



What's Happening?

As the year progresses, we hope to bring you new opportunities to learn more about the Reasons To Believe Ministry and get involved in the local chapter. Our next chapter event is tentatively scheduled for May. We'll keep you posted about the date, location and topic.

For those who want to grow in the area of apologetics, we encourage you to take a look at RTB's educational programs. Through Reasons Academy, you can take the "Good Science, Good Faith" program, a high school level science apologetics course. For those wanting more advanced training, Reasons Institute offers college level courses. Topics include Creation and the Bible, Creation vs. Evolution, Astronomy and Design, World Religions and Biblical Archaeology. Check them out!

Reasons To Believe is at the forefront of trying to reach unbelievers by using science to remove the obstacles to faith in Jesus Christ. Over the past years we have sponsored many outreach events and we plan to continue that effort. The harvest is great, but the workers are few. We ask you to think prayerfully about how you might contribute to our local ministry.

As always, we welcome your questions and comments. Contact us at seattle@reasons.org or via our facebook page,  RTB Puget Sound.

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When Beliefs Become Blinders (Part 1 of 4)

By Greg Moore

Like many Christians, I'm fascinated by the age of the earth debate. Recently, I came across the article, "Systematic Theology Texts and the Age of the Earth," by young-earth creationist Terry Mortenson.¹ In the essay, Mortenson critiques the old-earth views of Wayne Grudem, Millard Erickson, Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest.

It's understandable why Mortenson targets these theologians. They are mainstream scholars, their theology textbooks² are widely respected and their views carry considerable weight in the church. What's surprising are the charges he levels against them—claiming that their old-earth teachings are mislead Christians, undermine biblical authority and damage the foundations of Christianity.³



The Church is by no means unified on the nature of the "days" of creation. Nor has it ever been. Since the early church, Christians have disagreed on this matter and it has never been viewed as an issue of orthodoxy.⁴ So, there is nothing wrong with debate, provided the disagreement is charitable and fosters unity in the Body of Christ (Romans 14:1).

Unfortunately, that's where Mortenson crosses the line. Rather than promoting friendly debate, his article seeks to eliminate the opposition by characterizing old-earth creationism as a fringe position that must be completely rejected.⁵ This is self-serving and wrongly suggests that Bible-believing Christians have no choice but to accept the young-earth view.

In this article I will examine the evidence Mortenson puts forth to support the claim that old-earth is unbiblical. What I will show is his analysis is flawed and applies biblical data selectively to exaggerate the strength of the young-earth view.

PREFACE

Mortenson begins his article by presenting eleven arguments for

the young-earth view.⁶ Most of those claims are addressed at length elsewhere.⁷ For this reason, I will focus on two issues Mortenson highlights “because they are so important and overlooked or resisted by the authors under consideration (as well as by nearly all other old-earth creationists).”⁸ The first deals with the issue of animal mortality, the second with God’s character.

ANIMAL MORTALITY

Mortenson presents a lengthy defense of the young-earth tenet that there was no animal death before God’s judgment on Adam and Eve (the Fall). He opens with:

Simply put, the evolutionary idea of millions of years is diametrically opposed to the Bible’s teaching about death.⁹

He then builds his case on two propositions: (1) animal death contradicts God’s proclamation that the creation was “very good,” and (2) pre-Fall animal death destroys Christ’s redemptive work. Let’s explore these two claims.

Animal Death Contradicts God’s “Very Good” Proclamation

Mortenson contends that a “very good” creation would not include animal death. He states:

...could the God of Scripture really describe as “very good” a fossil graveyard of thousands of feet of sedimentary rocks covering the whole earth and containing billions of fossils of former living things? ... If God called all this death “very good” ... then...God lied.¹⁰

The statement in question is found in Genesis 1:31 which tells us that God saw all that he had made and it was very good. The text does not explain the meaning of this statement and the Hebrew word for “very” (me’od) merely expresses the idea of more than good.¹¹ So, all we can say with certainty is that God was pleased with his creative work and it fulfilled his divine purpose.¹² Those who claim this proclamation excludes animal death are reading their personal beliefs into the text.

Young-earth creationists believe the pre-Fall world was a blissful paradise where man lived in perfect harmony with animals. However, that is inconsistent with God’s instruction to Adam to subdue (kabash) the earth and rule over (radah) every living thing (Genesis 1:28). These Hebrew words imply an aggressive, forceful stewardship and indicate the pre-Fall world was harsh and needed to be tamed.¹³ Therefore, the logical interpretation of this statement is that animals were living in a wild state that would have included predation and death.

Numerous passages also tell us that God provides animals as food for carnivorous beasts and that is “good” (e.g., Job 38:39-41, 39:27-30; Psalm 104:21, 27-28). There is no suggestion that we are to view carnivory as an abnormality resulting from the Fall. Instead, the picture Scripture paints is that predator-prey relationships have been part of God’s good provision from the beginning.¹⁴ So, “very good” must allow animal death because that is something God considers “good.”¹⁵

Mortenson argues that God’s designation of food supplies rules-out

Bible & Science In the News

■ Combating Climate Change

This RTB article by Jeff Zweerink discusses how most global warming discussions focus on reducing carbon dioxide emissions, while more immediate results come from reducing methane and black carbon. This can have a significant impact and be done without the breaking the bank. Go to www.reasons.org/article/combating-climate-change.

■ The First Freedom

This *tothesource* article by Wesley Smith reviews Obamacare and contends that it is forcing religious organizations to comport with favored secular values and thus limiting religious freedom. In other words, he believes it is reducing religious freedom to merely the freedom to worship. Go to: www.tothesource/2_1_2012/2_1_2012.htm.

■ Why These 20 Amino Acids?

Of the hundreds of amino acids that exist in nature, only 20 comprise the proteins found in every organism. This RTB article by Fuz Rana discusses how recent work from the University of Hawaii indicates this is the optimal set and something that would not be expected from evolutionary processes. Go to www.reasons.org/articles/why-these-20-amino-acids.

■ What’s at Stake

This *tothesource* article by Benjamin Wiker contends that Obamacare’s mandate that Catholic hospitals and universities supply birth control and abortion to employees is more than an issue of religious liberty—It is an attempt to remake the Church according to the desires of the state. Go to www.tothesource.org/2_15_2012/2_15_2012.htm

■ Study of Languages Supports Bible

This RTB article by Fuz Rana discusses how a recent study used language to trace man’s origin. The results provide independent support of the Out-of-Africa model, thus strengthening the biblical creation model. Go to: www.reasons.org/articles/speaking-of-adam-and-eve-study-of-languages-supports-biblical-account-of-human-origins.

pre-Fall predation:

Man, animals and birds were originally vegetarian according to Genesis 1:29-30.¹⁶

This passage focuses on man's dietary needs. First, God tells Adam and Eve that seed-bearing plants and fruit-yielding seed "shall be food for you" (v. 29). This specifies that Adam and Eve are only allowed to eat certain plants and fruits. Next God says "I have given every green plant for food" to the beasts and birds (v. 30). This indicates animals are not subject to Adam and Eve's restrictions and can eat all vegetation. It does not say they cannot eat meat.¹⁷ Young-earth creationists take every green plant to mean only green plants, but the text does not state that.¹⁸

Notice also the animals God created on the sixth "day" of creation (Genesis 1:24-25). The first kind—cattle (behemah)—usually refers to domestic animals that are herbivores.¹⁹ The second kind—creeping things (remeś)—refers to small rodents and reptiles.²⁰ The third kind—beasts (chayah)—refers to wild animals.²¹ The text does not say if they are herbivores or carnivores. However, when we examine how chayah is used in Scripture, it usually refers to animals that eat flesh.²² So, this strongly suggests that the "kinds" God created included carnivores.

Mortenson claims herbivores were transformed into carnivores at the Fall:

The serpent was cursed, along with other animals, resulting in a physical transformation. It is reasonable to assume that the other cursed animals were also altered physically in some way (Genesis 3:14).²³

Throughout Genesis 3 Satan is referred to as the serpent. "Serpent" comes from the Hebrew nahash which is the word for snake. Opinions vary as to whether the serpent is an actual snake or a metaphor for Satan.²⁴ However, let's assume Satan appeared to Eve in the guise of a snake and evaluate Mortenson's statement on that basis.

After the Fall, the serpent is sentenced to grovel on his belly, eat dust, be detested and eventually be bruised on the head by the woman's seed (Genesis 3:14-15). These statements continue to depict Satan as a snake. Whether we take the passage literally or figuratively, nothing suggests that Satan underwent a physical transformation. So, there is no logical basis for claiming that the animals underwent a physically altered at the Fall.

Mortenson contends Isaiah's prophetic statements rule-out pre-Fall animal death:

... [when Christ returns] we will see the restoration... of all things...to a state similar to the pre-Fall

world. Then there will be no more carnivorous behavior...(Isaiah 11:6-9)²⁵

The Bible tell us that this creation will be destroyed and replaced with a new heaven and new earth (e.g., 2 Peter 3:10-13; Isaiah 65:17, Revelation 21:1). This will not be a restoration of the conditions of Eden, but a new reality where we will live in glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42) and not even remember the former things (Isaiah 65:17). Since we will exist in a new and different form, the same must be true of the creatures that will inhabit that new creation. So, whether carnivory is eliminated in that future state really has no bearing on how animals behaved in the original creation.²⁶

It is also questionable whether Isaiah's description of wolves and lambs peacefully coexisting refers to predator-prey relationships (Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25). Many theologians believe these passages speak allegorically of Christ's eschatological reign when hostile nations will live together peacefully because man's cruel and violent nature is subdued. However, whether they are meant to be taken literally or figuratively, they are entirely forward looking and do not even hint that situation Isaiah describes applies to Eden.²⁷

As a concluding argument Mortenson states:

... if the millions of years of death and extinction really did occur, then that "very good" creation was considerably worse than the world we now inhabit ... So, if the millions of years really happened, then the Fall actually improved the world from what it was in the "very good" pre-Fall creation. In this case, the curse at the Fall would actually be a blessing!²⁸

The Fall was primarily a spiritual matter. When Adam and Eve sinned, it severed their communion with God, destroyed their righteousness and holiness, and brought the curse of death on them.²⁹ As a result, they were driven from God's presence to a new state of sin, condemnation and spiritual death. Therefore, claiming pre-Fall animal death diminishes the magnitude of the Fall places too much emphasis on the physical as opposed to the spiritual. It is the change in man's relationship with God that is the measure, not something to do with the natural order.

There is an even larger problem for the young-earth view—pre-Fall animals really had no way to avoid death. Adam and Eve were mortal beings that were capable of death, but God granted them immortality by eating from the tree of life. If they were mortal, the animals must have also been mortal; however unlike Adam and Eve, they were not given access to the tree of life. So, lacking any biblical statement to the contrary, we must conclude animals were subject to death.³⁰ Perhaps animals didn't die within supernatural confines of Eden, but it must have been part of the created order outside the Garden.

One of the strongest declarations of this comes from

Psalm 104. This is one of a handful of texts scattered throughout the Old Testament texts that supplement and reflect poetically upon the Genesis creation account.³¹ Notice in verses 29-30 that God takes away creatures' breath and they die; then God creates new ones to renew the face of the ground. It is well accepted that God ceased his creative activity on the sixth "day" of creation (Genesis 1:31-2:1). So, the animal death that is spoken of in this passage must have occurred in the "very good" creation before the entrance of sin into the world.

The next article, which will appear in the April newsletter, will discuss the claim that pre-Fall animal death destroys Christ's redemptive work.

Greg Moore is a trained RTB apologist and works for the City of Everett. He is active in the Seattle Chapter and publishes the chapter newsletter.

ENDNOTES

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3. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology...", 176, 196, 197.
4. John Millam, "Coming to Grips with the Early Church Fathers' Perspective on Genesis," http://www.godandscience.org/youngearth/genesis_days_church_fathers.html.
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6. Ibid., 176.
7. For example see Rodney Whitefield, "Genesis One and the Age of the Earth: What Does the Bible Say," http://www.creationingenesis.com/Genesis_One_and_the_Age_of_the_Earth.pdf; Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 58-63; Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 267-273; Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004).
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9. Ibid., 178.
10. Ibid., 180.
11. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, Moody Publishers, 1980), 487.
12. John Millam, "The Origin of Physical Death," <http://www.reasons.org/files/chapters/seattle/200906.pdf>.
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15. Rodney Whitefield, "Very Very Good, Very Good, and Animal Death before the Fall," <http://www.creationingenesis.com/VeryVeryGood.pdf>.
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17. John Munday Jr., "Creature Mortality: From Creation or The Fall?"
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20. Ibid., 850.
21. Ibid., 281.
22. Rich Deem, "Did God Create Carnivores on the Sixth Day," <http://www.godandscience.org/youngearth/carnivores.html>.
23. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology...", 178.
24. Harris, Archer, Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, 571.
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26. Irons, "Animal Death Before the Fall: What Does the Bible Say?"; John Munday Jr., "Creature Mortality: From Creation or The Fall?"
27. Ibid., Rich Deem, "No Death Before the Fall—A Young-Earth Problem," <http://www.godandscience.org>.

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31. Irons, "Animal Death Before the Fall: What Does the Bible Say?"



Seattle Chapter Reasons To Believe

Who Are We?

The Seattle Chapter of Reasons To Believe is a local extension of the worldwide, interdenominational Reasons To Believe ministry. We exist to support our parent organization and foster local involvement in the ministry. We serve the Puget Sound and are composed of Christians of different ages and backgrounds.

It is our conviction the same God who created the universe inspired the Bible. Therefore, God's Word must agree with the facts of nature. We reject the notion that science and the Bible are at odds and provide a scientifically-sound and Biblically-faithful alternative to Darwinism and young-Earth creationism.

What Do We Do?

Our mission is to remove the doubts of skeptics and strengthen the faith of believers. We provide scientific, historical and philosophical evidence that supports the Christian worldview and helps remove barriers to a belief in God, the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We carry out this mission by:

- Helping people access RTB and other scientifically and biblically sound resources.
- Bringing nationally-known speakers into the area to promote the scientific reliability of the Bible.
- Assembling a team of local apologists to address questions about science and the Bible.
- Building alliances with local churches, ministries and groups to maximize the exposure of RTB.
- Reaching out to unbelievers with gentleness and respect, to expose them to God's word.

We welcome your involvement and support. For more information, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to: Seattle RTB, PO Box 99683, Seattle, WA 98139-0683.

Questions? Get Answers.

If you're looking for scientific support for your faith or answers to questions about God, the Bible, and science, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Or call the RTB hotline seven days a week, 5:00 to 7:00 PM at 626-335-5282.