

The Evidence for God and Genesis

David's magisterial exposition at HTC in June was very convincing on the scientific proof for the existence of God. Let us have a tour de table to see whether anyone dissents.

However, even if there is convincing proof of design and intelligence, does it equate with our notion or concept of God? In Genesis Ch.1 Jehovah says "Let there be light!". In this context I rather like Ludwig Wittgenstein's comment that in the beginning there was nothing - God said "Let there be light!" and there was still nothing but you could see it better. (Stop me if you've heard it before!)

In Genesis Ch 2 there is a different creation story (the order of creation is different). I believe that here God is Elohim in the Hebrew, which means 'the Lord'. Whereas in Chapter 1 God was outside time and space, by Chapter 3 he is walking in the garden of Eden and therefore has corporeal form. Are Jehovah and Elohim identical? By Chapter 6 the sons of God find that the daughters of man are comely and marry them, and have children by them. (Bit of a puzzler that one!). First mention in the Bible of son of God.

Whatever our conception of God, our notion of his attributes is clear. He is omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent. Does the intelligence responsible for the creation (or intelligences, there could have been more than one) measure up to those attributes?

The creation - dare one say it - is less than perfect. We live in a world where there are earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, disease. Nature is red in tooth and claw. Most animals end up being eaten by other animals. They often die in circumstances of great cruelty. All of this was going on before Man appeared on the scene, therefore has nothing to do with the Fall. Man seems to be an afterthought. The dinosaurs ruled the earth for 60 million years. Then God got fed up with them and sent an asteroid into the Gulf of Mexico. It is almost as though this creation is a prototype - a series of experiments. If man is made in God's image, what sort of man are we talking about - the hominids of the Rift Valley, or us or what follows next? Not forgetting that 'homo sapiens' himself takes many shapes and colours.

Obviously, much of the above is imponderable. How far does science take us? Are we left with any other solution than to have faith that God exists?

Responses

As regards my science talk, clearly I believe that the scientific evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the necessity for a creator, designer god. I think the material in my talk is an accurate and up to date summary of the most important evidence currently available. Anyone who wants the text can e-mail me for a copy.

Of course, this does not prove the evidence of Yahweh, the Christian God, although the god it does demonstrate has many of the attributes of Yahweh (the creator of all, mighty power, consistency, standing outside space time). As I said in my talk, we need another revelation to “see” Yahweh. Such a revelation comes through scripture and personal experience of Jesus.

I believe that the “Let there be light” in Genesis 1 is magnificently consistent with science’s view of the universe initially consisting entirely of photons (the particles which transmit light). It’s even scientifically true that at that stage there was nothing material – just photons!

The idea that Genesis 2 conflicts with Genesis 1 is in my view a mistake. Genesis 1 sets out an account of the entirety of creation whereas Genesis 2 concentrates almost entirely on the creation of man and creation from his perspective and as it impacts him. Thus, I see Genesis 2 as an expansion of an aspect of Genesis 1. Alternatively, one might say that Genesis 1 is creation from God’s perspective and Genesis 2 is creation from man’s perspective. Some aspects often deemed to be in conflict are the order of naming of the animals (Genesis 2:20) and the order of creation of the animals (Genesis 1:20-25) – but these are clearly entirely different things and there is no conflict. Another supposed conflict is in Genesis 2:19 where it appears on the surface that this account places the creation of animals after the creation of Adam. However, this arises out of a misunderstanding of Hebrew, where the tense of a verb is determined by its context. Thus the verb translated as ‘formed’ in Genesis 2:19 should really be ‘had formed’ – indeed the NIV does translate verse 19 in this way. Yet another issue often cited is that of the plants and herbs in Genesis 2:5 and the trees in Genesis 2:9 (in reverse order to Genesis 1:11-12). Here I need to emphasise again that Genesis 2 focuses on issues of direct import to Adam and Eve and not creation in general. Notice that the plants in Genesis 2 need a man to tend them and are thus cultivated plants not just plants in general. Also the trees of Genesis 2 are trees planted in the garden and not trees in general. Certainly Jesus regarded Genesis 1 and 2 as a unified whole – see his quote from both of these chapters in Matthew 19:4-5. We must also note that the literary form of Genesis 2 (epic poem) is quite different from that of Genesis 1 (prose poem).

In any event, in discussing Genesis we must always remember that the literary form of Genesis 1 in Hebrew is that of a prose poem. Thus while I believe Genesis is a correct account of creation it is not to be read like a scientific textbook anymore than we would read a modern poem recounting a factual event in such a way. We must also remember that the bible is generally much more concerned with spiritual issues than material issues. Thus, I believe that attempts to reconcile the Genesis with science by such means as “the days are ages” theory or the “gaps” theory serve no useful purpose.

I think the way the universe has been exquisitely fine tuned for life (one of the proofs of god in my talk) shows God’s benevolence and power. The creation of such a complex universe from nothing surely speaks of power and knowledge that in human terms effectively amount to omnipotence and omniscience. I agree there could have been more than one intelligence, but I see no need to make this more complex assumption and therefore reject it on the basis of Occams Razor.

I don’t agree that the existence of death in the pre-fall world (nature red in tooth and claw) implies a flawed creation. Incidentally, here most of the “young earth” theologians use the issue of death before the fall as their main argument for a young earth. I see no justification for this. I believe the true meaning of scriptures such as Romans 5:12 is that the Fall introduced man to spiritual death – exclusion from eternal life with God – rather than either

man or animals to physical death. This is a much more logical interpretation of the Fall story in Genesis. Adam and Eve did not immediately die when they ate the apple, their death was spiritual in the above sense.

I believe God designed the ecosystem from the beginning to be self-renewing. As creatures die they are partly eaten by other creatures and the balance decomposes and nourishes plants. As the plants grow they are eaten by animals and so the cycle goes. This is so much a part of the world that we see that I think we must accept this as the original design, as part of God's design.

God also appears to be a God of seasons and change. The face of the earth is being constantly remodelled by earthquakes, volcanoes etc. This seems to be a part of God's plan. Again the elimination of certain species (including the dinosaurs) is so prevalent (90% of species which once existed are now extinct) that again we must accept it as part of God's plan. I must agree that I do find disease a little difficult, but perhaps it serves some purpose in the scheme of things which we don't yet comprehend.

I don't think creation was a series of experiments although it was certainly a developmental process in which early forms were later discarded. But then how much more true is this of the universe as a whole which has taken nearly 14 billion years to get to where we are today with whole generations of stars being born and dying to produce the heavy elements needed for life on earth.

Incidentally I have come to believe that the Fall was not in any event the cursing of the entire earth as some translations of Genesis 3:17-18 might imply. The Hebrew word used here is *adamah* and in the NIV this is translated 'ground'. However, the most common translation of *adamah* is 'land', generally used in Hebrew in the sense of a specific parcel of land. Thus, I believe the best interpretation of this passage is that God was cursing the land of the Garden of Eden, so that henceforth it would revert to its ordinary unsubdued state and Adam would have to toil in the conditions existing outside the Garden rather than enjoying the fruits of God's special provision within the Garden. Of course, certain other aspects of the curse (e.g. pain in childbirth) were universal to mankind and have been suffered by humans ever since.

I believe that man is made in God's image in the sense that God breathed His spirit into primitive man, indeed two particular individuals Adam and Eve, at a particular point in history. It is probably useless to speculate exactly when this might have been, although I think the dawn of the Upper Palaeolithic period is likely. This coincides with an unprecedented development of technology, art and cultural sensitivity.