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## Article

# Beyond the Cosmic Fall and Natural Evil

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*The traditional doctrine of the cosmic fall asserts that God launched natural evil upon the world because Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. Rooted deeply in a concordist hermeneutic of Genesis 1–3, this doctrine claims that the Creator originally made a “very good” world (Gen. 1:31), and then following Adam’s sin, he “cursed” the earth (Gen. 3:17). This article argues that belief in the cosmic fall and natural evil is based ultimately in ancient science, ancient origins motifs, and the juxtaposition of two conflicting ancient phenomenological perspectives of the operation of nature. In particular, the Hebrew terms *tōb* (good) in Genesis 1 and *‘ārār* (curse) in Genesis 3 refer to physical attributes and nature’s functionality and malfunctionality, respectively. The optimistic Priestly writer perceived an idyllic and bountiful creation; whereas the pessimistic Jahwist writer viewed a dark sinister world bound by death, suffering, and limited productivity. Thus, the cosmic fall in Genesis 3 from an original paradisiacal state in Genesis 1 is an artifact of redaction.*

*This article challenges the concordist interpretation of the Bible’s overarching meta-narrative of Creation-Fall-Redemption. It suggests that there never was an idyllic *de novo* creation followed by a cosmic fall with natural evil thrust upon the whole creation, and consequently there is no need for a cosmic redemption from the bondage of any curse. Instead, these ancient scientific paradigms are incident vessels that deliver the inerrant spiritual truths that God created the world, humans have fallen into sin, and Jesus redeems us from all our sinful acts. The article concludes that the concept of natural evil has no place within the Lord’s creation and that the fulfillment of theodicy is found only in Christ (Matt. 5:19).*

Christians have struggled with the problem of evil throughout the ages. The doctrine of the cosmic fall has traditionally offered a theodicy to justify the existence of natural evil.<sup>1</sup> This belief asserts that God launched suffering and death upon the entire world because Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden as described in Genesis 3. Or stated another way, evil in nature did not exist prior to

human sin because, in Genesis 1, God had originally made a very good and perfect creation. According to the cosmic fall, divine punishment for Adam’s sinfulness resulted in significant physical changes to the natural world.

Protestant reformer John Calvin presents a classic example of the doctrine of the cosmic fall and the origin of natural evil. In his *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, he argues that humanity was “subjected to death” because it was “a just punishment which God, in the person of Adam, has indicted on the human race.”<sup>2</sup> Calvin adds that “the earth was cursed on account of Adam” and “the whole order of nature was subverted by the sin of man.”<sup>3</sup> He explains,

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It is to be observed, that in the works of the six days, those things alone are comprehended which tend to the lawful and genuine adorning of the world. It is *subsequently* that we shall find God saying, "Let the earth bring forth thorns and briers" [Gen. 3:18], by which he intimates that the appearance of the earth should be different from what it had been in the beginning [Gen. 1]. But the explanation is at hand; many things which are now seen in the world are rather *corruptions* of it than any part of its proper furniture.<sup>4</sup>

To use a modern category, Calvin was a young earth creationist. He believed that God had originally created a perfect world.<sup>5</sup> Commenting on the divine declaration that the creation was "very good" in Genesis 1:31, he notes that God "pronounces it *perfectly* good; that we may know that there is in the symmetry of God's works the highest *perfection*, to which nothing can be added."<sup>6</sup>

Calvin lists a number of "corruptions" that entered the world through God's judgment of Adam's sin, and he deems these as "evils," affirming his belief in natural evil.

Moses does not enumerate all the disadvantages in which man, by sin, has involved himself; for it appears that all the *evils* of the present life, which experience proves to be innumerable, have proceeded from the same fountain. The inclemency of the air, frost, thunders, unseasonable rains, drought, hail, and whatever is disorderly in the world, are the fruits of sin. Nor is there any other primary cause of diseases ... For ever since man declined from his high original [state], it became necessary that the world should gradually degenerate from its nature. We must come to this conclusion respecting the existence of fleas, caterpillars, and other noxious insects. In all these, I say, there is some deformity of the world, which ought by no means to be regarded as in the order of nature, since it proceeds rather from the sin of man than from the hand of God. Truly these things were created by God, but by God as an avenger.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to animal predation, Calvin asks, "Whence comes the cruelty of brutes, which prompts the stronger to seize and rend and devour with dreadful violence the weaker animals?"<sup>8</sup> He notes that "there would certainly have been no discord among the creatures of God, if they had remained in their first and original condition."<sup>9</sup> But "when they exercise cruelty towards each other ... it is an

evidence of the disorder which has sprung from the sinfulness of man."<sup>10</sup> Calvin believed that animals were vegetarians in the original creation and points to Genesis 1:30 and God's provision for the animals, "I give every green plant for food." Calvin adds, "For if the stain of sin had not polluted the world, no animal would have been addicted to prey on blood, but the fruits of the earth would have sufficed for all, according to the method which God had appointed."<sup>11</sup> Animal predation, then, is a natural evil and a consequence of the cosmic fall.

Calvin also appeals to the apostle Paul to support his belief in the cosmic fall. In Romans 8:20, Paul asserts that "the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it." Calvin writes,

At the present time, when we look upon the world corrupted, and as if degenerated from its original creation, let that expression of Paul recur to our mind, that the creature is liable to vanity, not willingly, but through our fault (Rom. 8:20), and thus let us mourn, being admonished of our just condemnation.<sup>12</sup>

These passages by Calvin summarize the fundamental tenets of the doctrine of the cosmic fall: (1) God created a world that was originally very good and perfect; (2) sin entered the world through a historical individual named "Adam"; (3) God judged Adam and launched corruption, disease, predation, and death upon the entire world; and (4) there are aspects of nature that are indeed evil. The cosmic fall in Genesis 3 is the first theodicy in the Bible. It provides a justification for the existence of suffering and death in the world made by an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving personal God—Adam sinned and God judged him by thrusting the cosmic fall upon the whole creation.

However, science has made remarkable advances in understanding the natural world since the sixteenth century and Calvin's belief in the cosmic fall. The fossil record offers overwhelming evidence that predation, suffering, and death have been on Earth for hundreds of millions of years prior to the appearance of humans and their sins. Geology also provides indisputable evidence that floods, droughts, and ice ages have occurred throughout Earth history, indicating that they are not "the fruits of sin." And environmental science reveals that "noxious insects" play an essential role in maintaining ecological

# Article

## *Beyond the Cosmic Fall and Natural Evil*

balance. In fact, the so-called “evils of the present life” such as animal predation are necessary components in a normally functioning biosphere.

Calvin’s belief in the cosmic fall and natural evil is based on the assumption that the opening chapters of the Bible are a record of actual events at the beginning of time. But questions must be asked. Are the origins accounts in Genesis an outline of real events in nature that occurred in the distant past? Does scripture actually reveal that God created a world that was originally perfect? And is the idea of natural evil found in the Bible?

### Ancient Science, Ancient Motifs, and Genesis Accounts of Origins

Biblical interpretation is the key to determining whether or not scripture affirms a cosmic fall and natural evil. Throughout most of church history, Christians have embraced concordism. This interpretative approach assumes that statements about the natural world in the Bible align with the facts of science. John Calvin was clearly a concordist, and today most evangelicals accept this interpretive approach.<sup>13</sup> It must be acknowledged that concordism is a reasonable assumption. God created the world and he inspired the Bible, and to believe that there is a correspondence between science and scripture is a fair expectation. But is a concordist interpretation of the Genesis accounts of origins correct?

My answer is “no.” The best evidence against concordism comes from passages that deal with the creation of the heavens in Genesis 1. On the second day of creation, God creates a firmament (Hebrew *rāqîa’*) to separate a heavenly sea of “waters above” from an earthly sea of “waters below.”<sup>14</sup> Then on the fourth day, God places the sun, moon, and stars in the firmament. Of course, this understanding of the structure of the world makes perfect sense from an ancient phenomenological perspective.<sup>15</sup> In fact, this conceptualization of the structure of the heavens was the science-of-the-day in the ancient Near East, as depicted in figure 1.<sup>16</sup>

Acknowledging the ancient astronomy in Genesis 1 provides a very significant interpretive precedent. Creation day two begins, “God said, ‘Let there be a firmament ...’”; and day four opens, “God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament ...’” However, there

is no firmament overhead; and the sun, moon, and stars are not embedded in a solid heavenly dome. God’s very words (“Let there be ...”) in the Word of God do not align with physical reality. Genesis 1 is not an account revealing actual events in the creation of the heavens. Therefore, to state the interpretive precedent incisively, *the Bible makes statements about how God acted in origins, but these events never happened.*<sup>17</sup>

This precedent poses absolutely no threat to scripture or to our faith if we recognize that the Holy Spirit accommodated in the revelatory process and allowed the biblical authors to use the science-of-the-day. The ancient astronomy in Genesis 1 is an incidental vessel that delivers the inerrant spiritual truth that God is the Creator of the heavens. To be more specific, the Bible uses the ancient concept of *de novo* creation, whereby a divine being creates something quickly and completely (fully developed).<sup>18</sup> In this way, the *attribution of divine creative action* in the origin of the heavens in Genesis 1 is filtered and accommodated through ancient astronomical categories.

Recognizing the ancient astronomy in Genesis 1 naturally leads to the question of whether the Bible also has an ancient biology, and in particular, an ancient understanding of the origin of life. Most ancient people embraced the ancient biological notion that living organisms were immutable (unchanging),

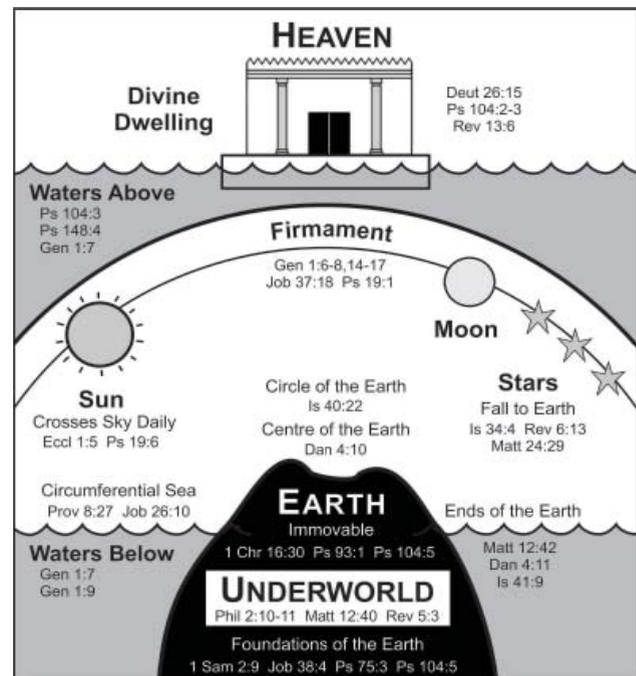


Figure 1. The 3-Tier Universe

because from their ancient phenomenological perspective, a certain kind of creature only descended from the same kind of creature. For example, they saw that a goat always gave birth to a goat, which always gave birth to a goat, et cetera. In attempting to understand the origin of living organisms, the ancients quite reasonably reversed (retrojected) the series of immutable organisms back in time to the *de novo* creation of the first individual (monogenism) or group (polygenism) of every kind of creature. Thus, a goat today was birthed from an earlier goat, which was birthed from an even earlier goat ... which was ultimately birthed from an original goat/s that was created *de novo* by God or the gods.

The ancient biological notion of immutability appears in Genesis 1. This chapter states ten times that living organisms were created and reproduced “according to their/its kinds” (v. 11, once; v. 12, twice; v. 21, twice; v. 24, twice; v. 25, thrice). Similar to the creation of the heavens, the *attribution of divine creative action* in the origin of life is accommodated through the ancient concept of *de novo* creation, whereby the original kinds of creatures were made quickly and completely. As a consequence, Genesis 1 does not reveal how God actually created living organisms.

The implications of the *de novo* creation of life for human origins should be evident. The creation of Adam is the retrojective conclusion of the ancient biological concept that humans are immutable. Stated more precisely, Adam never existed because he is an ancient conceptualization of human origins.<sup>19</sup>

The *de novo* creation of a human/s by a divine being using clay or earth in craftsman-like fashion is found in other ancient Near Eastern accounts of origins.<sup>20</sup> This creative mechanism appears in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in which a pinch of clay is used to make a man.<sup>21</sup> In the *Myth of Enki and Ninmah*, an intoxicated divine being forms seven imperfect humans from moist earth.<sup>22</sup> A goddess in the *Epic of Atrahasis* mixes clay with the blood from a slain god to fashion seven males and seven females.<sup>23</sup> And in the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, the Egyptian god Khnum creates people from clay and fashions them on a potter’s wheel.<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, these examples are similar to the creation of the first human in Genesis 2:7, “And the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,

and the man became a living being.” Once again, the *attribution of divine creative action* in scripture is accommodated and filtered through ancient scientific categories of origins. With this being the case, Genesis 2:7 does not reveal how God actually created the first man.

It follows that since the Bible has an ancient biology regarding the origin of life, then scripture should also have an ancient biology regarding the origin of suffering and death.<sup>25</sup> To understand this notion, it is necessary to appreciate one of the main purposes of origins accounts. They are etiological and function as scientific and historiographical paradigms.<sup>26</sup> In particular, they offer explanations for the origin and existence of *both* the good and the bad in the world, including things, situations, people, tribes, and nations.

Two motifs often appear in ancient accounts of origins: (1) *De Novo* Creation Motif—an original peaceful and idyllic world usually characterized by intimate presence of heavenly being/s, abundant food (often vegetarianism), friendship and communication with animals, no work, and no death; and (2) Lost Idyllic Age Motif—a cosmic disruption in the distant past whereby the effects of this event continue to impact people and the world negatively in the present.<sup>27</sup>

In his encyclopedia of *Creation Myths of the World*, Leeming observes,

Usually, the original world created by a deity or deities is a world in which death does not exist ... Typically, death enters the world *after* humans,<sup>28</sup> corrupted by a power such as a devil or trickster, commit some essential crime that leads to a loss of immortality, a loss of the original paradise.<sup>29</sup>

The existence of death, suffering, and the struggle to survive demanded an explanation, since ancient people faced these nearly every day. To assume that these brutal realities were the judgment and punishment of God or the gods angered by human misbehavior was quite reasonable. In many ways, the ancient motif of the lost idyllic age was one of the earliest theodicies conceived by humans.

Genesis 3 has a number of features found in the lost idyllic age motif—a sinister trickster in the form of a talking snake (vv. 1-5), the disruption of an original idyllic period because of human sinfulness

# Article

## *Beyond the Cosmic Fall and Natural Evil*

(vv. 15–19), the alienation of animals from humans (v. 15), the procurement of food through hard labor (vv. 17–18), the entrance of suffering and death into the world (vv. 16, 19), and the loss of God’s intimate presence since humans are driven out of the garden (v. 24). These striking similarities suggest that the Holy Spirit accommodated in the revelatory process and allowed the inspired author of Genesis 3 to use the motifs-of-the-day, such as the lost idyllic age. This motif functions as an incidental vessel to transport the inerrant spiritual truth that God judges humans for their sinfulness.

Similar to the attribution of divine creative action being filtered through the ancient motif of *de novo* creation in Genesis 1 and 2, the *attribution of divine judgmental action* in Genesis 3 is accommodated through the ancient lost idyllic age motif. To recast the interpretive precedent above, *the Bible makes statements about how God launched suffering and death upon the whole creation, but these events never happened.*<sup>30</sup>

To conclude, concordism fails to recognize and respect the ancient science and ancient origins motifs in the Bible. Concordist interpretations of the Genesis accounts of origins, like that of John Calvin, have led most Christians throughout history to believe in the cosmic fall and natural evil. However, these beliefs are rooted ultimately in an ancient phenomenological perspective of nature. Adam never existed and as a consequence there is no causal connection between his sin and the origin of physical suffering and death. Therefore, the cosmic fall never happened and natural evil never entered the world in divine judgment of sin.

In order to move beyond concordism, Christians today must separate (and not conflate) the incidental ancient paradigms in scripture from the inerrant spiritual truths—that God is both the Creator of the world and the Judge of human sinfulness.

## Sources and Genesis Accounts of Origins

Concordist readings of the first chapters of scripture have also led generations of Christians to assume that the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 is an elaboration of the events on the sixth day of creation in Genesis 1. But comparing these two chapters reveals numerous difficulties. For example, in Genesis 1,

birds were created on day five before the creation of male and female humans on day six. However, in Genesis 2, birds were made after the creation of Adam and prior to Eve.<sup>31</sup> Similar problems exist with land animals and fruit trees.<sup>32</sup> Put in perspective, conflicts in the order of creative events are ultimately incidental since most Christians would agree that when birds were created relative to humans is utterly irrelevant to their faith. Yet these inconsistencies offer more biblical evidence that points away from concordism and the assumption that scripture reveals scientific facts about origins.

Conflicts also indicate that the Holy Spirit inspired two independent creation accounts, commonly termed “Priestly” (P) for Genesis 1 and “Jahwist” (J) for Genesis 2. God then led a redactor to juxtapose these two renditions. This divinely inspired process is similar to that of how the four Gospels of the life of Jesus were written and then compiled together in the New Testament.

It is reasonable to ask whether the Genesis accounts of origins also feature two conflicting views regarding the character of the natural world. To answer this question, the sources in Genesis 1–11 must be identified.<sup>33</sup> The P account of origins includes creation (Gen. 1:1–2:3), genealogies (Gen 5:1–28, 30–32; 9:28–29; 11:10–26, 32), flood (Gen. 6:9b–22; 7:6, 9, 11, 13–16a, 18a, 19–21, 24; 8:1–2a, 3b–5, 7, 13a, 14–19; 9:1–18a, 19; 10:1b), and nations after the flood (10:2–7, 20, 22–23, 31–32). The J origins account comprises creation (Gen. 2:4b–25), fall of humans into sin and cosmic fall (Gen. 3:1–4:17), genealogy (Gen. 4:17–24, 26b), flood (Gen. 6:1–8; 7:1–5, 7–8, 10, 12, 16b–17, 18b, 22–23; 8:2b–3a, 6, 8–12, 13b, 20–22), nations after the flood (9:18b, 20–27; 10:8–19, 21, 24–30), and confusion of language (11:1–9).

Stylistic differences between Genesis 1 and 2 provide further evidence that these chapters were originally two separate creation accounts. The P author uses a poetic (structured) and repetitive writing style. Genesis 1 is framed on a pair of parallel panels as shown in figure 2. Each creation day also follows a basic formula: introduction (God said), command (Let it be), completion (It was so), judgment (God saw it was good), and temporal referent (Evening and morning—the *n*<sup>th</sup> day). In contrast, the J author uses free-flowing narrative with little structure in Genesis 2. His style is also distinguished by allegorical features: a fast-talking snake, two mystical

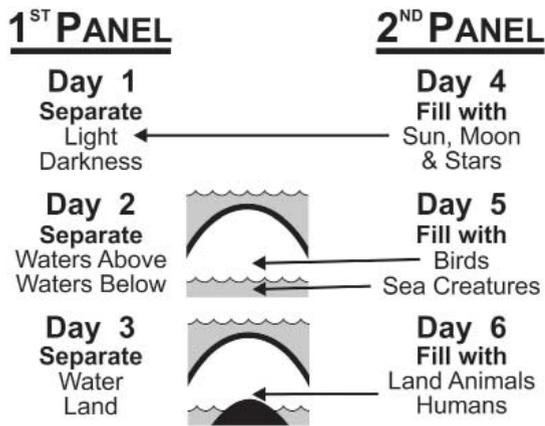


Figure 2. The Parallel Panels in the Priestly Creation Account

trees with one imparting eternal life and the other knowledge of good and evil, cherubim (composite creatures like the Sphinx in Egypt), a spinning and flaming sword, and word play such as *ādām* (man, earthling, Adam) and *'ādāmāh* (earth, ground).

In particular, the flood account in Genesis 6–9 intertwines verses from the P and J sources.<sup>34</sup> Reassembly of the original P and J flood accounts produces two coherent renditions.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the terminology in the P flood is similar to the P creation (Genesis 1) as is the J flood to the J creation (Genesis 2).<sup>36</sup> Typical of the poetic style of the P author, a chiasm emerges in the reassembled P flood (figure 3).

The weaving of P and J verses also appears in Genesis 10 with the nations that arise after the flood. Reconstructing the P version produces a concise account with a definitive structure (figure 4) in con-

- A Noah & His Sons before the Flood (6:9b-12)
- B Promise to Flood & Making Ark (13-17)
- C God & the Covenant (18)
- D Preservation of Life & Food to Live (19-22)
- E Entering the Ark (7:6, 9, 11, 13-16a)
- F Mountains Covered (18-20)
- G **150 Days** Waters Prevail (21, 24)
- CENTER GOD REMEMBERS NOAH** (8:1a)
- G' **150 Days** Waters Decrease (1b, 2a, 3b)
- F' Mountains Uncovered (4-5, 7, 13a, 14a)
- E' Leaving the Ark (15-18)
- D' Multiplication of Life & Food to Live (9:1-7)
- C' God & the Covenant (9:8-10)
- B' Promise Never to Flood & Making Covenant (11-17)
- A' Noah & His Sons after the Flood (18a, 19; 10:1b)

Figure 3. The Chiasm in the Priestly Flood Account. The chiasmic center in Genesis 8:1a presents the primary message of faith—God remembers the righteous man in the midst of his judgment of sin.

**10:2 SONS OF JAPHETH:**

- Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshek & Tiras.
- <sup>3</sup>Sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath & Togarmah.
- <sup>4</sup>Sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim & Dodanim.
- <sup>5</sup>From these the maritime nations spread into their lands each with its own **language** by their clans within their nations.

**6 SONS OF HAM:**

- Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan.
- <sup>7</sup>Sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah & Sabteka.
- <sup>20</sup>These are the sons of Ham by their clans and by their **languages**, in their lands and in their nations.

**22 SONS OF SHEM:**

- Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud & Aram.
- <sup>23</sup>Sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether & Meshek.
- <sup>31</sup>These are the sons of Shem by their clans and by their **languages**, in their lands and by their nations.
- <sup>32</sup>These are the clans of Noah's sons, by their lines, in their nations. From these the nations spread on the earth after the flood.

Figure 4. The Structure of the Priestly Post-Flood Nations Account

trast to the wordy and free-flowing J rendition.<sup>37</sup> Note that the P account in Genesis 10 refers to different languages. The P author does not have a confusion of language episode. Instead, this event appears only with the J author who makes no reference to languages in his account of nations after the flood. In addition, combining the P genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 along with reference to Isaac produces a definitive framework (figure 5). These genealogies also include a repetitive formula for each individual, typifying the poetic writing style of P.

Finally, the P author often uses the stylistic numbers 5 and 7 and their multiples. For example, Genesis 1 repeats the divine name "God" (*'Elohīm*) 35 times (5×7). In the P flood, the waters prevail and decrease during periods of 150 days (10×15). Noah's sons and their descendants total 35 individuals (15 including Japheth; 10, Ham; 10, Shem) in the P post-flood account. And the Genesis 5 and 11 genealogies, including Isaac, total 25 people (5×5) and feature numerous multiples of 5 and 7 (15 multiples of 5 in the former and 10 in the latter).

In reassembling the Priestly and Jahwist sources, significant differences emerge between their views of the natural world. First and foremost, *there is no cosmic fall in the P account of origins*. In fact, there is no connection between sin and death, and no hint that death is divine punishment for sin.<sup>38</sup> Immediately following the P creation account (Genesis 1), the P author introduces a genealogy (Genesis 5) in which

# Article

## Beyond the Cosmic Fall and Natural Evil

	Age at Son's Birth	Years Lived after Birth	
1. Adam	<b>130</b>	<b>800</b>	
2. Seth	<b>105</b>	807	
3. Enosh	<b>90</b>	<b>815</b>	
4. Kenan	<b>70</b>	<b>840</b>	
5. Mahalalel	<b>65</b>	<b>830</b>	
6. Jared	162	<b>800</b>	
7. Enoch	<b>65</b>	<b>300</b>	
8. Mathuselah	187	782	
9. Lamech	182	<b>595</b>	
10. Noah	<b>500</b>	<b>450</b>	
11. Shem      Ham      Japheth			
	Shem	<b>100</b>	<b>500</b>
12. Arpachshad	<b>35</b>	403	
13. Shelah	<b>30</b>	403	
14. Eber	<b>34</b>	<b>430</b>	
15. Peleg	<b>30</b>	209	
16. Reu	<b>32</b>	207	
17. Serug	<b>30</b>	<b>200</b>	
18. Nahor	29	119	
19. Terah	<b>70</b>	<b>135</b>	
20. Abram      Nahor      Haran			
	Abram	<b>100</b>	<b>75</b>
21. Isaac	<b>60</b>	<b>120</b>	

Figure 5. The Framework in the Priestly Genealogies. The ages and time periods in bold numbers indicate multiples of 5.

nine of the ten individuals die. Death is presented as being perfectly normal following an extremely long life averaging 912 years. In addition, there is no mention whatsoever that God cursed and changed the physical world in judgment of human sin.<sup>39</sup> Instead, the P writer in Genesis 6:11–13 identifies that human violence is the corrupt and destructive (*shāḥat*, 3 times) element in the creation. As punishment, God launches the flood. Though the P author acknowledges the gravity of human sin, the only sinful events he records in his account of origins are these three verses.

Overall the tone of the P rendition of origins is uplifting and optimistic. In using stylistic 5s and 7s, the P creation account declares the work of the Creator as being “good” (*tōb*) six times (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and “very good” once (v. 31), making a total of seven times. God blesses (*bārak*) his living creatures five times (Gen. 1:22, 28; 2:3; 5:2; 9:1), commands them to be fruitful (*pārā*) five times (Gen. 1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7), and to multiply (*rābāh*) seven times

(Gen. 1:22 twice, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7 twice). The P writer perceives the natural world to be wonderfully bountiful, even after the flood.

In sharp contrast, the J author makes no claim that the creation is good or very good. At best, he states only that the fruit and trees in the garden are “good for food” (Gen. 2:10, 3:6).<sup>40</sup> The J author never refers to God blessing his creatures or calling them to be fruitful and multiply. But more importantly, *the cosmic fall appears in the J account of origins*. The Lord curses the ground in Genesis 3:17, and refers to this event later in Genesis 5:29 and 8:21.<sup>41</sup> Divine judgment for sin results in physical changes to the world. The serpent loses its legs (Gen. 3:14), the woman experiences greater labor pain (v. 16), the ground is infested with thorns and thistles (v. 18), and the man is condemned to death (v. 19).

The tone of the J account of origins is pessimistic and offers a dark and sinister picture of human nature by presenting episodes of sinful behavior throughout—disobedience of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), murders by Cain and Lamech (Genesis 4), overwhelming evil prior to the flood (Genesis 6), Ham seeing the nakedness of his drunk father (Genesis 9), and human arrogance fueling the construction of a tower that attempts to reach heaven (Genesis 11). The J author emphasizes that “every inclination of the thoughts of his [man’s] heart was only evil all the time” even “from childhood” (Gen. 6:5; 8:21), and this sinful proclivity continued even after the divine punishment of the flood.

The terminology of the J writer is ominous and threatening. He employs the words “evil” (*ra’*: Gen. 2:9, 17; 3:5, 22; 6:5; 8:21), “curse” (*ārar*: Gen. 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25; *qālal*: 8:21), and “kill” (*hārag*: Gen. 4:8, 14, 15 twice, 23, 25). And the noun “sin” is found in scripture for the first time with the J author. Genesis 4:7 warns, “Sin is crouching at your door, it desires to have you.” None of these negative terms are used by the P writer.

The P and J accounts of origins present two completely different pictures of the natural world. The optimistic P author sees a creation that is “very good” even though sin exists within it. The pessimistic J writer views a “cursed” earth overwhelmed by human sinfulness. The cosmic fall is pivotal to the J account, while the P account makes no mention of it at all. But similar to conflicts in the order of creative

events between Genesis 1 and 2, these contrasting perceptions of nature are ultimately incidental and not relevant to Christian faith. They reflect two different ancient phenomenological perspectives of the natural world. Despite their striking dissimilarities, the P and J accounts of origins affirm the central inerrant spiritual truths in Genesis 1-11: God created the world and he judges human sinfulness.

## The Very Good and Cursed Creation

The redaction of the Priestly and Jahwist accounts of origins produced in scripture a paradigm of cosmic and human history in which the very good creation in Genesis 1 was cursed with suffering and death in Genesis 3. This has led most Christians throughout time to believe that God originally created a morally good world and that, in judgment of human sin, he launched evil upon it. In this way, the cosmic fall and natural evil are firmly connected in their minds, similar to Calvin's teaching. But questions arise. Are the ethical terms "good" and "evil" appropriate for qualifying the physical world or parts of it? Or more to the point, does the Bible actually refer to the moral goodness or moral badness of nature?

An examination of the Hebrew words translated as "good" and "cursed" in scripture offers insights to begin answering these questions. There are over seven hundred occurrences of *tōb*, and it carries a wide range of meanings: good, virtuous, kind, pleasant, agreeable, appropriate, suitable, prosperous, fruitful, luxurious, valuable, excellent, beautiful, orderly, and usable.<sup>42</sup> The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* notes,

In all Semitic languages, *tōb* is used in the context of everyday life to designate the practical utility of an object, an action, or a situation, with reference to its being "useful" or "advantageous." ... The most common meaning of *tōb* in the OT is *utilitarian*. From the perspective of the suitability of an object or person, the focus is on the functional aspect, as being in proper order or suited for the job. We are thus dealing with "goodness for something," with a very concrete and tangible meaning in the background.<sup>43</sup>

This dictionary entry adds that Genesis 1 is the "parade example" of the utilitarian meaning of *tōb*.

In this way the functionality of the work is emphasized, the fact that the world God has created is

"in good order." ... The utilitarian interpretation is underscored by indicating the functions served by the works of creation. They are good for the purpose for which they were fashioned.<sup>44</sup>

In his classic volume *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, Claus Westermann asserts that *tōb* in Genesis 1

is not to be understood as indicating some fixed quality; the meaning is rather functional: "good for ..." The world which God created and devised as good is the world in which history can begin and reach its goal and so fulfill the purpose of creation.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly John Walton in *The Lost World of Genesis One* contends that the term "good" in Genesis 1 refers to the creation "functioning properly," and in particular, the "functional readiness of the cosmos for human beings."<sup>46</sup> Walton adds that the term "'good' is a reference to being functional, not a matter of moral goodness."<sup>47</sup> Continuing he notes,

This is an important distinction because it does not suggest that we ought to look for moral goodness in the way the cosmos operates. When we think of "good" in connection to being functional rather than moral, we don't have to explain how predation can be part of a morally good world.<sup>48</sup>

Or stated another way, predation is not a natural evil because it carries no moral status. Instead, animals preying on others can be viewed as a functional component in a properly working biosphere.

It is in the light of this functional meaning of *tōb* in Genesis 1 that the cursed earth in Genesis 3 must be understood. The Hebrew verb *'ārar* occurs over sixty times in the Old Testament, and it is translated as "curse/d" in Genesis 3:14, 17; 4:11-12, 5:29, and 9:25. In *The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible*, Herbert Brichtco observes that the stem of *'ārar* means "to bind, hem in with obstacles, render powerless to resist," and that it "has the sense of to impose a ban or barrier, a paralysis on movement or other capabilities."<sup>49</sup> Brichtco adds that all occurrences of the verb *'ārar* and its related noun have "the force of 'curse' only in the operative sense of the word."<sup>50</sup> This "material, operative sense" refers to a lack of or limited functionality.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, in Genesis 3:14, the serpent is cursed by being bound to the surface of the earth and thus forced to eat dust. The cursing of the ground in Genesis 3:17 refers to a barrier imposed on the earth that restricts its fruitfulness (so too Gen. 5:29). The

# Article

## *Beyond the Cosmic Fall and Natural Evil*

curse upon Cain in Genesis 4:11–12 is both a ban to stop him from working the ground and a binding of the earth from producing crops. And the cursing of Canaan in Genesis 9:25 is a forcing of his descendants into bondage and slavery. Notably, the cursing of the earth refers to its malfunction and a loss of or restricted productivity.

The Hebrew words translated as “good” in Genesis 1 and “cursed” in Genesis 3 do not refer to the moral goodness or badness of nature. These terms deal with *physical* characteristics of the natural world—its functionality and malfunctionality, respectively. Similar to their ancient conceptions of the structure (3-tier universe) and origin of the universe and life (*de novo* creation), ancient people had views about its operation, such as the daily movement of the sun across the sky. They would also have experienced both the fruitful (“good”) and the frustrating (“cursed”) aspects of the world, and quite reasonably attempted to offer explanations for their origin and present existence.

Similar to the conflicting order of creative events between Genesis 1 and 2, the redaction of the Jahwist and Priestly accounts of origins juxtaposed two contrasting ancient perspectives on how nature operated. The optimistic P author viewed an idyllically functioning and bountiful creation,<sup>52</sup> while the pessimistic J writer saw a malfunctioning world bound by suffering, death, and limited fruitfulness. Yet like all other statements about nature in scripture, the views of P and J reflect an ancient science that is based on an ancient phenomenological perspective. Therefore, biblical passages referring to the origin of the world’s *physical* functionality or malfunctionality are ultimately incidental and irrelevant to Christian faith, like the order in which God created living organisms in Genesis 1 and 2.

It is worth noting that these two conflicting views on the operation of natural world reappear throughout scripture. Many psalms provide examples of the optimistic functional perspective. There is no hint of a cursed earth in Psalm 85:11–12: “Faithfulness springs forth from the earth ... The Lord will indeed give what is good [*tōb*], and our land will yield its harvest.” Psalm 104:21 and 28 acknowledge that God is involved in feeding all creatures, including those that prey on other animals. “The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God ... When you

[God] give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good [*tōb*] things.” The functional meaning *tōb* best fits the context of these two psalms.

Similarly, Job 38:39 states that God hunts prey for the lioness, and Job 39:27–30 asserts that he commands the eagles whose “young ones feast on blood.” Jesus also seems to embrace the optimistic functional perspective of nature. In Luke 12:24 he notes, “Consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them.” Ravens scavenge off the remains of dead creatures but are also known to eat small reptiles and birds, including their young and their eggs. In these passages, there is no indication that predation is immoral, and the notion of natural evil is nonexistent.

The pessimistic depiction of a malfunctioning natural world is also found outside the Genesis accounts of origins. It is *implicit* in eschatological passages. Isaiah 11:6–7 envisions a time when predation will come to an end, inferring that the creation had earlier gone awry.

The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf, and the lion and the yearling together;  
and a little child will lead them.  
The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like an ox.

Similarly, Isaiah 65:17–25 looks to a time when God “will create new heavens and a new earth” in which there will no longer be crying, infant mortality, and predation.<sup>53</sup> Colossians 1:15–20 also points to a world gone astray and in need of reconciliation with God. This passage opens by claiming that Jesus is the Creator of “all things” and “in him all things hold together” (vv. 16–17). But a cosmic fall is implied because God called Christ “to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the Cross” (v. 20).

The pessimistic picture of a malfunctional creation is *explicit* in Romans 8:20–22. The apostle Paul writes,

For the creation was subjected to frustration, and not of its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the *whole* creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.<sup>54</sup>

The English translation of the Greek noun *phthora* as “decay” does not fully capture the thrust of its meaning. In the ancient world, this word referred to ruin, corruption, deterioration, and destruction.<sup>55</sup> Paul is clearly pointing back to the cosmic fall and the entrance of suffering and death into the world. The Greek noun *douleia* rendered as “bondage” is better translated as “slavery” and reflects the cursing and binding of the earth in Genesis 3:17.<sup>56</sup> But liberation from the effects of the cosmic fall, in particular “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23), awaits the children of God.

An eschatological vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” also appears in Revelation 20–22. The biblical author asserts that “death and Hades [the underworld] were thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14), and consequently “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4).<sup>57</sup> Revelation 22:3 explicitly states that, in this new creation, “no longer will there be any curse.” This verse clearly points back to the binding curses of Genesis 3 and the effects of the cosmic fall. According to Revelation 20–22, God will free the creation of its bondage at the consummation of this world. In other words, the natural world awaits a cosmic redemption at the end of time.

The redaction of the conflicting Priestly and Jahwist depictions of the operation of the natural world has profound implications. The traditional concordist interpretation of the Bible’s overarching metanarrative of Creation-Fall-Redemption fails to recognize the incidental ancient science undergirding its ancient motifs, as well as the juxtaposition of P’s idyllically functioning fruitful creation against J’s malfunctioning world enslaved by suffering, death, and limited productivity.<sup>58</sup>

In the light of this biblical evidence, we can recast the interpretive precedent previously mentioned, using the terms *tōb* and *’ārar* within the context of ancient origins: *Genesis 1 makes statements about how God created a very good idyllic world, but these events never happened; and Genesis 3 makes statements about how God cursed the world with suffering and death, but these events never happened.*<sup>59</sup> Or stated even more incisively, there

never was a cosmic fall and a launching of natural evil upon the whole creation; and thus there is no need for a cosmic redemption from the bondage of any curse. The traditional Christian paradigm of a cosmic fall (Genesis 3) from an original idyllic state (Genesis 1) is an artifact of redaction and based on ancient conceptions of nature.

Yet by grace, the Holy Spirit accommodated in the biblical revelatory process and allowed the inspired human authors to employ their ancient notions about nature and ancient techniques of redaction. In doing so, these incidental ancient elements have throughout the ages effectively delivered the inerant spiritual truths—that God is the Creator and Consummator of the world, and that he is the Judge of all of us and of our sinfulness.

## Jesus, Natural Evil, and the Fulfillment of Theodicy

Did Jesus believe in natural evil? Numerous biblical passages of his miraculous healings often present a causal connection between demonic activity and various medical conditions such as blindness, deafness, speechlessness, and crippling afflictions (Matt. 12:22; Mark 9:25; Luke 13:16). One significant account is recorded in Luke 9:38–40, 42.

A man in the crowd called out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him.” ... Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father.

The casting out of an evil spirit by Jesus seems to indicate that he believed the medical disorder was caused by demonic activity. This miracle is also recorded in Matthew 17, and verse 15 identifies the condition as epilepsy. But are epileptic seizures caused by demon spirits? Medical doctors today would say “no.” Could there be another way to understand this passage? In ancient medicine, evil spirits were often believed to be the cause of disease; incantations, exorcisms, and sacrifices were common healing protocols used to expel them from the stricken individual.<sup>60</sup> By considering this ancient context, was Jesus accommodating to his audience

# Article

## *Beyond the Cosmic Fall and Natural Evil*

in Luke 9 and Matthew 17 by using the medicine-of-the-day? I believe so.

There are many examples of the Lord employing ancient science during his teaching ministry. In the mustard seed parable, he used the ancient belief that the mustard was “the smallest of all seeds on earth” (Mark 4:31) to reveal a message about the kingdom of God. Of course, orchid seeds are much smaller. In prophesying his death and resurrection, Jesus said, “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24). Seeds are alive and function metabolically at an extremely low rate.<sup>61</sup> But their outer casing breaks down before germination, giving the perception that seeds rot and die. Jesus stated that following his death he would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). There is no evidence of an underworld in the core of planet Earth, only solid iron. And in discussing the Second Coming, the Lord claimed that “the stars will fall from the sky” (Matt. 24:29). From an ancient phenomenological perspective, this passage makes perfect sense. Stars look like tiny specks and a streaking meteorite gives the impression that they fall to Earth.

In the same way, the causal connection between medical conditions and demonic activity in the healing accounts of Jesus is an accommodation using an incidental ancient medicine. The Lord is not offering a revelation that diseases and disabilities are natural evils. It is worth pointing out that there are roughly thirty-one individual healings and eleven mass healings performed by Jesus, amounting to nearly twenty percent of the verses in the Gospels.<sup>62</sup> One would expect that given the prominence of these miraculous events, the Lord would have *at least once* attributed medical conditions ultimately to the cosmic fall, if indeed that was the case.

Jesus was certainly aware of the opening chapters of the Bible and appealed to them in his teaching. For example, in Matthew 19:4–5 he refers to humans being created “male and female” (Gen. 1:27) and that a man and a woman “become one flesh” in marriage (Gen. 2:24). The Lord also points to the murder of Abel (Gen. 4:8) in Luke 11:51 and to widespread sinfulness prior to Noah’s flood (Gen. 6:9–13) in Matthew 24:37–39.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, in healing afflicted people, Jesus had over forty opportunities to teach that God had cursed humans with diseases and natu-

ral evils because Adam had sinned in the Garden of Eden. But he never did and he made no reference to the cosmic fall in Genesis 3. Why?

Biblical revelation must always be viewed in the light that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of scripture. As the Lord himself stated, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). Yet in fulfilling the scriptures, Jesus ushered in revolutionary changes. For example, in the Old Testament certain foods were deemed “unclean” (Lev. 11:1–47), but with the Lord all foods were declared “clean” (Mark 7:19).<sup>64</sup> Adulterers were to be stoned to death under Mosaic Law (Deut. 22:22), yet in the New Testament Jesus tells a woman caught in adultery simply to “leave her life of sin” (John 8:11). And most importantly, the atonement for sin changes radically with Christ. In the Old Testament, animals were sacrificed to atone for human sinfulness. However, in the New Testament this practice was completely abolished with the “once for all” sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross (Heb. 10:3, 11–12). The enormity of Jesus fulfilling the scripture on atonement for human sin cannot be overemphasized.

Obvious questions arise. Does this radical fulfillment of scripture in Christ also extend to understanding suffering and death in nature? Stated another way, is there a revolutionary change with regard to theodicy between the Old and New Testaments? And to be even more specific, does the causal connection between human sinfulness and the divine judgment of suffering and death upon the world in Genesis 3 get abolished with Jesus?

My answer to these questions is “yes.” As Jesus admonished, “No one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins” (Luke 5:37–38). There is no better example of the Lord’s “new wine” than his radical approach to physical suffering in the account of the man born blind in John 9:1–3.

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

The Lord completely undermines the causal connection between sin and suffering in this passage.<sup>65</sup> If suffering blindness was ultimately connected to the sin of Adam and the cosmic fall, then Jesus had the perfect opportunity to say so. But he never did. Instead, the Lord offers the revolutionary and counterintuitive notion that suffering is meant to reveal the power of God in the lives of men and women. And this was the case since the man was healed of his blindness (v. 7). Suffering is not meaningless, but rather it has a divine purpose within God’s creation.

It is necessary to qualify that Jesus’s teaching about the man born blind is not a heartless disregard for suffering, because he certainly identified with human agony. For example, after Lazarus had died due to an illness, the Lord was “deeply moved in spirit and troubled” and he “wept” (John 11:33, 35). Yet in presenting disease and death from a radically new perspective, Jesus proclaimed that the passing of Lazarus “is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (v. 4). Indeed, the resurrection of Lazarus, like the healing of the man born blind, glorified God because it demonstrated the Lord’s sovereign power over suffering and death. Again, Jesus had an excellent opportunity to remind his audience that Lazarus’s disease and death were ultimately connected to the sin of Adam and the cosmic fall in Genesis 3, should that be true. But once more, he never did. In fulfilling the scriptures, the Lord declared that even death serves a purpose in the world God created.

Again the radicality of Jesus’s fulfillment of scripture cannot be overstated. In dealing with the atonement of sin, he completely abolished the practices demanded in the Book of Leviticus and disconnected making amends for sin through animal sacrifice. The fulfillment in Christ also extends to theodicy. Jesus sets aside the “old wineskin” in Genesis 3 of a causal connection between sin and the cosmic fall, and he then reveals the “new wine,” that suffering and death in nature have a divine function. They serve to glorify God and display his power in our lives. In this way, the notion of natural evil has no place within the Lord’s creation.

### Final Reflections

The doctrine of the cosmic fall and the belief in natural evil are products of concordism and redaction. The traditional concordist interpretation of the

overarching metanarrative in scripture—Creation-Fall-Redemption—is rooted ultimately in an incidental ancient science and ancient origins motifs. In particular, the notion of a perfect creation soon followed by a fallen cosmos in Genesis 1–3 emerged from the juxtaposition of two conflicting ancient phenomenological perceptions of the operation of nature—the optimistic Priestly author’s idyllically functioning creation with no hint of a fallen cosmos, and the pessimistic Jahwist’s malfunctioning world enslaved by the effects of a cosmic fall.

Of course, the identification of these ancient scientific paradigms only began well after the birth of modern science in the seventeenth century. It is therefore understandable why a number of Christian creeds, councils, and confessions of faith include concordist interpretations of scripture.<sup>66</sup> They were formulated within a prescientific mindset. Consequently, incidental ancient scientific concepts such as *de novo* creation, cosmic fall, and cosmic redemption were inadvertently conflated with inerrant spiritual truths of the Bible.

To move beyond concordism and conflation, it is necessary to separate the incidental ancient science from the Holy Spirit’s life-changing messages of faith. I term this hermeneutical approach the “Message-Incident Principle.”<sup>67</sup> In this way, the ancient paradigms of the physical world embedded in the Creation-Fall-Redemption metanarrative become vessels that deliver metaphysical or spiritual foundations of the Christian faith. A nonconcordist interpretation of this grand narrative in scripture redirects attention to the inerrant spiritual truths. Figure 6 presents the Message-Incident Principle and separates the spiritual messages associated with



Figure 6. The Message-Incident Principle and a Non-Concordist Interpretation of the Bible’s Creation-Fall-Redemption Metanarrative

# Article

## *Beyond the Cosmic Fall and Natural Evil*

Creation-Fall-Redemption from their incidental ancient understandings of nature—*de novo* creation, cosmic fall, and cosmic redemption.

Let me further explain. The doctrine of creation does not affirm the *de novo* origins of an idyllic world, but instead reveals that the God of Christianity is the Creator of the entire cosmos and every living organism. Belief in creation is not about *how* God created, but *that* he created. The doctrine of the Fall does not deal with a lost idyllic age and the origin of natural evil, but rather with the reality that sin entered the world through humans. The cosmos is not fallen, the human heart is. And the doctrine of redemption is not a reversing of changes in nature caused by a cosmic fall or a return to a perfect garden without suffering and death. Redemption is spiritual, not physical. Jesus died to free us from our sins and to restore our relationship with God.

To state my position precisely: I fully embrace the inerrant spiritual truths of the Bible's Creation-Fall-Redemption metanarrative because these are nonnegotiable Christian beliefs for me; and I reject the incidental ancient scientific paradigms that undergird this overarching account in scripture.

There is a question that I suspect most readers have: "What are we to make of the Bible presenting two contrasting views of nature?" The answer rests in the belief that the Holy Spirit inspired not only the biblical authors, but also the redactors and compilers of their writings into scripture. For example, Genesis 1 (P) presents a transcendent cosmic Creator and Genesis 2 (J) an immanent personal Lord, resulting in a more complete picture of God, with him being both beyond us in heaven and yet near to us on Earth. Similarly, the Bible offers a creation that optimistically "declares the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1) and pessimistically is in "bondage to decay" (Rom. 1:21). This intellectual tension is experienced by all Christians. It both confirms the existence of God through the stunning intelligent design in nature, and it looks forward to the consummation of the present world with the "redemption of our bodies" and "our adoption as sons" (Rom. 8:23).

Another question that must have arisen in your mind is this: "Why did God allow the cosmic fall and the causal connection between sin and death to appear in scripture?" Let me offer a *speculation*. Hebrews 10:4 states with regard to the elaborate

sacrificial system of the Old Testament that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." In other words, despite what the Mosaic Law claimed and commanded, the slaughter of thousands upon thousands of animals did not atone for sin. However, animal sacrifice did have a spiritual function. As Hebrews 10:3 explains, "Those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins."

Could it be that the cosmic fall and the connection between human sin and physical death in scripture are also reminders for us? Too often we forget that we are creatures who are accountable before God. Death is the perfect reminder of our sinfulness and thrusts us to the feet of our Creator. Funerals often repeat the divine judgment in Genesis 3:17, "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return." Physical death reminds us that there will be a Judgment Day when we will stand before our Maker to give an account of our life.

We no longer live in Calvin's young earth creationist world. Today many scientists who embrace evangelical Christianity believe that the Lord created the universe and life, including humans, through an ordained, sustained, and intelligent design-reflecting evolutionary process.<sup>68</sup> In scripture, the Holy Spirit has given us an example and a template for incorporating the science-of-the-day as a platform for presenting inerrant biblical truths to our twenty-first century scientific generation. It behooves us to formulate an evangelical evolutionary theodicy. By moving beyond the ancient wineskin of a cosmic fall and natural evil in Genesis 3, we can pour the new wine of Jesus's fulfillment of theodicy into a modern evolutionary beaker. ❀

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>F. F. Bruce in *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Tyndale Press, 1963) offers a traditional understanding of the cosmic fall.

The doctrine of the cosmic fall is implicit in the biblical record from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22 ... Like man, creation must be redeemed because, like man, creation has been subjected to a fall. (p. 169)

Some view the cosmic fall as preceding the appearance of humans and due to satanic forces. Troubled by carnivory, C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962) hypothesizes,

I say that living creatures were corrupted by an evil angelic being ... The Satanic corruption of the beasts would therefore be analogous, in one respect, to the Satanic corruption of man ... [S]ome mighty created power had already been at work for ill on the material universe, or the solar system, or, at least, the planet Earth, before ever man came on the scene. (pp. 133–35)

<sup>2</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 2 vols., trans. John King (1554; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 1:102. Online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.114, 117–18; italics added.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.62; italics added. The clause “Let the earth bring forth” is actually from Genesis 1:11, 24.

<sup>5</sup>Calvin argues, “Moses relates that the work of creation was accomplished not in one moment, but in six days.” He also dismissed the notion of “infinite periods of time” and claimed the world has existed for a “period of six thousand years” (John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge [1536; Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005], 142–43). Online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 1.57; italics added. Calvin adds, “On the whole, this language is intended merely to express the perfection of the fabric of the world,” *ibid.*, 1.62.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.62–63, 117; italics added. Calvin’s reference to “Moses” reflects a precritical understanding of the authorship of the Genesis accounts of origins. This assumption will be challenged later in this article.

<sup>8</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 4 vols., trans. William Pringle (1559; Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, no date), 1:296. Online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom13.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 1.63.

<sup>13</sup>A 2004 survey of American adults reveals that 87% of evangelicals believe in six-day creation and a global flood. Survey conducted Feb. 6–10, 2004, by International Communications Research Media, PA.

<sup>14</sup>See “*rāqīa’*,” in *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 8 vols., ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 7:552–55; Paul H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above. Part I: The Meaning of *rāqīa’* in Gen. 1:6–8,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 227–40.

<sup>15</sup>This category is not to be confused and conflated with our modern phenomenological perspective of nature. What the biblical writers saw with their eyes, they believed to be real, such as the literal rising and literal setting of the sun. When we see the sun “rising” and “setting,” we know that it is only a visual effect caused by the rotation of the earth.

<sup>16</sup>See John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 165–78; Kyle Greenwood, *Scripture and Cosmology: Reading the Bible between the Ancient World and Modern Science* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 71–102. Walton in *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009) notes,

Through the entire Bible, there is not a single instance in which God revealed to Israel a science beyond their own culture. No passage offers a scientific perspective that was not common to the Old World science of antiquity. (p. 19)

For an introduction to ancient science in scripture, see my chapter entitled “Ancient Science in the Bible,” in *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 43–70. This chapter is also online at [http://www.ualberta.ca/~dlamoure/ilj\\_ancient\\_science.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~dlamoure/ilj_ancient_science.pdf).

<sup>17</sup>One of the reviewers of this article complained that this precedent and the three others similar to it that follow “shock” the reader. To soften the language of this sentence, I could have written: The Bible makes statements about how God acted in origins *that are not literally true*. Or, the Bible makes statements about how God acted in origins that *do not correspond to physical reality*. Of course, by employing the clause, “*but these events never happened*,” I am being polemical. In teaching biblical hermeneutics at the university level for nearly twenty years, I have found that in order to move beyond concordism, it is necessary to expose that it completely fails as an interpretive approach. Moreover, it is critical to understand that with this hermeneutical precedent I am not saying that God lies in the Bible. Lying requires a deceptive intent. In fact, scripture states directly in Titus 1:2 that God “does not lie” and Hebrews 6:18 asserts that “it is impossible for God to lie.” The God of the Bible is not a God of deception. Instead, the Holy Spirit by grace accommodated in scripture and came down to the intellectual level of the biblical writers and their readers and used their scientific categories in order to communicate as effectively as possible.

<sup>18</sup>*De novo* creation is not restricted to instantaneous creation or creation out of nothing, and it does not preclude creation through a natural process. For example, on the sixth day of creation in Genesis 1, land animals came forth from the earth fully developed in just one day, using a mechanism seemingly similar to the origin of plants on the third day. In fact, the word translated as “produce” in Genesis 1:12 and 1:24 is the same Hebrew verb *yāsā’*. Also see endnote 20.

<sup>19</sup>Of course, Adam plays a critical role in scripture in that he is the archetypal sinner—he represents us and our sinfulness. Yet the implications of Adam not existing are significant for the doctrine of original sin. See Denis O. Lamoureux, “Beyond Original Sin: Is a Paradigm Shift Inevitable?,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 67, no. 1 (March 2015): 35–49.

<sup>20</sup>David A. Leeming observes in *Creation Myths of the World: An Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), “In a vast number of creation myths from all parts of the world the creator makes the use of soil—usually clay—in the creative process ... More often earth—as dust, mud, or especially more logically, as clay—is used to create humans” (2:312). Another creative mechanism was a plant-like sprouting of humans from the earth. For example, in KAR 4 the gods plant the seeds of people and humans later “sprout from the ground like barley.” Quote in Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994), 30.

<sup>21</sup>Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 48–49.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 39, 75.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 105, 107.

# Article

## *Beyond the Cosmic Fall and Natural Evil*

<sup>25</sup>In fact, a corollary of *de novo* creation is that suffering and death can only occur *after* living organisms have been made.

<sup>26</sup>Leeming notes in *Creation Myths*, “It is common practice to treat [creation] myths etiologically – that is, as primitive science” which is based on “limited scientific understanding” (1:xviii). Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), also acknowledges the ancient scientific and historiographical concepts in ancient accounts of origins. “For the ancients, their cosmological myths also reflect their scientific ideas about the cosmos ... Often they viewed their myths as history” (p. 337). Note that my use of the term “paradigm” is intended to reflect the modern concept of scientific paradigms. I am arguing that ancient people had ancient scientific paradigms based on an ancient phenomenological perspective of nature.

<sup>27</sup>Leeming explains the logic behind these two motifs.

Not surprisingly, the awareness of a lack of perfection in the world and the capacity for evil and wrongdoing in the human personality have led many cultures to describe a *fall* from grace in the early days of creation. Central to the *fall* from grace theme is the assumption that the world originally created was perfect but that, either through the manipulation of a devil figure or because of some inherent need in the human to disobey the creator or to give in to an inherent selfishness and arrogance, humans have *fallen* from a state of grace to one that characterizes the actual world in which we live. (*Creation Myths*, 2:329; italics added)

<sup>28</sup>See my comment in endnote 25.

<sup>29</sup>Leeming, *Creation Myths*, 2:317–18; italics added.

<sup>30</sup>See endnote 17 regarding my polemical use of the clause “but these events never happened.”

<sup>31</sup>Sparks argues that attempts to render “God formed” in Genesis 2:19 to the pluperfect “God had formed,” as seen in evangelical Bibles such as the NIV, “does not suit the immediate context, where God works to resolve Adam’s solitude” (Kenton L. Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008], p. 83, note 8). Moreover, if birds and land animals were created earlier, why would the author not simply say that God brought them to Adam instead of referring to their creation?

<sup>32</sup>See Greenwood, *Scripture and Cosmology*, 110.

<sup>33</sup>The identification of the sources with some of my minor modifications is based on Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed: A New View into the Five Books of Moses* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 33–50; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), xxviii–xxxii, 163, 214. Note that I have excluded verses added by the redactor such as Genesis 4:25–26 and the *tōlēdōt* title (“These are the generations of ...”) in Genesis 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; and 11:27. The argument that the Genesis sources are faded parallel memories fails to appreciate its underlying concordist hermeneutic. For example, whether or not birds were created before humans, the J and P sources still affirm their *de novo* creation.

<sup>34</sup>Similar to Genesis 1 and 2, recognizing the original P and J flood sources eliminates conflicts between events in Genesis 6–9. For example, there are two divine orders regarding the loading of birds. The P source has “two of every kind of bird” in Genesis 6:9, while J states “seven of every kind of bird” in Genesis 7:3.

<sup>35</sup>Reassembled J and P flood accounts are online at <http://www.ualberta.ca/~dlamoure/h35.pdf> and <http://www.ualberta.ca/~dlamoure/h37to38.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup>Similarities between the J and P creation and flood accounts are online at <http://www.ualberta.ca/~dlamoure/h36.pdf> and <http://www.ualberta.ca/~dlamoure/h39.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup>I am assuming that reference to Sheba and Dedan in Genesis 10:7 is a later addition or interpolation that was incorporated into the text. In this way, the Priestly author’s structural style is preserved along with his use of the stylistic numbers of 5 and 7. Moreover, this avoids the repetition of the birth of Sheba and Dedan in Genesis 25:3. This doublet reflecting two sources is clearly seen in 1 Chronicles 1:9 and 1:32.

<sup>38</sup>It is interesting to note that the Hebrew term *sheōl* referring to the underworld does not appear in P accounts of the Pentateuch, but six times with the J renditions (Friedman, *Sources Revealed*, 10). It may be that P viewed humans going directly to heaven after death as somewhat implied in Genesis 5:24 when “God took him [Enoch] away.”

<sup>39</sup>Animals becoming fearful of humans in Genesis 9:2 is not in the context of divine judgment and should not be construed as a cosmic fall (in fact, if it were, it would be the only change in nature). Rather, this verse appears to be etiological only and it is found *after* God reissues the commands for animals to multiply and be fruitful in Genesis 8:17.

<sup>40</sup>The Jahwist author makes only one other reference to anything in nature being “good,” the gold in Havilah (Gen. 2:12). As the next section of this article reveals, this use of the term “good” is functional and not moral.

<sup>41</sup>Genesis 5:29 seems to indicate some relief from the curse of toil in Genesis 3:17–19, but this verse is best seen as expressing a hope or prayer (“May Noah bring us relief ...” – Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 128). As well, Genesis 8:21 appears to imply that the cursing of the earth might be lifted. However, Wenham argues that

God is not lifting the curse on the ground pronounced in 3:17 for man’s disobedience, but promising not to add to it ... Furthermore, it is also quite apparent that the curses pronounced in Genesis 3 – weeds, toil, pain, death, enmity with serpents – are all part of humanity’s present experience, so that 8:21 cannot be stating they are lifted after the flood ... It is simply the threat of another flood that is lifted. (*Ibid.*, 190)

<sup>42</sup>“*Tōb*,” in Clines, *Classical Hebrew*, 3:349–56; Robert P. Gordon, “*Tōb*” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 2:353–57. Notably, the Septuagint translates *tōb* in Genesis 1 as *kalos* and not *agathos*. Bertram notes, “By using *kalos*, the translator introduces the idea of the beauty of the world” (Georg Bertram, “*Kalos*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 3:544. In combining the functional and esthetic nuances of *tōb*, Genesis 1:31 might be translated as “God saw that all he had made was *working beautifully!*”

<sup>43</sup>I. Höver-Johag, “*Tōb*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 14 vols., ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 5:299, 304; italics added.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 5:304.

<sup>45</sup>Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. J.J. Scullion (1974; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1984), 166.

- <sup>46</sup>Walton, *Lost World*, 51. Walton attempts to argue that Genesis 1 does not deal with material origins, but functional origins only. I disagree and contend that *both* aspects appear in scripture. See my criticism subtitled “The Material Origins versus Functional Origins Thesis,” in *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, ed. Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 119–22.
- <sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 150.
- <sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 149–150.
- <sup>49</sup>Herbert C. Brichtco, *The Problem of “Curse” in the Hebrew Bible*, Journal of Biblical Literature Series, vol. 13 (Philadelphia, PA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1968), 116, 216–17. See also “*ārar*” in Clines, *Classical Hebrew*, 1:397–98; Christopher J. H. Wright, “*ārar*,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament*, 1:24–26.
- <sup>50</sup>Brichtco, *Problem of “Curse,”* 114.
- <sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 113.
- <sup>52</sup>As Mark S. Smith notes in his *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), “Genesis 1’s vision [of the world] is *wildly optimistic*,” p. 113, italics added.
- <sup>53</sup>However, death will continue to exist within this new creation. Isaiah 65:20 states, “He who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed [*qālal*].” This appears to reflect the view of the P author in that death is normative after a long life. Yet it seems that in this new creation the serpent of Genesis 3 remains, in that “dust will be the serpent’s food” (v. 25). This discrepancy between Isaiah 11 and 65 is the result of the Book of Isaiah being written by at least two authors, and maybe three: Isaiah 1–39 (pre-exilic), 40–55 (exilic), and 56–66 (post-exilic). See Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words*, 104–108.
- <sup>54</sup>Italics added.
- <sup>55</sup>Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., revised by Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1930.
- <sup>56</sup>The term *douleia* is found most often in contexts dealing with slavery. Echoing the Hebrew *ārar*, Rengstorf notes that in the New Testament, “*doulos* is the classical picture of bondage and limitation” (Karl H. Rengstorf, “*Doulos*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:271).
- <sup>57</sup>In contrast to the 3-tiered world of Revelation 5:3 and 13 (“no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth”), the new heavens and earth of Revelation 20–22 is a 2-tiered cosmos without an underworld. This seems to be a return to the 2-tiered universe of the P author in Genesis 1.
- <sup>58</sup>A metanarrative is a comprehensive account of the ultimate meaning of history, human experience, and justification for the structure of society. In particular, scientific and historical paradigms are vessels that transport the metaphysical beliefs of a community or culture. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 34–37. In referring to “Creation-Fall-Redemption” as the Bible’s “overarching metanarrative,” I am distinguishing the incidental ancient paradigms from its inerrant spiritual truths—God created the world, humans have fallen into sin, and Jesus redeems us through his death. See endnote 26 for my use of the term “paradigm.”
- <sup>59</sup>See endnote 17 regarding my polemical use of the clause “but these events never happened.”
- <sup>60</sup>David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and*

*Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 18–20.

- <sup>61</sup>I am grateful to botanist Keith Furman for making me aware of this scientific fact.
- <sup>62</sup>“31 Individual Healings of Jesus Christ,” accessed December 22, 2015, <http://www.stronginfaith.org/article.php?page=111>.
- <sup>63</sup>Of course, Jesus’s use of the early chapters of Genesis is archetypal in order to reveal theological lessons. None of these passages is a debate about the historicity of the events or people.
- <sup>64</sup>This uncleanliness is ceremonial rather than ontological since 1 Timothy 4:3 states, “For everything God created is good.”
- <sup>65</sup>In fact, Exodus 4:11 challenges the idea that sin is connected to physical disabilities. “The Lord said to him [Moses], ‘Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf and dumb? Who gives him sight or *makes him blind*? Is it not I, the Lord?’” Italics added.
- <sup>66</sup>For example, reference to the underworld (*hādes*) appears in the Apostles’ (The Received Form) and Athanasian Creeds; the *de novo* creation of Adam is found in the Councils of Carthage and Trent and the Augsburg and Westminster Confessions. I am grateful to James Peterson for his assistance with this issue.
- <sup>67</sup>Denis O. Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 106–11.
- <sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, xiii.

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