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Evolution and God

“And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.” Genesis 1:25 NASB

“But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man’s ribs...Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of man, and He brought her to the man.” Genesis 2:21-22 NIV

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men.” Romans 5:12 NIV

“For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Romans 8:20-21 NASB

Can a Christian believe in God and evolution at the same time? Is it not possible that God brought all the different kinds of plants and animals and even human beings into existence through the process of evolution? Questions such as these have been sincerely asked by a number of Christians. Raising such questions does not necessarily indicate that they have doubts about God’s existence or His ability to instantaneously create matter and life out of nothing, nor do they necessarily signal a wavering faith or a lack of spirituality.

Did God Use Evolution?

Some Christians wonder whether God possibly used evolution to bring about the great variety of life forms that are in existence today. The focus of these questions is not whether man is merely a higher form of animal and less than uniquely made in the image of God. It is rather the possibility that God may have used evolution to develop the body of “man” and then at some point implanted a spirit and called the first specimen of this new species, Adam, the first man.

A number of Christians today have concluded that God did indeed use evolution to one extent or another to bring about the variety of life forms in existence, including human beings. Such a position is known as theistic evolution. It is not a denial of God, nor is it an indication that the person is not a Christian. It is a position that some Christians have taken, thinking that this is the best way to harmonize the biblical account of creation and the findings of science.

But does the Bible permit the position of theistic evolution? Remember the real question here is not, “Could God have used evolution?” but rather, “Did He?” God could have brought life in all of its various forms into being in any number of different ways, but what does the Bible teach about how life came into being?

A straightforward reading of the creation account indicates that God did not use evolution to bring life to this planet. Regardless of how one interprets the length of the days of Genesis 1, the sequence of events in the biblical account does not fit the theory of evolution. According to the theory of evolution, for example, fish evolved before fruit-bearing trees; but according to Genesis 1, plant life came two days before marine life (Gen. 1:12,20). The theory of evolution postulates that birds evolved from reptiles. Millions of years were required for the scales, forelimbs and solid bones of reptiles to evolve into feathers, wings and hollow bones of birds. And many more years of evolution were involved to get birds off the ground in flight. But according to the Bible, God brought birds into being on the fifth day – before reptiles (Gen. 1:20,25). According to the theory of evolution, insects were around long before man, and had to be for the pollination of evolving plants. But according to the Scriptures, God gave life to land animals, insects and man on the same day (Gen. 1:24-26).

The sequence of the sun, moon and stars coming into being on the fourth day, after the light appears on the first day, is not easy to comprehend (Gen. 1:14-19). However, this difficulty does not mean that we toss out the historical, chronological interpretation of the biblical account as some interpreters have suggested. God could have had other light sources for the first three days.

Length Of Days

The “problem” of the fourth day is not eliminated for the theistic evolutionists who try to harmonize their views with biblical data. If anything, the problems of harmonization are even greater for those who try to fit evolutionary theory or, for that matter, any kind of “day equals age” scenario into the Genesis record. For example, how long a geologic age would the evolving plants of the third “day” be able to survive without the coming of sunlight on the fourth “day?”

In light of these sequential inconsistencies between the Genesis account and the theory of evolution, some theistic evolutionists have chosen to take either a non-historical or topical approach to the “days” of Genesis. In a non-historical approach, the creation account is understood as Old Testament poetry. The events are seen as allegory, not real history. There was no literal Adam nor Eve. They only symbolically represent the human species which has evolved from the animal stage to the point of spiritual response to God. The seven “days” are just figures of speech to show how God views man as the goal of His plan of evolution. In the topical approach, the historicity of the Genesis account is not denied, but the “days” are not taken as chronological. The term “days” is just used as a literary device to structure the presentation of God’s creative activity.

Reptiles, for example, appeared on the sixth day not because they are chronologically after birds of the sixth day, but because they are grouped topically with all land creatures on “day” six. To explain the use of the term “days” in the topical approach, some Christians have proposed that the days are literally the days God took to reveal to Moses His creative acts. In other words, when Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days to receive the Law (Ex. 24), the Lord revealed to him in a one-week “Creation Seminar” how He brought the world and life into existence. On Sunday, He showed Moses how He brought light out of darkness. On Monday, He revealed how He separated the waters – and so on. At the end of the six day seminar, in this view, God rested from His week of teaching.

There are several problems, however, with all of these less-than-straightforward interpretations of the creation account. The context of Genesis 1 gives no indication of any kind of literature other than normal historical narrative in which events are to be taken chronologically. And the early chapters of Genesis are definitely not Hebrew poetry; there is no indication of change to a different kind of literature in these chapters. No New Testament writer ever considered the early chapters of Genesis as parable or allegory. Nothing about the creation account and the events of the early chapters of Genesis was ever taken as only

symbolic by Jesus (Mt. 19:4-6; Lk. 11:50-51). So while you can be a Christian and believe in evolution, you will not be in the tradition of the apostles and Jesus in your interpretive approach to the early chapters of Genesis.

After Their Kind

Another obstacle to the concept of theistic evolution is the recurring phrase “after their kind” (Gen. 1:11-12,21-25). The idea that God brought all life forms into being through the gradual emergence of one-celled organisms from a primordial sea of molecules is not compatible with the words “after their kind.” The idea that God used a selection of random mutations over millions of years to bring about different life forms is not consistent with “after their kind.” While there is some question as to the taxonomic boundaries of the word “kind,” there is no question that definite categories of plant and animal life are being distinguished by this phrase. This is in direct contrast to the concept of the continuity of all forms of life as taught in the theory of evolution.

According to the Bible, all life forms do not trace their origin to some prehistoric sea, and they cannot be likened to the successive branches of a tree – continuously and progressively emerging over millions of years. The Bible certainly allows for genetic variation within “kinds,” but it teaches that life forms for the land, sea and air were established by God “after their kind” from the beginning.

The biblical account of the formation of Eve makes it particularly difficult for the theistic evolutionist to have a high view of Scripture. Suppose we decided that the creation account should not be taken literally, and the creation of man out of “dust from the ground” was only the Bible’s use of figurative language to communicate the concept of man’s evolution. Then how should we interpret the Bible’s account of the formation of Eve in (Gen. 2:18-25)? What is God trying to say, if this is only figurative language? How do we harmonize the biblical statements with evolution when we read that Adam and the animals were there when God formed Eve? We don’t read that Eve came from the animals or from the ground, but that God formed Eve from what He took out of Adam’s side.

Whatever figurative or symbolic way we choose to interpret this account, we must admit that God has somewhat misled us with words, if in fact He brought woman into being slowly through evolution. If God was trying to communicate that the female part of the human species also came about through evolution, wouldn’t there be a better way to say it poetically or allegorically?

Death, A Result Of Sin

By departing from a straight historical and chronological interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis, the theistic evolutionist also waters down the New Testament doctrines based on these chapters. In Romans 5:12-14 we are taught that death is the result of human sin which started with Adam. That is, death was not in the world before Adam and Eve. But the whole concept of evolution is based on the idea of billions of deaths of slightly maladapted organisms while only the fittest survive and advance. Aside from the obvious problem of attributing to God an inefficient and cruel method for bringing about the first human, the Bible plainly teaches that death came after the first human was in existence.

Theistic evolutionists might argue that Romans 5 refers only to human death and not the deaths of all the “lower” animals, primates and humanoids leading up to man. But what about Romans 8:18-22? Here we are taught that the death we see in the natural world came as a result of human failure. How can the Bible say that the natural world was unwillingly subjected to futility at the time of the fall of mankind if it was already a world of “tooth and claw” struggle for survival?

Furthermore, we read that the glorious freedom we look forward to as God’s children will affect the natural world as well. The whole creation, now groaning, will be set free from slavery to decay, and will be returned to a state of order and glory. If theistic evolution is the correct view of the first two chapters of Genesis, then this Scripture implies that we will return to a primeval world of violent-death survival! It also implies that this return is not only glorious, but desired. Romans 8 could hardly be teaching that! The simple teaching of the Bible is that both human and animal death began as a direct result of the fall.

Theistic evolution may appear to be an ideal way to harmonize evolutionary theory with the early chapters of Genesis. But a closer examination of these chapters and other Scriptures indicates that such harmonization is impossible. It all comes down to this choice: Evolution or God’s Word?

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