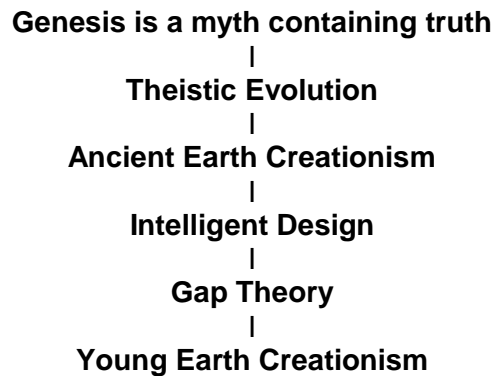


Approaches to Genesis 1-3

Introduction: Following the presentation on the hermeneutics of Genesis, there are various approaches within the church to origins that tend to come out in ‘families’ of doctrines. It is helpful for us to know what these are:

If we construct a line with the various positions it might look:



The strict order in the centre might be debatable, but within evangelicalism, the line from Theistic Evolution to Young Earth is the normal range.

It would be so easy if it were only Christian Creationists on one side and atheistic scientists on the other! But life is not that simple.

1 Genesis is a Myth containing truth:

Not an evangelical position.

2 Young Earth Creationism:

This is the position that takes Genesis as literally as the text will allow.

- It assumes the days to be literal days of 24 normal length earth hours each.
- It assumes that the first two verses are part of day 1 so that Adam is created into a cosmos which is only 5.5 days old.
- The normal assumption is that all 10 creative acts in Genesis 1 are by “Fiat” - ie out of nothing at God’s word. It tends not to make distinction between “Create”, “Make” and “Form” which are the 3 verbs of Genesis 1.
- Genesis 2 is taken to be a retelling of Genesis 1 from a different standpoint.
- Naturally, Adam and Eve are assumed to be the first humans, created mature. The creation of Eve is taken to be literally from material taken from Adam’s side. The two special trees in the garden are literal trees etc.
- That no animal could have suffered or died before the fall of Adam. Thus the whole fossil record is younger than Eden, probably laid down in the Genesis year long flood.
- The assumption would be that all creatures, those living and those extinct coexisted with Adam.
- The genealogies of Genesis and the Gospels are taken to date Adam to 4,000 BC. Since Adam and the cosmos are the same age but for 5 days, the Earth and the Cosmos are taken to be 6,000 years old, or sometimes stated as “Less than 10,000 years old.”

Although some sections of the church have always taken Genesis literally, the modern movement called “Young Earth Creationism” traces its roots back to Archbishop Ussher in

Ireland in the 17th Century who worked out the date for Adam as 4004 BC using the genealogies of scripture. Some following him even gave a date in October for the creation of Adam, and even a time of day!

This modern movement got a big boost in the 1960's with the commencement of "Young Earth Creationist Science". This is a completely separate branch of science to the mainstream, whose aim is to be able to illustrate that the science of the world is biased towards an atheistic and humanist agenda. Young Earth science is dedicated to proving that the Genesis flood took place as the Bible says and that the whole universe is only 6,000 years old.

There are PhD scientists of all disciplines working on the project - cosmologists, geologists, paleontologists, anthropologists, astronomers. It is a big movement, mainly based in the USA and Australia, but targeting the UK with missionary zeal! Creation Ministries International tends to be (or at least it looks like) an organization that sets the agenda about what the doctrines are going to be.

Ken Ham's book: *The New Answers Book*: Gives an overview of this position, but is very unfortunate in its style being very dogmatic in approach. There are other books but they tend to be specialist and not readily available.

Arguments for this position:

This position is being driven by a great desire to defend the Bible against the forces of secular humanism. It takes the "Inerrant" view of the scripture very seriously and is definitely dedicated to (their version) of God's Word.

- This position has an easy and simple coherence with the rest of the scripture, with the minimum of interpretation. The rest of the Bible is completely compatible with this view.
- It is good scholarship to try to test this particular Biblical position with a fresh view of science.

Difficulties with the position:

Although the intentions are extremely honorable and the desire is to show that God's Word is true at face value, there are some problems:

- The position is in considerable conflict with the mainstream of scientific opinion, which does not demonstrate the cosmos to be less than 10,000 years old.
- Creationist Science is driven not by scientific fact but by a near literal reading of Genesis 1-11. The answer is known from the beginning, that the Earth and the Cosmos are young. No science that refutes this fact is allowed. It is therefore a closed system driven by dogma.

It is also not as complete as a system as it would present itself. There are some big holes.

To mitigate against this, it should also be noted that mainstream science is also a closed system in that no Divine intervention can be taken into account. It has however arrived at where it is by observation of falsifiable facts.

Main stream science is also incomplete, otherwise scientists would be out of a job.

The recommendation would be that if anyone feels in their hearts that this position is right, then their faith ought to be in the Word of God and not in Young Earth Science. Science of either the mainstream or the Young Earth variety is changing as knowledge increases.

The Word of God will be proved to be true, whether literally or in a way we did not expect - God's Word is eternal.

3 Theistic Evolution:

This position accepts the scientific narrative, but sees God as the driver. Rather as we would live our normal lives, where things have rational explanations, but that we see God throughout. Non believers do the same things and sometimes have the same coincidences but do not see God. It starts from Science and then looks back to the scripture.

Evolution is a very emotive subject! It might be interesting to note that most evangelical Bible colleges in the UK teach this as the preferred approach.

To make some observations about evolution:

- It is not necessarily an atheistic theory. Darwin was not an atheist. He started out as a deist (the position that God created the universe with perfect laws but has intervened little since) and finished an agnostic (a decision to not decide - a "don't know" approach to God). There is no evidence that he made a deathbed recantation incidentally!
- Nevertheless it is being driven by an anti-theist agenda in many areas today. The problem has always been that other philosophies and agendas get added on. Evolutionary ideas formed part of the philosophy of the 3rd Riche - the idea of the master race and the need to eliminate inferior races was inserted into evolutionary philosophy. The phrase "The survival of the fittest" is not in Darwin's works, it is a philosophical idea with many implications drawing from the basic ideas of evolution.

One of the most difficult outcomes has been that man does not see himself as a special creation but as coming from the animals.

- As a strictly scientific theory it is in fact neutral as far as Theism is concerned, just as the laws governing the motion of the planets are neutral about the existence of God.

The problem is that prior to 1859 there was no reasonable explanation for the existence of life without God, and although that is still true, since the origin of life still cannot be explained, evolution is seen as being the theory that opens the door to the exclusion of God. Because the great bastion of faith was that there was no explanation for life without God, when evolution was proposed, the dam burst and God was expelled. We do have to be careful that we do not make our plea for God based upon the gaps in our scientific knowledge.

- Also of course, on the face of it evolution is contrary to the opening chapters of Genesis.
- As a final point: Most professional biologists now accept evolution as proven beyond reasonable doubt.

A current book on this subject by **Denis Alexander: *Creation or Evolution, do we have to choose?*** This is coming from a Christian so it is a good way to catch up with where evolution is, without all the atheistic language.

Denis Alexander believes in evolution, is a senior research scientist working in genetics and micro biology. He is an evangelical Christian and sees no problem with reconciling the two positions. He explains a lot of scripture.

What then are the arguments concerning this position for us?

I can only give you my view here, based on the reading I have done over six months:

- Firstly we need to understand “Micro-evolution” and “Macro-evolution”. Micro is evolution within a basic species. There is so much evidence for this that we should not argue with it. We can breed all sorts of dogs by selective breeding. Macro is evolution of one basic animal type from another - say birds from dinosaurs. It is the macro evolution that is the discussion.
- There is evidence for, and against macro-evolution. It is important that we are clear about the facts and don't hide. God is a God of truth.

Evidence for: Is mainly in the field of microbiology and genetics. In genetics there is now strong evidence for, in that the same mutations, ie genetic mistakes, occur right across the primates. There are many genetic features that give the appearance that mutations occurring early in evolution have been passed on, replicated and developed. That is good evidence of common ancestry.

Evidence often given for, but that is really neutral:

Common skeleton structure across most land vertebrates, and common anatomical features. Often said to be evidence for, but actually might just be evidence for a good design that does not need modifying - there is not much difference between different makes of car.

Evidence against: Absence of a coherent record of missing links in the fossil record. There are some 'missing links' but there is by no means the smooth transition that would be expected. There are no links into the primates at present.

It therefore depends upon your faith!

- Main objection: To reconcile this with scripture. Even given that Denis Alexander makes some good points, On the face of it, this is not what Genesis 1 says to us on first reading:

Gen 1:11 says: *“Let the land produce vegetation: Seed Bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds”, and*

Gen 1:21 *“So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.”*

Gen 1:24 *“Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds, livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to their kinds ...”*

We have to ask ourselves whether we are making assumptions about what Genesis says, or whether evolution is in fact directly opposed to what Genesis says.

We easily make assumptions about what we think Genesis says, but we need to come back to it and see what it actually says: that the creative act is with the sea creatures, then it says: “Let the land produce” which is an interesting phrase. You may take this as ‘instant creation by fiat’ but it may not mean that. It does not say that each animal will reproduce according to its kind, as it says with the vegetation.

How you view this will come down to the way you view the days:

- As literal days.
- As periods of time.
- As a literary device to separate the acts of creation.

- As Moses 'classroom' days - ie God explained certain things to Moses on the first day, certain things on the second day etc.
- As God working in one timeframe inserting acts into another timeframe, working in one set of dimensions inserting acts into another.

In conclusion: A wise people will look carefully at the wording of Genesis to see if this position is ruled out.

The word of God will be proved to be true, but maybe not necessarily in the way that we think.

4: Ancient Earth Creationism:

I have not been able to read much on this position to be able to make detailed comment. It would basically be summed up as:

- Believing that the cosmos is ancient and not young.
- That God intervened at specific points along the ages.
- That the "days" of Genesis 1 would best be summed up as long ages.

It would not be evolution, but would be creationist, accepting that the Earth is ancient.

5: Gap Theory:

There are a number of positions on this one. Basically the theory is that the first two verses of chapter one of Genesis are not part of the first day. That there is a long period of time implied by:

In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth and the Earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. The Spirit of the Lord was hovering over the face of the deep.

A particularly well worked out version of Gap Theory was popular about 100 years ago. This theory suggested that there was an earlier creation which was destroyed in a world-wide flood prior to the opening of the book of Genesis. In this theory, the fossil record of the dinosaurs and the early extinct creatures was laid down before the days of Genesis 1.

The idea that the earth was formless (or literally "chaotic") in 1:2 is taken to indicate destruction, rather than the way God made the Earth.

Clearly the weakness of this particular view is that there is no Biblical evidence to support it.

The idea however that a long period of time is encompassed in these first two verses, without perhaps adding the idea of an earlier creation, does persist and is widely believed. The main issue is that it avoids the young-Earth position, whilst allowing a fairly straightforward interpretation of the rest of the book.

As David Pawson suggests, the first and 7th days were both very long. By this he is saying that the 7th day went on until Easter day, when the new creation started. Why should the first day not be very long also? In fact, it is not until 'day 4' that the sun, moon and stars are placed in position "*to mark seasons, days and years*" (Gen 1:14)

6: Intelligent Design:

Intelligent Design as a movement is fairly new, having begun to form in the 1980's. The issues behind it are very old. Ever since there has been scientific exploration of the universe in which we live, there have been Bible believing Christians in the main stream of research. Many of the great names of the past were devout believers. They saw their scientific research as revealing the wonders of God and His creation.

At times, scientific research has brought the scientist into dispute with the church. The most famous in history is probably the dispute between Copernicus and later Galileo with the church over the discovery that the Earth was not the centre of the universe, as common sense and Aristotle had proposed, but that the Earth and the planets orbited the sun.

To some extent, "Intelligent Design" is seen as an alternative to "Young Earth Creationism", in that it is a vehicle for Believers to challenge the atheistic world-view of much of mainstream science, by highlighting the necessity of a creator in order to make the generally accepted scientific narrative work. Thus it is not the same as either Young Earth Creationism (which seeks to reconstructs science) or Theistic Evolution (which sees God in the process of evolution whilst acknowledging the principle that the main process was by natural means).

Intelligent design does not try to reconcile to scripture. It is entirely concerned with seeing God in creation and the need for intelligence in creation. ID books are only concerned with the science.

There are several main features of Intelligent Design. One is to seek out the gaps in current scientific knowledge, especially those where evolution would seem to have no answer and to see this as evidence of God. Michael Behe and his "Machines of Irreducible Complexity" is a good example of this. Behe's thesis is that there are organisms at the micro level which have to have all of the components present to work at all, and therefore could not have evolved from something simpler. He uses the simple break-back mousetrap as an example.

Another idea from the microbiology level of creation is the improbability of the molecules of life, the amino-acids lining up in the right order and proportions for the first cell to come into being. Cells are enormously complex organisms. It is only when cells exist in sufficient complexity to reproduce that evolution and natural selection could take place. Up until then, each would have to be assembled from the basic constituent molecules each time.

There is a weakness in the system which should be noted, that the placing of God into the Gaps in scientific knowledge only lasts as long as the gaps last. However, the ideas are non-the-less exciting, and many of the ideas do not depend upon this 'Gaps' idea.

Many of the ideas involve features that look at the chances of certain features of the cosmos having arrived by accident. Some of the numbers are stunning. An example of this would be: Taking the foundational physical laws of the universe, some 10 or so basic laws, including the strong nuclear force and the weak nuclear force, gravity, the electromagnetic force - none of these basic laws need to have been as they are, they could have had any value, yet to vary any one of them by just a few percent and life as we know it could not exist. To have something like 10 dials set together at such fine limits is the same probability as firing a bullet from one side of the galaxy to the other and hitting a target as big as a coin. This is called the anthropic principle

The use of compound probabilities such as this is criticized by those who oppose the view. Generally however, the ideas do give a great insight into the majesty of God and His magnificent creation.

Lee Strobel's book: *The case for a Creator* is a very interesting book in this stream. Other ideas coming from "Intelligent design" would be:

The discovery of DNA as a code. It is a complex language made up of 4 letters, with a grammar, and punctuation. Inside each of the body's 10 trillion cells there is a digital database of 3.1 billion letters of DNA. If the double helix of the DNA was laid out straight it would measure 2 metres. If all the DNA in one individual were laid out end to end it would

stretch from the earth to the moon and back 8,000 times. If all the information in human DNA were written out in prose, it would fill at least 4,000 books with 500 pages each. We are truly fearfully and wonderfully made.

John Lennox says that it is not credible to think that a language structure such as DNA could come about by an unguided process. Whenever we encounter language, we always think of intelligence. If we received such a code coming from outer space, we would make the obvious conclusion, the most logical one, that it had been made by an intelligence. In fact in this case, we should note that Jesus was the Word of God (John.1:1-3) without whom nothing was made that was made (Colossians 1:16). Code is a very similar idea to 'Word'.

The idea that we are in the ideal place in the galaxy for both safety and to be able to observe the universe into which we are placed. The sun is a larger than average yellow star which makes it stable. The moon is very large compared to other moons in the solar system, and keeps the earth stable on its axis. The Earth is in the 'habitable zone', where liquid water can be sustained on the surface. The sun and the solar system are sufficiently far from the centre of the galaxy to be safe from the destructive events that are assumed to take place there.

Conclusions:

Einstein said that the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible.

Francis Bacon said that the Bible is the book of God's dealing with man, and science is the book of nature, and that both are written by God, then they ought to be in harmony. Science can tell us the 'how', the scripture can tell us the 'who' and the 'why'.

The Word of God will be shown to be true, but not necessarily in the way that we expect.

Greg Hall, March 2009