

Creation, Design, Evolution, and Human Origins

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Origins: A Reformed Look at Creation, Design, and Evolution (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2007)

Web resources at: <http://www.faithaliveresources.org/origins/resources.htm>

400 years ago, Galileo discovered evidence the Earth orbits the Sun

Galileo, in *Letter to the Grand Duchess Cristina*: “To prohibit the whole science [of Copernicus] would be to but to censure a hundred passages of Holy Scripture which teach us that the glory and greatness of Almighty God are marvelously discerned in all His works and divinely read in the open book of Heaven.”

Why should Christians care about what we learn from a careful study of nature?

The “Two Books” analogy: Both nature and scripture are revelations from God; we trust that God is not saying contradictory things. Science is a human interpretation of nature; biblical scholarship is a human interpretation of scripture. Philosophy, politics and tradition influence those interpretations. Conflict arises when we make errors in interpreting nature, scripture, or both.

Multiple independent lines of evidence for an old Earth and universe

Distant galaxies appear tiny compared to nearby ones; light has been traveling for billions of years.

To learn more: ▪ Chapters 5 and 7 of our book and web resources

- *The Bible, Rocks, and Time*. Davis Young and Ralph Stearley (InterVarsity Press, 2008)

Interpreting Genesis 1

First consider how the inspired human author and the original intended audience understood the text, then apply that message to today. This involves accurate translation, the literary genre, and the cultural and historic context. This leads to a literal interpretation of some passages, non-literal interpretation of others.

Applied to Genesis 1: The cultural context for the ancient Hebrews was the nations of Egypt and Babylon. They believed the Earth was flat, was formed out of a watery chaos, and that a solid dome “firmament” held back the waters above the sky. This view of the physical world appears throughout the Old Testament. God accommodated his message to this view without trying to correct it. The *theological* message of Genesis 1 is strikingly different from the creation stories of the surrounding cultures. There is only one God. The sun is not the Egyptian sun god Ra, but merely a physical object made by Israel’s God. The primary message to the ancient Hebrews was about the “who” and “why” of creation – that Israel’s God is the sovereign creator of all and humans are God’s image bearers. The primary message was not the “how” and “when” of creation.

John Calvin in *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis*: “Nothing is here treated of but the visible form of the world. He who would learn astronomy and the other recondite arts, let him go elsewhere ... Moses does not speak with philosophical acuteness on occult mysteries, but states those things which are everywhere observed, even by the uncultivated, and which are in common use.”

To learn more: ▪ Chapters 5-6 of our book and web resources

- *Beyond the Firmament*. Gordon Glover (Watertree Press, 2007)
- “Creation According to Genesis.” Daniel Harlow, *Christian Scholars Review* v.37 n.2 (2008).

The formation of the universe

By measuring the rate at which galaxies are moving apart, astronomers calculate that the universe began 13.7 billion years ago. This is independently confirmed by measurements of heat radiation.

This scientific model is called the “big bang.” *A scientific explanation does not replace God.*

Five different definitions of “evolution”

1. *Evolutionism*: atheistic claims that there is no Creator, no purpose to human existence.

“No intervening spirit watches lovingly over the affairs of nature.... No vital forces propel evolutionary change. And whatever we think of God, his existence is not manifest in the products of nature.” – Steven Jay Gould “In Praise of Darwin” (*Discover*, February 1982).

2. *Microevolution*: small changes in species caused by random mutation and reproductive success over a few decades or centuries, allowing species to adapt to changes.
3. *Pattern of change over time*: fossil record shows species changing over time, some go extinct, new ones arise.
4. *Common ancestry*: all living and extinct species are linked in a “family tree.”
5. *Theory of evolution*: a scientific theory that accepts common ancestor and says the mechanism of species changing and splitting over time is random mutation and reproductive success.

Young Earth Creationists; Old-Earth Progressive Creationists; Evolutionary Creationists

These are three broad categories. All accept microevolution. All rejection evolutionism.

They disagree about age of the earth, common ancestry, and the theory of evolution.

All agree that God intended and “designed” all the various kinds of life, but have different views on how that design was accomplished (miraculously or through natural processes).

Types of evidence for common ancestry and the theory of evolution

In Darwin’s time: fossils; anatomical comparisons of species; geographic distribution of species.

Modern evidence: developmental biology; genetic diversity within species; genetic similarities across species.

To learn more: ▪ Chapter 9 of our book and web resources

- *The Language of God*. Francis Collins (Free Press, 2007).
- *Coming to Peace with Science*. Darrel Falk (InterVarsity Press, 2004).

Adam and Eve: 5 scenarios

Recent ancestors. Specially created about 8,000 years ago, ancestors of all humans

Ancient ancestors. Miraculously modified pre-human hominids, about 150,000 years ago

Recent representatives. Selected as representatives from among existing humans; recent past

Ancient representatives. Selected as representatives from among existing humans; ancient past

Symbolic. Symbolic of many revelations from God and many rebellions in ancient past

Scientific evidence on human origins

Hominid fossils. Intermediate between humans and other primates; a few million years old.

Genetic similarities between humans and animals. Consistent with common ancestry.

Genetic diversity in human population. Implies a “bottleneck” in human ancestral population of not two individuals, but a few thousand, around 150,000 years ago.

Important theological questions which any scenario on human origins must address

Humans created in the “image of God”: our intelligence, or our personal relationship with God, or our position as God’s representatives and stewards on earth, or perhaps all three; room to fit with all five scenarios.

The soul: range of views on the best definition; room to fit with all five scenarios.

Death before the fall. Just spiritual death? Or also physical death?

Original sin. The situation is that no one can be righteous apart from Christ. Did sin originate in a single event or multiple events? How is our sinful state “transmitted” to each person, each generation?

“The Christian claim is that a savior is needed because all people are sinners. That is simple. *Why* all people are sinners is an important question, but an answer to it is not required in order to recognize the need for salvation. None of the gospels uses the story in Genesis 3 to speak of Christ’s significance. In Romans, Paul develops an indictment of the human race as sinful and then presents Christ as God’s solution to this problem in chapters 1-3 before mentioning Adam’s sin in chapter 5.” --George Murphy, “*Roads to Paradise and Perdition: Christ, Evolution, and Original Sin*,” Perspectives in Science and Christian Faith, June, 2006.)

To learn more: ▪ Chapters 11 and 12 of our book and web resources

Christians with different views on origins still agree that: God created and governs the universe. No part of the universe is a divine power in itself. The natural world testifies to God’s glory, power, creativity, and faithfulness. Scripture is inspired by God and authoritative. God created humans as his image bearers and invites us into special relationship with him. All humans have sinned and need a Savior. Jesus Christ died to save us and restore that relationship. Our significance is not based on our size in the universe or the biological means by which God created us, but on God’s relationship with us.