in Creation, it is not that the Revelation itself is defective (although a full understanding of God's purposes needs Special Revelation). The problem is with us because we are deaf and blind to God and suppress his clear revelation.²¹⁶

Creation, subjected to the Fall, also reveals God's wrath and judgement on sin²¹⁷ and something of the hope we have as we look forward to Christ's return.

"18Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. 19 For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. 20 Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. 22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. 24 We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. 25 But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)"²¹⁸

²¹³ Psalm 19:1.

²¹⁴ Acts 14:17.

²¹⁵ Romans 1:20.

²¹⁶ Romans 1:21.

²¹⁷ Romans 1:18.

²¹⁸ Romans 8:18-25.

God's General Revelation is also seen specifically in the Creation of human beings, made in his image. Dan Strange says,

“All human beings are created in the imago Dei and ‘sons of God’ are created as ‘religious’ beings, revealing God, representing him and built for relationship with each other and the rest of creation.”²¹⁹

We reveal him in our concern to create and to order things. We reveal something of his character in our desire for relationship, reflecting both the God who chooses to make us to relate to Him and the God who is eternally relational through the Trinity.

However, whilst Creation itself is revelatory, that revelation is limited. It is only through Special Revelation that we can know and understand Creation both in terms of its origins and purpose. This is seen right from the beginning when God provides commentary on his creation as he declares it good. It is seen in our need to turn to Scripture to discover the truth of our origins.

Creation and God's Greatness

When we looked at who God is, we saw that God is great and sovereign. His sovereignty is seen in his independence. In John 5, we are told that both Father and Son have life within themselves. They are not dependent upon anything outside of themselves for their being, identity, status or value.

The Independent God Creates

This is portrayed in God's effortless creation simply by his Word. God is not dependent on any other being or matter when he creates. He creates from nothing, sometimes referred to as Creation ex nihilo. We see this in John 1 and Revelation 4.

Dan Strange puts it this way: “Not only is the Lord personal but he is absolute or self-sufficient.”²²⁰

He sees this view of God the Creator as an essential starting point to our understanding of the world and life.

“The first building block of a Reformed Christian worldview is a doctrine of Creation ex nihilo that preserves the Creator-Creature distinction.”²²¹

God Creates everything

Note that the Creation of everything from nothing really does include everything. This means that, historically, Christian writers took time to emphasise that the description of Creation in Genesis 1 includes the Heavens and Earth and therefore within that creation are other spiritual beings including angels.

Bavinck puts it this way,

“According to Holy Scripture, creation is divided into a spiritual and a material realm into heaven and earth, into ‘things in heaven and [things] on earth, things visible and [things] invisible (Col 1:16).”²²²

²¹⁹ Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 71.

²²⁰ Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 58.

²²¹ Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 58

²²² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation* (Vol 2. Trans John Vriend, Ed John Bolt. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2004), 444.

He goes on to observe that,

“The existence of such a spiritual realm is recognized in all religions. In addition to the actual gods, also a variety of demigods or heroes, demons, genii, spirits, souls, and so on have been the objects of religious veneration.”²²³

It is important to recognise this because, throughout history, there have always been reductionist tendencies so that life is seen purely in terms of what we can touch, smell and hear in the present time. Such scepticism about other spiritual beings goes back to New Testament times with the Sadducees, who denied both the Resurrection and the existence of angels (c.f. Acts 23:8) and continues with various philosophers and theologians throughout history who either have seen angels as metaphorical extensions of God’s actions or as humans.²²⁴ Modern day materialists and empiricists deny outright the existence of a spiritual realm:

“In modern theology... only little is left of angels. Rationalists... while they do not deny the existence of angels, do deny their manifestation.”²²⁵

One problem with this is that the reaction to materialistic empiricism is often to go to the other extreme of spiritualism because,

“Ever and again we thirst for another world that is no less rich than this one. By the way of a reaction to it, materialism evokes spiritualism. But the spiritism in which this spiritualism today manifests itself in the lives of many people is nothing other than a new form of superstition.”²²⁶

In fact, so called spiritual manifestations are often seen to be just phenomena that can be explained away psychologically.²²⁷ However, we cannot take this lightly because,

“One thing is certain: in numerous cases spiritism has a very injurious effect on the psychic and physical health of its practitioners, and it follows a path that is prohibited by Scripture (Deut 18:11 ff.). Between this world and the world beyond there is a gap that humans cannot bridge. If they nevertheless attempt to cross it, they lapse into superstition and become prey to the very spirits they have conjured up.”²²⁸

This is why it is so important that when we talk about angels, demons and the spiritual realm, we come back to what God reveals through Scripture rather than going along with speculation.

Exactly where angels appear in the Creation order isn’t stated and Calvin argues that it is unwise to argue about the exact timing of their creation.²²⁹ Whilst Augustine notes,

“Where Scripture speaks of the world’s creation, it is not plainly said whether or when the angels were created; but if mention of them is made, it is implicitly under the name of ‘heaven’ when it is said, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,’ or perhaps rather under the name of light.”²³⁰

²²³ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 444.

²²⁴ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 444-445.

²²⁵ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 445.

²²⁶ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 446.

²²⁷ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 446.

²²⁸ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 446.

²²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xiv.4. (Beveridge 1:144).

²³⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.9. (Dods:352).

He goes on to insist that It can't be prior to this because "before heaven and earth God seems to have made nothing"²³¹ whilst it must also have happened during the 6 days of Creation because angels are involved in praising God at creation (Job 38:7).²³² His personal view is that they were created when God created light.²³³

Angels have two types of ministry according to Bavinck: an extraordinary one and ordinary one.

"The extraordinary ministry of angels consists in accompanying the history of redemption at its cardinal points. They themselves do not bring about salvation, but they do participate in its history. They transmit revelations, protect God's people, oppose his enemies, and perform an array of services in the kingdom of God."²³⁴

In other words, their presence functions as a sign to what God is doing at a key point in history.

"Scripture also speaks of an ordinary ministry of angels. The primary feature of that ministry is that they praise god day and night (Jon 38:7; Isa. 6; Ps. 103:20; 148:2; Rev 5:11). Scripture conveys the impression that they do this in audible sounds, even though we cannot imagine what their speech and songs are like."²³⁵

Their ministry is, on the one hand, designed to help and encourage us, as Calvin says:

"the point on which the Scriptures specifically insist is that which tends most to our comfort and to the confirmation of our faith, namely that angels are the ministers and dispensers of the divine bounty towards us. Accordingly, we are told how they watch for our safety, how they undertake our defence, direct our path and take heed that no evil befall us."²³⁶

However, as we see in Bavinck's comments, their role is not human-centric, even though we benefit; rather, their chief end, like ours, is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

And this brings us to a vital point. What we see about the greatness of God's Creation should bring us to our knees in awe and wonder as we worship God.

God's Creation reveals his Lordship and calls us to worship

Our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We were made to worship. We saw this earlier when we discovered that the language of work in Eden (serving and keeping) is Temple or worship language.

God's Lordship is shown through Creation because Creation itself worships Him (c.f. Palm 19).²³⁷ Creation shows that God is Lord because it demonstrates his "control"²³⁸ over it. He is the Lord who "establishes his ownership of all things." (Psalm 24:1-2)²³⁹ His authority is demonstrated²⁴⁰ because

²³¹ Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.9. (Dods:352).

²³² Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.9. (Dods:353).

²³³ Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.9. (Dods:353).

²³⁴ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 463.

²³⁵ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 464.

²³⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xiv.6. (Beveridge 1:145).

²³⁷ Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 292.

²³⁸ Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 292.

²³⁹ Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 293.

²⁴⁰ Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 293.

it comes into being through his word.²⁴¹ So Creation brings glory to God as we see his power, his majesty, his worth.

Creation causes worship because human beings were made to worship God. Dan Strange describes how we were made to be “religious.” He says,

“This religious nature...is not merely the capacity we have for relating to, worshipping, obeying or disobeying something or someone we consider ultimate, what we might call a generic religiosity, but is rather a particular religiosity: our relationship, worship and obedience or disobedience to the self-contained ontological Trinity, the living God of the Bible.”²⁴²

In other words, our only right response is to worship the true and living God. We were not made with a mere general awareness of deity, of the “something more”. We were made to know and be known by the Triune God. This is why idolatry is serious.

Creation and God’s Goodness

If Creation is an outflow of God’s greatness, then it also is an outflow and reflection of his goodness too. In Creation, we see God’s beauty, holiness and wisdom. For example, we see his holiness as God makes distinctions separating light from darkness, day from night, land from sea, sea from sky. This is the same God who will separate a people out for himself as a holy nation. This is also the God who, in his wisdom, creates an ordered and structured Universe.

This good God cannot be the God who stays at a distance. As Calvin puts it, “It were cold and lifeless to represent God as a momentary Creator, who completed his work once for all and then left it.”²⁴³ God’s goodness, kindness, compassion and love are reflected in his providence.

God’s Providence shows his love and wisdom

Calvin describes the mind where he says,

“On learning that there is a Creator, it must forthwith infer that he is also the Governor and Preserver, and that, not by producing a kind of general motion in the machine of the globe as well as in each of its parts, but by a special Providence, sustaining, cherishing, superintending, all the things which he has made, to the very minutest, even to the sparrow.”²⁴⁴

So, God did not stop working when he completed the days of Creation. This helps us to understand what Genesis 2 means when it describes God as resting on the 7th day. “As Scripture also makes very clear (Isa. 40:28), this resting was not occasioned by fatigue, nor did it consist in God standing idly by.”²⁴⁵ This ‘rest’ represents a change in the specific nature of God’s work. “God’s ‘resting’ only indicates that he stopped producing new kinds of things. (Eccles. 1:9-10)”²⁴⁶ Rest points us to the effortlessness of God’s reign over his creation; he is enthroned over it.

²⁴¹ Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 293.

²⁴² Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 71.

²⁴³ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xvi.1. (Beveridge 1:171).

²⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, I. xvi.1. (Beveridge 1:172).

²⁴⁵ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 592.

²⁴⁶ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 592.

“The whole world with everything that is and occurs in it is subject to divine government.” This includes the seasons and the weather²⁴⁷ as well as animals. “Scripture knows no independent creatures; this would be an oxymoron. God cares for all his creatures, for animals... and particularly for humans.”²⁴⁸

Providence describes the way in which God is concerned for the well-being of his creatures and so orders and sustains the very detail of Creation. Providence is a consequence of God’s Will and Decrees. In other words, everything happens because God predestines it.

This includes God’s direct actions, so that miracles are

“not a violation of natural law nor an intervention in the natural order. From God’s side it is an act that does not more immediately and directly have God as its cause than any ordinary event, and in the counsel of God and the plan of the world it occupies as much an equally well-ordered and harmonious place as any natural phenomenon. In miracles God only puts into effect a special force that, like any other force, operates in accordance with its own nature and therefore also has an outcome of its own.”²⁴⁹

However, it also includes the way in which God works through subordinate causes in order to accomplish his will. This is known as concurrence.²⁵⁰ It means that just as God can be the direct author of our salvation but work through intermediate means (the sending of preachers), so God can be the direct provider of our daily bread whilst using the processes of the water cycle and crop generation to bring this about. This means that we should not think in terms of “the God of the gaps” who steps in to provide where natural processes cannot. Rather, God is in and over those processes.

It also helps us to understand why God created a “mature” Universe with all the necessary processes in place from day one.

“The world was not created in a state of pure potency, as chaos or a nebulous cloud, but as an ordered cosmos, and human beings were not placed in it as helpless toddlers but as an adult man and an adult woman. Development could only proceed from such a ready-made world, and that is how creation presented it to providence.”²⁵¹

Providence encourages us to trust God’s provision and to depend on him every day.

Providence distinguishes the true God from false Gods

Providence is different and opposed to pantheism²⁵² and to deism.²⁵³

As Bavinck explains,

“The providence of God, thus distinguished from God’s knowledge and decree and maintained against pantheism and Deism, is -in the beautiful words of the Heidelberg Catechism – ‘the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his

²⁴⁷ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 592.

²⁴⁸ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 592.

²⁴⁹ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 610.

²⁵⁰ Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 287.

²⁵¹ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 609.

²⁵² Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 599-600.

²⁵³ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 600-604.

hand, heaven and earth and all creatures and so rules them that... all things, in fact, one to us not by chance but by the fatherly hand."²⁵⁴

It is distinguished from Deism because God is personal, active and imminent. He is not the impersonal first cause of a Universe that continues to run itself. It is different to pantheism because the Universe is dependent upon an external person to rule over it. It does not have life within itself.

Providence also distinguishes Christian faith from polytheism. In polytheistic religion, the gods look to humans to provide for them: food, labourers, etc. Providence points us to the God who cares for and provides for his creatures.

²⁵⁴ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 604.

11 The Doctrine of the Fall

God made the world good. The sense we get in Genesis 1 is of “perfection.” By perfection we do not mean in the sense that it was complete but rather that it was fitting for its time. It was incomplete in the sense that humans still had the work of filling and subduing creation and of tending and caring for it.

We see here an eschatological trajectory. As a number of commentators over time have noted, the movement is from a Garden to Garden City. We look forward to a day and a place where God will dwell with all his people (see Rev 21-22). I believe that Revelation 21-22 was always the goal of Creation.

According to John Calvin, this means that sin was both a fall from where we were and a departure from where we are going.

“For what is our original? One from which we have fallen. What the end of our creation? One from which we have altogether strayed, so that weary of our miserable lot, we groan, and groaning sigh for a dignity now lost.”²⁵⁵

Or to put it another way, redemption does not simply restore us to a previous static position, but puts on the right path and in the right direction again.

So, the first state of Creation was “good.” Goodness means that

- It is rich in provision. There is a fertile garden and a fertile earth. Humans and animals are also fertile, expecting to be fruitful and multiply.
- Work is there at the start, but does not include the struggle and frustration we see later.
- Similarly, child birth was meant to be painless.
- There was an absence of pain, conflict and death.²⁵⁶

Humans and Sin

It was Adam and Eve’s response to temptation, listening to the Serpent and disobeying God’s command that led to The Fall.

We note here that that

1. Sin was a conscious, willed decision so that Adam and Eve were responsible for their choice and action.
2. The consequence and punishment of sin is that our human status is “dead”. This includes
 - Spiritual death (broken relationship with God and exile)
 - Physical death – mortality
 - Eternal death – Hell
3. This applies to all humanity – we sinned in Adam and so we die in Adam (See Romans 5).

Sin meant choosing to side with God’s enemy in his “revolt against the LORD.”²⁵⁷ This reminds us again of the wider creation beyond the material Universe, of things both seen and unseen. As Blocher notes, the snake plays a significant and not a minor role²⁵⁸ in the rebellion against God. We have talked about God creating angels. There is a spirit world as well as a material world and in the

²⁵⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.3. (Beveridge 1:212).

²⁵⁶ I have argued previously that this applies to all creatures, not just to humans.

²⁵⁷ Blocher, *In the Beginning, The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1984), 137.

²⁵⁸ Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 150.

Bible, we see that some angels have fallen, standing in rebellion against God. Spiritual warfare means that we must not underestimate the devil's role just as we shouldn't overstate his power.

Sin involved the decision to believe a lie, however subtly put. Note the nature of the lie:

"The snake's attack on the truth of God's word is launched in an indirect manner, by imputing hidden motives that God's revelation passes over in silence, by subjecting the terms of the covenant to 'the hermeneutic of suspicion'. Even when he is so bold as to contradict the terms of God's words, 'DYING you shall not die' (v4), there is still ambiguity. The unusual placing of the negative leaves open the possibility of understanding it as: 'It is not proper death that you shall undergo'; in other words, dare to experience the trivial death-like change that will bring you the experience of full humanity."²⁵⁹

So, the Fall was a suppression of truth. We have seen that God's greatness and goodness are clearly revealed and that Creation speaks of them. Romans 1:18ff tells us that we exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

"But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.¹⁹ They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them.²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God."²¹

Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles."²⁶⁰

Dan Strange observes that:

"the serpent entices Eve and Adam into disbelieving the truths about God that Genesis 1 and 2 have clearly established and that Adam and Eve had witnessed experientially since their creation."²⁶¹

It is not that they were without excuse. They knew truth by revelation and experience but chose to reject it. Strange identifies this as false faith.

"To have 'False Faith' is to believe lies about God, lies that are both rationally and ethically unjustified."²⁶²

False faith is in the word of the Serpent (an alternative revelation), in themselves (they want to be like God, so false gods) and in a promise of reaching a desired place with God through a wrong action (a false salvation and a false gospel). In other words, the Fall was about idolatry.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 139.

²⁶⁰ Romans 1:18-23.

²⁶¹ Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 75.

²⁶² Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 76.

²⁶³ Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 77.

We will return to the specific role of humanity and the consequences for us in more detail later when we look in detail at the truth and lies we believe about ourselves. Here I want to pick up the effect of the Fall on the rest of creation.

The Fall and the World around us

The key thing is that there has been a loss of the goodness described above. Death and decay affect the whole creation. It is not a complete loss of goodness. There is still provision of fruit and food for sustenance and enjoyment, but it comes at a cost. We harvest food and give birth by the sweat of the brow. There are weeds, thorns and thistles in our work and pain in our labour.

There is enmity within creation – the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman points towards Christ and Satan, but also reflect the reality of predatory creatures and the fear they cause.

The Fall is a subversion of the Creation order. Instead of humans worshipping God and ruling over Creation, they sit in judgement over God and listen to the serpent.

Romans 8 describes creation as groaning and longing, waiting for the day when things will be put right.

“Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don’t need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don’t yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently)”²⁶⁴

It is for those reasons that, contra Blocher, I continue to think it is right to refer to the events of Genesis 3 as The Fall. Blocher is uncomfortable with this, seeing the term as Gnostic.

“Traditionally the churches, commentators and theologians entitle the third chapter of Genesis ‘The Fall’. There is nothing in the text, however, to suggest that metaphor. It could put the reader’s thoughts on the wrong track altogether by implying that the event was a sudden, dramatic change of level downwards, of a metaphysical order: a fall from the heavenly to the earthly, from a higher spiritual stage of being into the lower material realm. The Bible would condemn such contamination from Greek and Gnostic themes.”²⁶⁵

He prefers to talk about it as “transgression”²⁶⁶ or “crossing a boundary”²⁶⁷ which are, in my opinion, true labels, but focus on what Adam and Eve did and miss the wider consequences.

When we refer to Genesis 3 as “The Fall,” we are not describing a fall from spiritual to material. Rather, the whole material creation falls together. It is a fall from the glorious position that man was

²⁶⁴ Romans 8:18-25.

²⁶⁵ Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 135.

²⁶⁶ Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 135.

²⁶⁷ Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 136.

meant to have into rebellion, slavery and death. It is the fall from goodness which we have outlined above.

The Fall and punishment

Living in a fallen creation is part of the punishment of sin. As Bavinck says:

“According to Scripture, in addition to guilt and pollution, suffering is also a punishment for sin. As a result of it, humanity not only lost true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, but also dominion and glory. This became evident already immediately after the fall and is further confirmed throughout Scripture. God put enmity between the human race and the serpent and thereby in principle took from humanity the dominion over the animal world originally granted to it.”²⁶⁸

The punishment for sin is summed up in one word: “Death”. Now, Adam and Eve continued to live for many years after eating the fruit, so does that mean God got things wrong or lied? We reject this idea because, “in the Bible, death is the reverse of life – it is not the reverse of existence.”²⁶⁹

This means that, as we saw above, we experience spiritual death as exile from God, we face physical death and outside of Christ there is eternal death – separation from God’s loving presence in Hell. Punishment for sin also means living in a dying and decaying world now. I am inclined to believe that this understanding seems to best fit with a Young Earth Creationist approach. However, it is possible to consider how death with pain and suffering along with decay as opposed to progress might be experienced significantly differently in a post-Fall context to a potentially benign form of death as part of the natural order prior to the Fall.

Because physical creation fell, it needs physical restoration. That’s why it longs for the day when God will put everything right.

²⁶⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 3, 176.

²⁶⁹ Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 171.

12 Applying Creation

We started our discussion about Creation and the Fall by naming some of the lies we can believe about this Universe. It is probably worth reminding ourselves of them.

- That this world is just here by accident or chance. In earlier times, people saw this world as being the by-product of the wars and love affairs of gods. In modern times, we are more likely to see the world as it is resulting from atheistic evolution.
- That the world around us and God are one and the same thing. This is sometimes called pantheism. This leads to people worshipping nature.
- That God is distant from this world. He may have been the first cause, but he has just put the rules in place and left the Universe to get on with running itself. This is usually referred to as Deism.
- That “matter” (physical creation) is evil and that only the spiritual world is good. This is known as Dualism and is particularly associated with Gnosticism.
- That Creation is still completely good. That the Fall has not happened or is not that significant.

Belief in lies is central to the Fall. As Dan Strange puts it,

“the serpent entices Eve and Adam into disbelieving the truths about God that Genesis 1 and 2 have clearly established and that Adam and Eve had witnessed experientially since their creation.”²⁷⁰

This is a matter of false faith because,

“To have ‘False Faith’ is to believe lies about God, lies that are both rationally and ethically unjustified.”²⁷¹

Just as with what we believe about God, a key part of the work of the Gospel is to replace these lies with truth. We can replace the lies we believe about creation with the following truths that God’s Word reveals:

1. That this world is not here by accident but has been intentionally created by the Good God. This means it has order, beauty and purpose.
2. That the Creator God is distinct from his creation.
3. That God is intimately close to his Creation. Divine providence means that he does not simply set things in motion and step back.
4. That matter is created by God and is good.
5. That although created good, Creation is also subject to the Fall.

These truths have vital implications for life. What we believe affects how we live. We therefore want to think in terms of three areas where The Doctrine of Creation and the Fall has implications.

1. Worship – including implications for our theology of religions. Under this heading, we may also want to consider the question “What is the mission of the Church?”
2. Evangelism and Apologetics – how does what we know about the World around us affect our proclamation and defence of the Gospel?

²⁷⁰ Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 75.

²⁷¹ Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 76.

3. Ethics and pastoral care – how do we make good decisions about work, relationships, family life, the environment etc.?

13 Creation, Mission and Worship

Because we live in a good world which a good and purposeful God has made, this helps us to understand a little bit more about why we are here and what God has made us for.

The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith asks the question

“What is the Chief end of Man?” and the correct response is “To glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

This answer is rooted in the story of Creation. If God is purposeful, then we have a purpose too and our purpose relates to him.

Christopher Wright helpfully notes that

“The story that engages us in the Old Testament answers the four fundamental worldview questions that all religions and philosophies answer in one way or another.

- Where are we? (What is the nature of the world around us?)
Answer: We inhabit the earth which is a part of the good creation of the one living, personal God, YHWH.
- Who are we? (What is the essential nature of humanity?)
Answer: We are human persons made by this God in God’s own image, one of God’s creatures but unique among them in spiritual and moral relationships and responsibility.
- What’s gone wrong? (Why is the world in such a mess?)
Answer: Through rebellion and disobedience against our creator God, we have generated the mess that we now see around us at every level of our lives, relationships and environment.
- What is the solution? (What can we do about it?)
Answer: Nothing in and of ourselves. But the solution has been initiated by God through his choice and creation of a people, Israel, through whom God intends eventually to bring blessing to all nations of the earth and ultimately to renew the creation.”²⁷²

This points to God’s mission.

“The opening account of creation portrays God working toward a goal, completing it with satisfaction and resting, content with the result.”²⁷³

The aim, as we have frequently seen, is for God to have a people for himself, living under his rule in the place of his blessing.²⁷⁴ The blessing is seen first of all in the place of blessing. Creation is the arena for God’s mission and for ours because he has placed us in this world to fill it and subdue it. In Genesis 1,

“we meet humanity with a mission on the planet that had been purposefully prepared for their arrival – the mandate to fill the earth, subdue it and to rule over the rest of creation (Gen 1:28). The care and keeping of creation is our human mission. The human race exists on the planet with a purpose that flows from the creative purpose of God himself.”²⁷⁵

Worship is about the whole of our lives lived out for the good God who has made us and loved us. We have seen this in the way that the Creation accounts are suggestive of a great temple or throne

²⁷² Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*, 55.

²⁷³ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*, 63.

²⁷⁴ See Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*, 393-395.

²⁷⁵ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* 65.

room being prepared where God will reign.²⁷⁶ We have seen it in the way that man's responsibility to till and to care for the land foreshadows the language of priestly service in the tabernacle and the temple.²⁷⁷

Worship is not what we do on one day each week in church buildings. We should seek to do everything to God's glory.²⁷⁸ Wright reminds us and challenges us that Psalm 24:1 and Job 41:11 reveal how

"The earth then belongs to God because God made it. At the very least this reminds us that if the earth is God's, it is not ours."²⁷⁹

We are not the owners of this World but accountable tenants responsible to God as the true landowner.²⁸⁰ Indeed,

"If God owns the universe, there is nowhere we can step off his property, either into the property of some other deity or into some autonomous sphere of our own private ownership."²⁸¹

This helps us to think carefully about the nature of sin. It is fascinating that Genesis 3 starts with the serpent and Eve speaking. It is a long way through the passage before God's voice is heard and we might be tempted to think that God was in some way absent and ignorant of the conversation. Similarly, whenever I give into temptation, one of the lies I believe is that God is absent and not able to see what I do.

But God is not absent and God does see. There is nowhere that I can escape from his presence. Sin is "not on my time" but on his. This means that sin is idolatry because I am claiming that someone or something else (whether the thing that tempts me or me myself) has lordship over that particular part of time and space.²⁸² It also means that sin is robbery. All sin breaks the commandment "You shall not steal." I rob God of his rightful lordship and possession of part of his creation.

Sin robs God of his rightful worship because when I give in to temptation, I put that thing I love in the place of God. Just as when Adam and Eve listened to the serpent's word instead of God's Word, so when I listen to my appetites,

"The creational hierarchy of relationships is disrupted as the creature 'shakes off all reverence' for the creator."²⁸³

This is important because God's mission now is not simply about blessing through creation and providence. The events of Genesis 3 point to our need, and indeed the need of the whole of creation, for redemption.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁶ See John Walton, *The Lost world of Genesis 1: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 36-52.

²⁷⁷ See Numbers 3:7-8; 4:23-24, 26 and Deuteronomy 4:19. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 67.

²⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:31.

²⁷⁹ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*, 397.

²⁸⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 397.

²⁸¹ Wright, *The Mission of God* 403.

²⁸² Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 77.

²⁸³ Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 74.

²⁸⁴ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 407.

So, our doctrine of Creation and Fall will necessarily push us towards talking about the incarnation. The church father, Athanasius, points out that sin puts humanity into a pitiful position.

“This, then, was the plight of men. God had not only made them out of nothing, but had also graciously bestowed on them His own life by the grace of the Word. Then, turning from eternal things to things corruptible, by counsel of the devil, they had become the cause of their own corruption in death; for, as I said before, though they were by nature subject to corruption, the grace of their union with the Word made them capable of escaping from the natural law, provided that they retained the beauty of innocence with which they were created. That is to say, the presence of the Word with them shielded them even from natural corruption, as also Wisdom says: “God created man for incorruption and as an image of His own eternity; but by envy of the devil death entered into the world.”²⁸⁵ When this happened, men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them and held sway over them to an even more than natural degree, because it was the penalty of which God had forewarned them for transgressing the commandment.”²⁸⁶

Our rebellion against God had placed us under a penalty. Death had entered the World. As we have seen before, the problem is not merely that we are guilty and are awaiting judgement but the judgement has already started to be enacted in the corruption and decay we see around us, in our separation from God so that we act as rebel sinners and in the physical death we all experience.

However, Athanasius goes on to say that The Fall also provides a dilemma for God.

“The law of death, which followed from the Transgression, prevailed upon us, and from it there was no escape. The thing that was happening was in truth both monstrous and unfitting. It would, of course, have been unthinkable that God should go back upon His word and that man, having transgressed, should not die; but it was equally monstrous that beings which once had shared the nature of the Word should perish and turn back again into non-existence through corruption. It was unworthy of the goodness of God that creatures made by Him should be brought to nothing through the deceit wrought upon man by the devil; and it was supremely unfitting that the work of God in mankind should disappear, either through their own negligence or through the deceit of evil spirits.”²⁸⁷

In other words, if the penalty is enacted then God’s creation purposes are frustrated. God is not enjoyed and glorified by his creation. However, if it is not enacted, then God’s Word does not come true and God himself becomes a liar.

So, for Athanasius, the right solution is seen in The Son’s mission:

“For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us. He saw the reasonable race, the race of men that, like Himself, expressed the Father’s Mind, wasting out of existence, and death reigning over all in corruption. He saw that corruption held us all the closer, because it was the penalty for the Transgression; He saw, too, how unthinkable it would be for the law to be repealed before it

²⁸⁵ Wisdom ii.23 f

²⁸⁶ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 1 (5)

²⁸⁷ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 2 (6).

was fulfilled. He saw how unseemly it was that the very things of which He Himself was the Artificer should be disappearing. He saw how the surpassing wickedness of men was mounting up against them; He saw also their universal liability to death. All this He saw and, pitying our race, moved with compassion for our limitation, unable to endure that death should have the mastery, rather than that His creatures should perish and the work of His Father for us men come to nought, He took to Himself a body, a human body even as our own.”²⁸⁸

As we read Athanasius’s words, two things stand out. First of all, the incarnation is not about a God who was distant drawing close. God was always close to his Creation; he was never absent. He comes in a new way. Secondly notice how love motivates the Son. This is a love both for His Father, seeking his honour and glory, and for us, pitying our helplessness.

The Doctrine of Creation and Fall means that worship cannot happen outside of the Gospel. This is important because there is a temptation today to seek out a general spirituality that is voiced in statements like

“I prefer to worship God as I enjoy the beauty of his creation.”

It is seen in services and ceremonies where, to appease interfaith sensibilities, Christ and the Cross are not mentioned.

Certainly, if the whole of my life is worship, then walking in the countryside or admiring the view across Birmingham on a snowy evening like tonight is part of my worship but that cannot be the whole picture.

Worship that fails to acknowledge our fallenness and the need for a saviour is to ignore God’s Word to us and to believe lies about His creation. If Dan Strange is right in saying that

“To have ‘False Faith’ is to believe lies about God, lies that are both rationally and ethically unjustified,”²⁸⁹

then worship that ignores the Fall and denies the central place of honour to the Saviour is false faith and idolatrous. Idolatry is not just about the active choosing of another god to worship but also the failure to fully recognise the one true God as creator and sovereign over everything.

Contemporary Questions about mission

There is currently a debate within Evangelicalism about the role and mission of the Church. If mission starts with God on a mission and if that mission is about the whole of creation, then what is our responsibility in that?

Options suggested include the following:

- That everything good which we do is mission – therefore, when we help care for the environment, heal the sick, help the poor etc, those things are part of the Church’s mission.
- That the mission of the Church is specifically the Gospel. This is not to deny the wider responsibilities of humanity towards creation but the church has been given a specific task of making disciples.

²⁸⁸ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 2 (8).

²⁸⁹ Strange, *For their Rock is not as our Rock*, 76.

- That our mission is to make disciples, but this relates in some way back to the original creation mandate. Christians individually and collectively have a wider responsibility to Creation that flows out of the proclamation of the Gospel.

As I said, there has been much discussion and debate, sometimes heated. This means there's plenty of further reading for you to peruse.²⁹⁰

At this stage I want to affirm that

1. We certainly remain responsible as human beings for stewarding God's creation. This must be even more emphatically true for those who have been restored to the image of God.
2. Athanasius' logic pushes us to the conclusion that we should be longing for the day when a restored and renewed Creation fully declares God's goodness and greatness so that the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.

However, for a complete answer to how that happens and our role in it, we also need to answer questions about the nature of the New Creation and the extent to which it is completely different or a continuation of this Creation.

²⁹⁰ I suggest you start with Wright, *The Mission of God* and, for another perspective, Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2011).

14. Creation, Evangelism and Apologetics

I want to say a few words now about how our Doctrine of Creation and the Fall affects our approach to Apologetics.

Creation reveals God and leaves us without excuse

This theme is picked up particularly by the Apostle Paul in Acts 14, Acts 17 and Romans 1. In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas pray for a man to be healed and in response to this miracle, the locals are about to worship them as gods.

Paul responds by insisting that they must not worship him because the true God has already been revealed and it is this God that they need to worship. God is revealed in creation through his providential care for his creatures. God has allowed the nations to go their own way until now but the coming of Jesus changes things.

David Peterson notes that this allowing the nations to go their own way is not about God excusing their rebellion through ignorance. Rather, just as God's involvement with his people Israel is a sign of his covenant blessing, so here we see a sign of the curse in the absence of his special revelation to them. They are abandoned to wandering, giving a foretaste of final judgement.²⁹¹

However, God has not left them without any witness at all.

“God’s goodness is experienced by everyone who enjoys the benefits of living in his creation. The pleasures of life are an encouragement to believe in a beneficent Creator. To worship and serve created things rather than the Creator is the essence of sin, and in Romans 1:18-25 it is the reason why God abandoned the nations to the consequences of their rebellion.”²⁹²

So, creation and providence provide enough revelation so that we can know truth about who God is.

In Acts 17, Paul uses the fact that God is creator to show that he has no need for human temples and shrines. He is the God who made the whole Universe and in a sense, it acts as his throne room or temple but even this finite Universe cannot contain the infinite God.

So, we see God's goodness in his providence and his greatness in his creative power. Paul puts it like this in Romans 1:20:

“For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So, they have no excuse for not knowing God.”

The Church Father Athanasius also picks up on how Creation itself points back to belief in a creator God. He says:

“In regard to the making of the universe and the creation of all things there have been various opinions, and each person has propounded the theory that suited his own taste. For instance, some say that all things are self- originated and, so to speak, haphazard. The

²⁹¹ David Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles* (Pillar), 410.

²⁹² David Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 410.

Epicureans are among these; they deny that there is any Mind behind the universe at all. This view is contrary to all the facts of experience, their own existence included. For if all things had come into being in this automatic fashion, instead of being the outcome of Mind, though they existed, they would all be uniform and without distinction. In the universe everything would be sun or moon or whatever it was, and in the human body the whole would be hand or eye or foot. But in point of fact the sun and the moon and the earth are all different things, and even within the human body there are different members, such as foot and hand and head. This distinctness of things argues not a spontaneous generation but a prevenient Cause; and from that Cause we can apprehend God, the Designer and Maker of all.”²⁹³

Do you see that? Long before the Theory of Evolution became popular, Athanasius was challenging the logic that self-replicating matter would lead to the vast diversity in our Universe. He sees the hand of a Creator at work who purposefully chooses to design each thing differently according to its purpose. There is no good reason or explanation for mutation: we expect self-replication to lead to clones. A number of people have noticed that our Universe reflects both a unity and diversity which point us back to a Creator who is one God in Three persons, a God whose triune nature reflects unity and diversity.

Humans have rejected God’s Truth as revealed in Creation

In Romans 1:19, Paul tells us that God’s Revelation is Creation means that we have received Truth, not just the ability to access or deduce truth from observation or reason, but who God is has been clearly revealed to us. It is not merely that we are ignorant of truth, rather, we have ignored, rejected and suppressed it.²⁹⁴

As we have seen above, this not just a rejection of God’s greatness. It is not about human beings running away from a Creator who is most certainly strong and powerful but may be cruel and bad. It is a rejection of the goodness we have experienced of God, his loving kindness, his faithfulness, his providential care.

This suppression means that we have exchanged truth for a lie. Here, Paul points us back to the problem in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve chose to believe the Satan’s lie, in the face of evidence and experience that God was not great (they could rival him for power) and God was not good (he did not have their best interests at heart in his command).

We have exchanged worship of the living God for worship of his creature. The story of Creation used in evangelism convicts us of our idolatry when we place our trust in other created things and/or in ourselves.

We have exchanged natural creation order relationships for unnatural ones. Paul focuses specifically on sexuality here. The point is that believing lies and choosing idolatry over trust and worship of the living God leads inevitable to sinful practices. Sin is not merely the wrong things we do. Those sins are symptomatic of a root heart condition, hence moralistic efforts at self-improvement will never cut it.

²⁹³ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, MI), 1 (2).

²⁹⁴ Daniel Strange, “Perilous Exchange, Precious Good News: A Reformed Subversive Fulfilment of other Religions” (Pages 91-138 in Gavin D’Costa, Paul Knitter and Daniel Strange, *Only One Way: Three Christian Responses on the Uniqueness of Christ in a Religiously Plural World*, London. SCM, 2011), 112 -113.

So, the story of Creation is important in evangelism because it brings us to the heart of the problem and leads to conviction of sin. Whether through a single gospel presentation, an evangelistic course or the ongoing day to day work of disciple making, I would expect our apologetics to take us back again and again to how God made this world and what we have done with it.

The problem is not a mere intellectual one

However, we cannot simply rely on a presentation of the facts of Creation to convict people of sin. Notice with me again what Paul says in Romans 1.

“Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools.”²⁹⁵

Our sinful rebellion has affected our ability to think and to see clearly; it leads to spiritual blindness. If our minds are “dark and confused,” then to what extent can we engage with the logic of an apologetical argument? To what extent can we observe creation and deduce God’s hand in it?

Furthermore, our confused, idolatrous, sinful state is not just a choice we have made.

“So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies.”²⁹⁶

We have been handed over to sinful slavery. Here we have that same sense of abandonment that we picked up on in Acts 14 with regards to the nations.

If our minds are dark and we are handed over or abandoned to our sin then this constrains us and prevents us from seeing the truth about God in Creation.

This is important when we think about Apologetics. Some Apologetical methods rely heavily on presenting evidence about God’s existence as seen in nature. For example, you have William Paley’s classic apologetical work “Natural Theology” where nature is used to evidence and point to God.

In more recent years, Ken Ham and the Answers in Genesis movement have pushed heavily for an approach to evangelism rooted in demonstrating the scientific reliability of Genesis 1-11. Ham explains that he realised that we need to get people back to a Christian worldview if we are to help them to properly understand the problem of sin and why they need God.²⁹⁷

I have strong sympathies with this not just because I am, like Ham, a Young Earth Creationist but because as I stated above, for people to make sense of what the problem is, they need to know why they are here and where they have come from. This would be true whether you believe in a literal 6 day creation or an Old Earth Creation interpretation of Genesis.

The problem is that both Ham’s modern Creation Evangelism and Paley’s Natural Theology place too high a confidence in our readiness to accept the witness of General Revelation. It assumes that presented with the facts, we will move to faith.

²⁹⁵ Romans 1:21.

²⁹⁶ Romans 1:24.

²⁹⁷ <https://answersingenesis.org/gospel/evangelism/practical-creation-evangelism/>

The reality is that people don't. The problem of darkened minds and hard hearts pushes us away from relying purely on an intellectual explanation and our dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit to illuminate dark minds and to warm, prick and convict cold, hard hearts.

Secondly, as Ham certainly would affirm, if we stop here, we stop far short of the Gospel message. The revelation of Creation removes our excuse for not worshipping the one true God but it does not show us how we can be restored to him.

This is reflected in the Biblical examples we have seen. First of all, in Acts 14, we quickly realise that Paul had much more to say but that his message was cut short by the crowd's reaction. In Acts 17, he moves from talking about creation in General to the Creation of man and from there to the one who is coming to judge and who has been raised from the dead. The Romans 1 passage starts in verses 16-17 by telling us that God's righteousness has been revealed in the Gospel. This righteousness is all about salvation by faith alone. The description of Creation's excuse removing testimony and our suppression of it provides the explanation for the Gospel's revelation of saving faith leading to true righteousness is needed.

Conclusion

Our evangelism must include engagement with the goodness and greatness of God's wonderful Creation. From there, we will naturally move to the problem of Sin and the Fall. However, we must make sure that we do not get lost in the minutiae of defending the truth of Creation at the expense of pointing to the needed Saviour.

15 Creation and Work

Thinking about the Doctrine of Creation is particularly helpful as we seek to apply the Bible to the whole of our life because Creation points us both to the goodness and challenges of work. The Bible is, from the start a book for all 7 days of the week, not just one.

Whilst we are often particularly interested in what the Bible has to say about the Sabbath Day, our understanding of sabbath is rooted in what Scripture has to say about the other six days. John Frame muses:

“Bible students are sometimes surprised to learn that the fourth commandment requires them to work for six days! There is a work ethic in the fourth commandment that appears also, implicitly in the eighth, ninth and tenth commandments. Rest is the central meaning of the commandment, but rest has no meaning if it is not a rest from work.”²⁹⁸

The sixth commandment is the requirement to honour the Sabbath and the reason for keeping it is rooted in what Genesis tells us about creation. Exodus 20:8-11 says:

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.”

Work and Worship

Earlier when looking at Genesis 2, we saw that the words used to describe the man’s work in the Garden as keeping and tilling it are worship words used to describe the work of the Levites in the Tabernacle.²⁹⁹ Our daily work is not just about providing for our families. It is in and of itself worship because we do it to God’s glory. Christians should not see their responsibilities during the week as they go out to earn a living as in conflict with their responsibilities as part of the church to be involved in ministries and to be sharing the Gospel. Obviously, there is the opportunity to share the Gospel with colleagues but work is also not just an opportunity for evangelism, it is good and God glorifying in and of itself. This means that the Apostle Paul can say to slaves:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free.”³⁰⁰

Work and the Fall

Work happens in the context of enjoyment of God’s provision for us. It is therefore not to be seen as a consequence of the Fall. As Chris Wright says:

²⁹⁸John M Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Philipsburg, NJ.: P&R Publishing, 2008), 541.

²⁹⁹ See Numbers 3:7-8; 4:23-24, 26 and Deuteronomy 4:19. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 67.

³⁰⁰ Ephesians 6:5-8.

“The command to ‘fill the earth and subdue it’ inescapably entails human work. Work is not itself a result of the fall, though it was certainly affected by it. Rather, work is part of the image of God in humankind, for God as presented to us in the creation narratives, is a worker. To be like God is to reflect God’s activity as we see it in the story of creation.”³⁰¹

But note there that Wright does pick up on the effects of the Fall on labour. Similarly, Frame notes that:

“After the Fall, work becomes toilsome (Gen 3:17-19; cf Ps 90:10; Eccl. 2:18-26), but it is still necessary and beneficial (Deut 16:15; 1 Thess 4:11-12). So we are not to be lazy (Prov 6:6-11; 12:24, 27; 15:19).”³⁰²

It is important to recognise this because sometimes I think Christians speaking about the workplace can talk glibly, simply going back to Creation and forgetting about the effects of the Fall. Yes, work is good but we must not underestimate the destructive consequences of sin on work life. Just because work is itself good, does not mean that all work and all aspects of work are good. To be sure, we want to encourage believers to enjoy, take pleasure in and see their work as worship, however we also need to recognise that significant parts of their jobs will be dissatisfying and unpleasant. This might include the creeping bureaucracy of tedious paperwork, poor work conditions, tyrannical and unfair bosses, unjust wage settlements, sexism and harassment in the workplace, spurious complaints and unnecessary waste and errors.

Just as we seek to glorify God through good work, we should want to speak out about and challenge bad work, injustice and poor conditions, even as we remind each other that it is possible to glorify God through patient endurance even in those contexts.

Work and Rest

Genesis 2 opens with the description of the 7th day when God rested. In doing so, God (among other things) provided a pattern for us of work and rest. This is the example that is picked up on in Exodus 20.

Like the inclusion of a prohibition, a restriction on what trees could be eaten from in Genesis 2:16-17, the command to rest on one day in seven provides another boundary marker which reminds us that we are not infinite but limited, that we rule over creation not as supreme, all powerful overlords but as accountable stewards. There will be times when we feel like our work is never done and that there are not enough hours in the day. There will be times when it will be tempting to keep on working. Indeed, many professions, especially those where there is a sense of vocation such as teaching and medicine seem to rely on workers who give every waking hour. They find that the work is infinite, there is always more that can be done. This is true of those in pastoral ministry too. We can be even more tempted to work every hour because we see our work as so overtly connected to the Gospel. Pastors and missionaries are finite too. We need rest

What is more, my belief that I have to keep on working may well reflect a belief that success or failure is dependent upon me that I am indispensable. The reality is that when I rest, life goes on. The other side of the coin is sadly that some people fail to take appropriate breaks or rest, work excessively long hours and rarely get away on holiday out of fear that if they are not seen to be busy, they will become dispensable. Resting is an act of humility and trust.

³⁰¹ Christopher J Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2004), 148.

³⁰² Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 798.

John Frame notes that there has been some discussion within Reformed Christianity as to whether the Sabbath Day was primarily about rest or worship.

John Calvin describes the purpose of the Sabbath as:

“First under the rest of the seventh day, the divine Law giver meant to furnish the people of Israel with a type of the spiritual rest by which believers were to cease from their own works and allow God to work in them. Secondly, he meant that there should be a stated day on which they should assemble to hear the Law, and perform religious rites, or which, at least, they should specially employ in meditating on his works, and be thereby trained to piety. Thirdly, he meant that servants and those who lived under the authority of others, should be indulged with a day of rest and thus have some intermission from labour.”³⁰³

The implication seems to be that whilst rest from work is included in that purpose (point 3) that this is secondary to the purpose of gathering for corporate instruction and praise. Frame takes the view that the focus is primarily on rest itself.

“The Sabbath rest is physical, not merely a ceasing of one activity in order to perform another.”³⁰⁴

I think this is helpful because it enables us to see the benefit of recreation as part of rest and even the opportunity to stop doing anything at all. A rest day that adds an extra burden of legalism on people with the assumption that they must fill it with worthy activities does not feel like a rest day at all! Frame even goes so far as to suggest that:

“I therefore believe it is legitimate to spend part of the Sabbath in sheer physical rest. A nap on that day should not be disparaged as idleness.”³⁰⁵

I’m sure many of us will want to say a hearty “amen” to that!

Frame also wants to protect us from the unhealthy dualistic distinction between work as earthly and sinful and Sabbath worship as spiritual and good. He says:

The Sabbath command is not that we sin for six days and then receive grace on the seventh.”³⁰⁶

I am inclined to agree with Frame on this. However, I want to insist on the following qualifiers. First of all, we are all made differently both physically and emotionally. For some people, a change really is as good as a rest and they find relaxation and refreshment in doing something different. Someone who spends his working days engaged in intellectual activity may find physical exercise and hard labour working on DIY or gardening helpful whilst someone whose work is physical may want to sit down with a good book or listen to an intellectually stimulating talk. Those who spend much of the work in isolation may appreciate company whilst those who spend the week negotiating, supervising, teaching may find a day in solitude is just what they need for the week ahead.

Secondly, whilst the whole of life is worship, the sabbath worship is different in kind and if our whole life is about glorifying God and witnessing for him, then the rest and refreshment we need is spiritual.

³⁰³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.ii.28 (Beveridge 1:339).

³⁰⁴ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 541.

³⁰⁵ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 541.

³⁰⁶ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 544.

Sabbath is a time for feeding together on God's Word. Sabbath is a time for mutual encouragement. Sabbath is a time for gathering before we scatter.

Conclusion

I am reminded again that whatever we do, both in our rest and our work, we are to do it all for God's glory.

16 Creation and the Environment

If this creation is made by God and we are placed in it to look after it, to rule over it, subdue it and to fill it, to keep it and till it, then what implications does this have for our approach to the environment and ecology?

1. Care for Creation as worship

Chris Wright notes that,

“Creation is good independent of our human presence within it and our ability to observe it. In the creation narratives the affirmation ‘It is good’ was not made by Adam and Eve but by God himself. So the goodness of creation (which includes its beauty) is theologically and chronologically prior to human observation.”³⁰⁷

Indeed, we are not ourselves the true pinnacle of creation. Rather, this belongs to the events of the 7th day.

“It is not quite true to say that human beings were the climax of God’s creation in Genesis 1-2. The real climax came with God’s own sabbath rest, as God entered into the enjoyment of his ‘very good’ creation. The creation exists for God – for God’s praise and glory... and also for God’s delight.”³⁰⁸

This is important because it keeps our status and position in perspective. Humans enjoy a special and privileged position in Creation. They are to rule it, but they do not own it. We are stewards only. This truth is re-enforced by the boundaries that God puts in place. These boundaries are first seen with the limit on which trees Adam could eat from in the Garden. We do not have unlimited access to and usage of God’s creation. There are controls on how we are to live in his world

This follows through for the people of Israel when they are placed in the land. There are restrictions and boundaries. These include the weekly sabbath rest from work but also sabbath years and Jubilees when debts were cancelled and when the land itself was allowed to rest.³⁰⁹

Those restrictions served as a reminder that God’s people were not permitted to exploit the earth. This is both because, as we have just seen, Creation isn’t there just for us but ultimately for God’s glory and enjoyment. When we act as wise stewards and care for the environment, we share God’s perspective on it and share in his enjoyment of it. Environment care is part of our worship.

This also helps to distinguish a Christian approach to ecology from some forms of environmental activism. Frame notes that “there are differences between a Biblical concern for the earth and secular environmentalism”³¹⁰ especially where environmentalism is rooted in a form of pantheistic worship of creation as mother.³¹¹ We do not worship the creation, but the creator who made and sustains it.

³⁰⁷ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 107.

³⁰⁸ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 126.

³⁰⁹ See e.g. Exodus 23:10-11.

³¹⁰ Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 744

³¹¹ Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 744.

2. Environment care is an act of wisdom

Part of our responsibility to rule over creation includes the need to care for it because what happens to the world affects us. John Frame comments that,

“The cultural mandate does not justify destruction of the environment as some non-Christian writers have suggested. Man cannot fill and subdue the earth if he destroys the earth’s resources.”³¹²

As he explains, this reflects the point that we too are creatures and participants in Creation.

“[God] made man to have dominion over the world but man is not only the Lord of creation, he is himself a creature made of dust. And he is dependent on the rest of creation for his sustenance. So man is to use the resources of the world, he is not to exploit or deplete them. If those resources are depleted, the natural consequence is that man himself suffers. Man must be a responsible steward of the earth if he is to preserve his own life.”³¹³

We benefit from a planet that is properly cared for. Exploitation of the earth’s natural resources and the destruction of plant and animal life hurts us as well as the wider creation.

3. Environment care is an act of love and devotion

Frame points out that,

“although God has a special concern for human life, he is concerned analogously for the whole of creation, for all forms of life.”³¹⁴

This is not to be confused with the more militant elements of the animal rights movement. It is not that animals or any other form of life are equivalent to and equal with human beings.³¹⁵ However, we have a particular responsibility to care for the creatures in God’s creation which goes back to Adam taking responsibility for naming each of the creatures. It is reflected in Noah’s responsibility to preserve all animal forms in the Ark and re-enforced by another boundary rule or limitation. After the Flood, humans were permitted to eat meat, but Noah was told,

“You must never eat any meat that still has the lifeblood in it.”³¹⁶

This responsibility to care for all creatures under our rule is important because our attitude to other creatures shows something of our character. We are rightly wary of those who demonstrate a cruel attitude to animals because as Frame points out,

“There is a strong analogy between different kinds of life. Those who do not care about the loss of animal life will likely not care much about human life either.”³¹⁷

³¹² Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 744. NB. By Cultural Mandate, Frame mean’s God’s command to fill and subdue the earth.

³¹³ Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 744.

³¹⁴ Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 744.

³¹⁵ Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 744.

³¹⁶ Genesis 9:4.

³¹⁷ Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 743.

Conclusion

God has given us responsibility as we live as his image bearers in his creation. We are called to be wise and loving stewards of it. Christians who know and love God as their heavenly father have an even greater motivation to care for his creation.

17 How did we get here? – Conclusion

As we've been looking at the Doctrine of Creation, the great encouragement has been to see that our world is here because a loving, sovereign creator God intentionally put us here. The Doctrine of Creation points us back to God's character as good and great.

The Doctrine of Creation begins to tell us something about our own purpose as human beings. We were made in the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism to glory God and enjoy him forever. A significant part of that purpose includes our stewardship of Creation. We glorify God when we enjoy him. We enjoy him when we enjoy the goodness of his creation. That is why we are called to be stewards of creation, ruling over it and filling it.

This means that just as the Doctrine of Creation points us back (or up) and pushes us to ask questions about who the good and great God who created us and this Universe is, so it pushes us deeper as we seek to ask questions about who we are and what it means to be made in God's image.

This leads us on to recognise that the Doctrine of the Fall is vital too. It helps us to understand the presence of suffering and evil. The Doctrine of the Fall reminds us of the importance of the Doctrine of Revelation both in terms of why we need God's revelation and why we so often choose to suppress and reject it.

The Doctrine of the Fall means that as we think about who we are we need to know about redemption. The Doctrine of Creation and of Fall pushes us forward so that we need to know about New Creation.

Appendix 1: Is Evolution about chance?

When ordinary lay-people (as in non-scientific specialists and particularly non-evolutionary-science specialists) like you and me talk about evolution, we are likely to talk about chance. So, when I first wrote about creation, I named one of the lies that we believe about Creation/the Universe as that:

“This world is just here by accident or chance.”³¹⁸

I then went on to suggest that there are two different ways in which people throughout history have come to that conclusion.

“that this world is just here by accident or chance. In earlier times, people saw this world as being the by-product of the wars and love affairs of gods. In modern times, we are more likely to see the world as it is resulting from atheistic evolution.”³¹⁹

In ancient times, this belief was rooted in the origin myths about gods battling it out for supremacy. To their way of thinking, we are here by accident because the purpose of the gods was not to make humans as the focal point of a good and intentional creation. We are the by-product of their family squabbles. In a similar way, a modern worldview with the emphasis on atheistic evolution leaves us in a similar position. There is no purposeful creation of human beings, rather we are the by-product of what Richard Dawkins might describe as the selfish gene’s fight for survival.

This applies generally to humanity but also to each one of us specifically. Why am I here? The correct answer surely has to be that there isn’t a reason or purpose for my existence. That’s why we are likely to think in terms of accident or chance.

Now, whilst that’s the normal way of talking about evolutionary outcomes among people generally, a number of evolutionists are not so keen on using the language of chance, especially if we add the word “random” in. Here for example is a quote from Richard Dawkins

“Darwinism is not a theory of random chance. It is a theory of random mutation plus non-random cumulative natural selection. . . . Natural selection . . . is a non-random force, pushing towards improvement. . . . Every generation has its Darwinian failures but every individual is descended only from previous generations' successful minorities. . . . [T]here can be no going downhill - species can't get worse as a prelude to getting better. . . . There may be more than one peak.”³²⁰

Now, I’ve noted a few seeking to rebut Christianity and Creationism by saying “look you are accusing evolution of being about random chance and it is not.” I think there are three problems here.

1. That the defenders of evolution have not allowed for the use of everyday language to sum up a point or to describe the perception that arises out of their theory.
2. That a lot of people don’t really know how things like chance and probability work.

³¹⁸ <https://faithroots.net/2018/02/08/applying-creation/>

³¹⁹ <https://faithroots.net/2018/02/08/applying-creation/>

³²⁰ The quote is from “Climbing Mount Improbable” I came upon it by random chance at this website <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/926505-darwinism-is-not-a-theory-of-random-chance-it-is>

3. That whilst it would be reductionist to think of evolution purely in terms of random/blind chance, it would be similarly reductionist to ignore the element of chance present in evolutionary theory as well.

Let's expand on point 3 a little. Michael Le Page when responding to the statement "Evolution is random" responds:

*"No and yes. Natural selection is a rigorous testing process that filters out what works from what doesn't, driving organisms to evolve in particular directions. However, chance events play a big role too."*³²¹

He explains a little further:

"Evolution by natural selection is a two-step process, and only the first step is random: mutations are chance events, but their survival is often anything but. Natural selection favours mutations that provide some advantage (see [Evolution promotes the survival of species](#)), and the physical world imposes very strict limits on what works and what doesn't. The result is that organisms evolve in particular directions."³²²

This is similar to Dawkins point above that evolution

"is a theory of random mutation plus non-random cumulative natural selection"

Really what we are starting to think about here is probability. This is important because the risk when we talk about "chance" is that we think in terms of "anything can happen" because everything is completely random and chaotic. However, that's not the assumption we work on in life. Let me give you two examples.

First of all, let's take gambling. Now some people gamble by just throwing the dice and seeing what is happening but that's not how the serious gamblers work – or the bookies. Rather, the serious gamblers recognise that there are a number of factors at work.

If Bradford City were to play Chelsea in the FA cup (to again take a random example), then someone putting a bet on the game -and the bookmakers when deciding the odds would consider the following:

1. The form of the two teams – is one on a winning streak and one on a losing streak
2. The relative ability of the two teams, Chelsea play in the Premier League and Bradford in League 1.
3. Who has home advantage because this seems to lead to a level of psychological motivation or intimidation in sport.

Those are the normal factors and they are knowns. However, there are some "unknown knowns" to quote Donald Rumsfeld. For example, what if a key player gets injured in the run up to the game or sent off in the first few minutes, what if a few players are under-par because of injury, ill-health or

³²¹ <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn13698-evolution-myths-evolution-is-random/>

³²² <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn13698-evolution-myths-evolution-is-random/>

exhaustion. Also, there are things that can go one way or the other. Sometimes, the inferior team are simply over-whelmed, they freeze and the premier league team get an extra advantage. This happened when Bradford got to the League Cup final and met Swansea. They froze under the Wembley spotlights and were turned over 5-0. However, when Bradford turned up to play Chelsea at Stamford Bridge, the opposite happened. The Premier League stars came out over-confident and complacent. The visitors found something extra from within because of the motivation to get a big-name scalp.

Now, here's another example. When you are running an engineering programme, you have to come up with a Risk Management plan. Risk assumes that there are certain possible outcomes that may not definitely take place. However, those risks are possible and we can predict a level of probability. Again, we would look at the possible outcomes and we would identify a level of probability. We would look at the different factors that could affect the project. We would then assess the likelihood of the event happening. However, risk management means that we weren't just looking at that possible outcome. Rather, we knew that if something happened then that would have an impact leading to other potential outcomes in terms of cost, time delay, damage etc. We assessed and managed the risk on the basis of probability.

Now, this is important when we come to evolutionary theory because in effect, the evolutionist is doing something similar. They are saying that there are a number of factors in the Universe, some would have been known/predictable factors and others unpredictable. That's the chance element.³²³

So, Dawkins writes about evolution as starting with the infamous primordial soup with lots of molecules replicating each other.

"At some point a particularly remarkable molecule was formed by accident. We will call it a replicator. It may not necessarily have been the biggest or the most complex molecule around, but it had the extraordinary property of being able to create copies of itself. This may seem a very unlikely sort of accident to happen. So, it was. It was exceedingly improbable. In the lifetime of a man, things that are that improbable can be treated for practical purposes as impossible. That is why you will never win a big prize on the football pools. But in our human estimates of what is probable and what is not, we are not used to dealing in hundreds of millions of years. If you filled in pools coupons every week for a hundred million years you would very likely win several jackpots."³²⁴

Notice here that there is a "chance" dynamic. The original forming of a different type of molecule was "by accident." It was either unexpected or at least, not guaranteed. Dawkins argument is that we cover the probability of this seemingly improbable event by allowing for lots and lots of time and lots and lots of chances.³²⁵

³²³ NB it is helpful to note that the OED defines chance in terms of "1. A possibility of something happening. 2. (chances) the probability of something happening. 3. An opportunity. 4. The occurrence of events in the absence of any obvious design." I would suggest that evolutionary theory is actually interested in all 4 of those definitions. The 4th is closest to what we think of as "by accident" and note that the theory does assume some accidental or random occurrences -but also that there are possible and probable outcomes in the light of what we know about how the Universe works.

³²⁴ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 15.

³²⁵ There is a separate point to consider here which is that possibility needs to precede probability. Creationists are not saying that evolution is impossible because it is improbable, they are saying it is improbable because it

The point is that this is when natural selection is meant to kick in. Chance means that within the population of molecules that there will be x % of molecules that have certain characteristics. However, from that point in, we can predict with a much higher degree of probability how many of those molecules will survive. And probability is very good at that. You can have a fair idea that if 10 English men enter the Australian Tennis open how many are likely to survive to round 2, round 3 and so on.

Does this mean that the “chance” objection to Evolution is invalid? I want to suggest not for the following reasons.

1. Because Evolutionists cannot ignore the point that chance, and in fact accident are at the starting/entry point into the system. Chance does not fully explain evolutionary theory – but most evolutionary models seem to need chance in the explanation.
2. Because I would suggest that we need to be careful about reading probability backwards. The purpose of probability is to help us make predictions looking forward. However, I’m not that convinced that it is as helpful as some assume in assessing whether past events occurred. What are the chances that Bradford City will get to a major Wembley Cup final next season? They are very small in deed. What are the chances that Bradford City did get to a major cup final a few years ago? Well, they did!
3. Because, when we talk about chance in the context of creation and evolution, we are not just talking about the probability of events happening. We are talking about human identity, meaning and purpose. It isn’t just “what is the probability of ‘me’ existing?” It’s if I am here because of chance plus natural selection then I don’t actually have a reason to be here. I have not been intentionally created. I am an accidental by-product.

Here’s a final example to think through.

In 1970, my mum and dad married. My mum was from Biggin Hill in Kent. My dad was from Derby in the Midlands. Dad went to University in Oxford and then moved to Bradford to complete his MSC. Mum travelled in a forces family and circumstances brought her to the same city. They found themselves in the same church. 2 years later, my sister was born. Then I came along in 1974.

Now, I am about 5’9 tall with fairish brown hair and weigh about 13 stone. I am short sighted and have to wear glasses. I also have asthma. I’m University educated. Oh, and I support Bradford City. Now, to some extent you can predict that in the population there will be people like me.

You can predict to some extent that people with a certain genetic make up and with particular interests are likely to be attracted to people who fit another particular genetic make up -assuming they share similar interests. You can also assume that the result will be offspring that carry certain genetic characteristics. Furthermore, you can also predict that the offspring will develop their own interests based on the environment they are in. So, yes you can predict that there will be a certain number of brown haired, 5 ft 9 tall male Bradford City supporters in the population (you can probably predict our survival rate too).

is impossible. You can have as many chances as you like but if certain factors are simply not there then the event will not happen.

But that's not the sum total of who I am is it? I'm not just the product of the union of one cluster of atoms with another cluster of atoms. So, my parents brought their own unique interests and values into their relationship and then passed them on to me, some of which I chose to continue with and others which I didn't. Yet, there are so many reasons why they might not have ended up together in Bradford of all places and yet they did.

So, is it by chance that this specific 5'92 13 stone, brown haired, short sighted Bradford City supporting male exists. Without belief in God, I think we would have to say "Yes, I am an accidental by-product of chance."

However, the Bible says different. It tells me that I am made by God's good pleasure, I am fearfully and wonderfully made, he knit me together in my mother's womb. He chose me and loved me before the world began.

Appendix 2: Evolution and chance part 2

It was a chance meeting. I just happened to be walking back up Rochester High Street and Crow Lane when our eyes met. By chance, she happened to be trying to visit our church's bookshop and had just missed closing time. By chance, the lady cashing up saw us talking on the street outside and by chance she just happened to know Sarah's friend. They got talking and decided to match make. The rest is history.

Now, leaving aside my belief in divine providence, if you were to ask how Sarah and I ended up together, you could argue that it was by chance. To be sure, once we met, there may have been a strong possibility, probability even that we would be attracted to each other and you may be able to identify genetic characteristics that made that more likely. You may even note the very normal things that happened once we met. How we got together is not just a story about random chance (again note I'm currently running without the assumption of divine providence).

I was thinking about this as I wrote about evolution and chance. Remember how in the last article we saw that evolutionary theorists want to say that evolution doesn't just happen by random chance.

Dawkins says:

"Darwinism is not a theory of random chance. It is a theory of random mutation plus non-random cumulative natural selection. . . . Natural selection . . . is a non-random force, pushing towards improvement. . . . Every generation has its Darwinian failures but every individual is descended only from previous generations' successful minorities. . . . [T]here can be no going downhill - species can't get worse as a prelude to getting better. . . . There may be more than one peak."³²⁶

Whilst this is Le Page in the New Scientist:

"Evolution by natural selection is a two-step process, and only the first step is random: mutations are chance events, but their survival is often anything but. Natural selection favours mutations that provide some advantage (see [Evolution promotes the survival of species](#)), and the physical world imposes very strict limits on what works and what doesn't. The result is that organisms evolve in particular directions."³²⁷

The problem is that whether or not they see non-random and indeed necessary activity in terms of how survival of the fittest determines the survival rate and development of specific genetic mutations, they have already affirmed that the starting point of those genetic mutations is a chance or accidental event(s).

In other words, it doesn't matter how the process develops, it is founded upon chance. Therefore, Evolutionists may not like to put it in those terms but within their system, we are here because of random chance. That random chance may have been followed up by non-random processes but without chance, those very processes would not be taking place at all.

³²⁶ The quote is from "Climbing Mount Improbable" I came upon it by random chance at this website <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/926505-darwinism-is-not-a-theory-of-random-chance-it-is>

³²⁷ <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn13698-evolution-myths-evolution-is-random/>

Appendix 3: Sabbath Rest

In the chapter on Creation, Work and Rest, I mention a couple of differing views on the Sabbath day. It is worth noting that we have to take a step a little further back when thinking about how to apply this. Here are some questions to think through that different Christians take different views on.

1. Has Sunday replaced the Saturday Sabbath or is the Lord's Day something different?
2. Linked to that, should my focus be on a specific day of the week now, or should it be about looking forward to the time after Christ's return as our eternal Sabbath rest?
3. If our Sabbath rest is eschatological, then to what extent do we experience aspects of it in the now and the not yet?
4. If Sunday is our Sabbath, then as per the previous article, is its primary purpose for rest as in ceasing from work or rest as a focus on corporate worship?

The fact that Christians have different views on these things warns us against simplistic responses. There is a need for wisdom thinking here. My current thinking is

1. Historically, Christians have linked Lord's Day with Sabbath and there is clearly a relationship.
2. However, whilst the first day of the week has clearly and explicitly been observed as The Lord's Day from the start of the Church so is explicitly scriptural, it isn't explicitly described as a Sabbath.
3. The New Testament encourages us away from either a legalistic or superstitious observance of days and festivals.
4. Is the Sabbath primarily there for physical and mental rest, or, as per Calvin, is it primarily about corporate worship? This is the point we will pick up on in a little more detail in the article on Creation, work and rest. I think there is an element of "both/and" here. Ceasing our usual work is rest from it. Whilst rest includes sleep and recreation, it also includes doing other activities that are not pure recreation. For example, many people use days off for doing gardening, DIY. Corporate worship is rest because we are not pursuing our normal creation mandate goals. However, this pushes us to ask whether we do things in a way that means the day and it' activities are enjoyable and restful. Part of this means sharing out responsibilities in order to ensure that the burden of tasks like setting out chairs, organising activities, providing refreshments does not become a burdensome duty and drudgery to a few people.
5. The principle of rest is seen through the pattern and order of creation not just in terms of the Sabbath. For example, there is night and day. One of the challenges is to make sure that we use the opportunities for rest during the week so that we do not push that all onto one day. Similarly, we should not wait for holidays before resting. This will enable us to get the best out of that time.
6. Linked to the above, some of us are blessed with 2 day weekends but not everyone and we need to think about how we make best use of that time in a way that also blesses and encourages those who do not have that specific blessing.
7. In general I would encourage Christians not to use Sunday to catch up with normal work and study or shopping. I am not being legalistic about this and leave it with individual consciences.

8. Church leaders including paid and unpaid elders will have an additional challenge because Sunday can be a challenging and busy day. I think this is where point 4 comes in to play. For me, Sunday is still Sunday and in so far as it should reflect Sabbath principles, and purposes it still does. It is time together with the Church family as together we break from our normal weekly duties to share the Lord's supper, to pray, praise, encourage one another and gather around God's Word. So whilst I have another "day off" in the week, I do not see it as "my sabbath" because I find the idea of an individual Sabbath unhelpful.

9. This does make us think about those who can't take Sundays off due to work. It is important then that we don't simply leave them to find time off on their own but provide contexts for corporate worship for them.

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