

Tom Seidler's Response

to the Open Response by Marcus Honeysett and Vernon Wilkins

Greetings most noble brethren in Jesus!!

My excuse for the delay in responding is that I was planning to have an article on animal death available first. However, a season of rest combined with more than possible idleness conspired against this to cause an unreasonable delay!

I well accept that people can take Genesis 4-11 as history without taking 1-3 as historical, and that some of the reasoning is independent. My emphasis on including Genesis 1-11 is to seek to get people to deal responsibly with the whole context, and not be satisfied with just considering the 'framework theory' and arguments within Genesis 1 and 2. [1]

As per our original debate, here is a polemics warning! We have on this subject quite different views, and in making our points, very blunt argumentation can occur! But faith in Christ has made us brothers and family – this is real, eternal and binding – so I've sought in the below to do it as a fellow sinner before a consuming fire of a God, whom by grace alone we can call *our* 'Father'. Forgive me if I failed in some aspects, I have already had it kindly edited by a like-minded brother for 'graciousness'. Any failure in this regard remains entirely my own!

You may agree, by the end, that the issues are profoundly serious, particularly for those who have considered them as extensively as you will have if you get that far! I may be mistaken, but I can only speak as I see. If you see a dangerous hazard in front of a brother, and him walking towards it – you MUST raise it.

Framework in Creation

A framework in the creation account does not automatically make it entirely non-historical poetry. That Genesis 1 reveals careful structure in creation is very hard to argue with, and, coming from the God who designed DNA and the double helix, is hardly surprising! In fact, given God's incredibly ordered nature, and that he is 'not a God of disorder/confusion' (1 Corinthians 15:33), one should be surprised if one could not discern a pattern in God's perfect creating method.

I don't give *much* room to non-historical, non-literal Genesis 1 readings!!! I believe that Genesis 1 possesses this artistic 'framework' because it reflects God who made things in an artistic and structured manner (creating 'the form' [days 1-3] and filling 'the void' [days 4-6]). In this 'framework' I see the glory of the Master Patterner – the God who, when you watch him act, is Poetry-in-Motion. Yeah, that's right, the man I know – at work. Beauty-full!

I do not see in this clear framework the grounds for changing the genre to figurative history, and allowing the accommodation of a barbarous creative method, a few billion years, and a near total misrepresentation of what actually happened. I still feel constrained from

surrounding literary type (and whole-Bible references) to read it in a very near-historical and near-literal manner, and once you leave Genesis 1, you can take the 'near' out! (See [2] regarding one particular non-literal aspect!!!)

God SAID, 'Let there be ...', and there wasn't!

Well, at least for a million years. I would ask other framework readers not to miss – for all the poetic beauty they rightly see – the blatant point of God's RAW power: power-Word-command. Genesis 1 provides an important foundation for the doctrine of the Word of God, but this is significantly altered by readings that stretch out the 6 days into millennia. This makes a poor comparison with the immediacy of response to the Word seen in the New Testament by waves (creation), demons and dead people, and fits more poorly still with the following verses:

'Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him. [Why??]
For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.' Psalm 33:8,9
'He sends his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.' Psalm 147:15
'Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.
Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.' Psalm 148:4,5

God said, 'Let there be X', and there was X. In what way does that correlate with Jesus saying to the waves, 'Be still', and they were *immediately* still (and please, please, this is surely a creation reference?). Only if Peter could later say, 'Yeah, they were still, about a week later the storm calmed down, everything is relative, I mean immediately in God's view – a day is as a thousand years, right?' And, after all, we know from 2 Peter 3:8 that Peter knew God had this view of time.

I hope you see beyond the farce to the reality: the God of long ages isn't the one reflected in Genesis 1, *even if it were* pure poetry! He said something and hundreds of millions of years later it happened. Yeah, right.

Hebrews 11:3 reads that 'by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God.' From the writer's wording, 'the worlds were framed by the Word of God', it looks like he's read Genesis and had faith in it (and Peter likewise in 2 Peter 3:5 etc). Do you have the same faith as the writer to the Hebrews? The Word is categorical that in the beginning 'all things were formed through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made' (John 1:3), and again, 'by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible – all things were created through him' (Colossians 1:16) – pointing explicitly to the use of extraordinary means: creation-by-Word.

I believed, therefore I spoke

Apologies that some of what I said came across as dogmatic statements, rather than Bible-centric encouragement for folk to form a personal view for themselves. I will certainly be wary of such a danger in future. I guess it was just in part because I really do have some very strong (and I believe biblically informed) views on these topics that it slipped out!! ;)

I had meant to state my belief, and then clearly justify it from scripture. It is good to have a belief, and rely heavily on it in some circumstances, e.g. 'that Christ died for our sins ... that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day.' Now if we were invited to a discussion with a liberal who told us a spiritual resurrection was an allowable interpretation, we might quote that verse at some point (1 Corinthians 15:4), and perhaps we'd say: 'It couldn't possibly be like that – it must surely have been like this; I couldn't possibly read the Bible like that – only like this.' We would then proceed to the many other texts and broad theological reasons that support our statement. We would aim to show that the liberals 'know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God'. Aspects of this subject seem similar – less core perhaps – but really a pretty clear part of the scriptures we are to rely on and trust.

More thoughts on pre-Fall animal death

One brother raised the fact that Christ's death was a creative method of redeeming many sons to glory (as we sing in Stuart Townend's song). The most glorious act of creation, or redemption of creation in history, involved the death of God in a very cruel fashion, and left indelible marks of pain on his body, forever the Lamb looking as though it had been slain, and the nail prints in the hands ...

Ahh, but creation did not sing at this point, it put on its mourning clothes, the heavens themselves went black as night, there were no angels rejoicing, the son of man had sustaining joy set before him, but not in that hour of absolute forsakenness was he rejoicing – the mere prospect of it had him sweating blood. It could not be called 'very good'.

It never crossed my mind that, confronted by the reality of animal death in the garden, anyone would still consider that God could have called it, 'very good'. Imagine as he walks with Adam and Eve round some zebra entrails the lions nearby had put to the side while they chewed on the meat; as they glanced at the roses and saw just beyond them a rottweiler ripping up a cat, 'Oh, God! This really is very good!'

I am mildly staggered; it once again rings false with me – are people being utterly honest here? Nonetheless, in a gesture of goodwill toward my pro-the-option-of-pre-Fall-animal-death friends I will endeavour to confront them with a number of Scriptures that they fly in the face of.

A scriptural analysis

Let's start from the beginning. Animals (and man) were vegetarian initially, at the order of God: 'to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for

food.’ After the flood he says a number of things to Noah that would indicate he has a care about animals: ‘Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature’, ‘Behold, I establish my covenant with you ... and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth ... When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.’ (Genesis 1:30, 8:21, 9:9-10, 9:16 – see [3])

===new finding

God remembered Noah AND all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him...

On the Sabbath God commanded that ‘your ox and your donkey’ and ‘your livestock’ were to do no work (Exodus 23:12, 20:10). In Leviticus, though you could kill a very young animal, you had to give it at least seven days with its mother (Leviticus 22:27) – this surely indicates some degree of compassion for the mother and the newborn, that they may both have some brief moments of bonding and love before the child is sacrificed. The very next verse states that you must not kill them both on the same day. The destruction of a family, even of animals, in one day is not good, even for the purpose of sacrifice.

Years ago the following verse convicted me to care for my cat more! You think I jest, but no!!!

‘If you come across a bird’s nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. You shall let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long.’ You cannot kill the whole family. It is wrong. Deep. God cares enough to legislate for animal care. ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.’ (Deuteronomy 22:6-7, 25:4)

‘The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like an ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den.
They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain’ (Isaiah 11:6-9)

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, connected intimately with animals and old warfares ending. You can’t get much more explicit than that about God’s heart. Incidentally, Eden was likely atop a holy mountain also: four HUGE riverheads came out of it!

This future restoration of the Edenic harmony that had once been is prefigured in Christ’s time: a man who ‘walked with the animals’ (Mark 1:13), surely referencing the former days and the creation at peace in the company of its creator – while pointing to the day when God will ‘bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.’ (Ephesians 1:10, cf. Revelation 5:13)

In Christ's teaching, you realise that though God cares supremely about humans, he nonetheless has real care for animals: 'look at the birds of the air ... your heavenly Father feeds them', 'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father', 'Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.' (Matthew 6:26, 10:29; Luke 12:6)

Additionally the sacrificial system involved the death of a deliberately innocent animal, but sacrifice only became *necessary* through sin entering the world – for 'without the shedding of blood there is no remission'. Now evolution involved this continually, the innocent young lambs being killed by wolves – if this was very good, then surely the sacrifice and its deliberate, sombre, necessary grimness is somewhat less unusual.

'He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man;
he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck' (Isaiah 66:3)

This clearly indicates that God disapproves of brutality to animals: 'breaking a dog's neck' is clearly to be regarded as cruel and harsh. The thoughtless killing of an ox is equated to murder. It is the taking of life needlessly and without the seriousness associated with spilling the lifeblood of any created creature. When God tells Jonah that Nineveh has 120,000 spiritually blind people and 'also much cattle', he is providing another reason to pity and hold back from destruction. Animals in death are to be pitied. Could pity exist in a very good creation? 'Oh that's a terrible shame that so many must die, I pity them – but it's very good at the same time.'

That God loathes the weaker animals being shoved out of the way in favour of the strong is made blatant in Ezekiel 34 (amongst many others), 'You have not strengthened the weak, or healed the sick ... You shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away.' Though this is a parable about the leaders treatment of their people, it surely has no force if the weaker animals being shoved out of the way by the stronger must be described as 'very good', and if, for millions of years God himself purposely did not strengthen the weak, or heal the sick in order to accomplish his creation. Surely he would be a hypocrite to point the finger at others for doing the same?

'A good man takes care of his animals, but wicked men are cruel to theirs.' (Proverbs 12:10)

God is good, Satan is wicked. No doubt, had the 'destroyer' made the world, the cruelty involved in evolution would have made it an ideal creative method for the one who, 'having been a murderer from the beginning', has so long had death as his 'customary means'. In the new creation 'Death and Hades [having been] thrown into the lake of fire', 'death shall be no more, nor **pain**' (Revelation 20:14, 21:4).

So from a God who cares about each and every little sparrow sold for half a penny, legislated for their care, made covenants with them, assigned them their vegetarian food in the beginning, and doesn't like their necks being broken – can you really come up with a God who tolerated billions of years of their suffering, cruel competition and survival by being the strongest/best? Why would you want to? Why? Because of so called 'science'/knowledge, that false 'humble servant'.

'Science', the humble servant?

It was claimed that science could have a humble servant role in deciding between two possible interpretations, but certainly not be master. As I've reflected on this, I think the claim that it plays such a role in this doctrinal area is false.

You recall my question, 'If you hadn't read so many books by "knowledge-ists" [translating scientists], would these interpretations have ever suggested themselves?' 'Probably not ...' was the answer I received. 'Science' is the active suggester of this interpretation, not the humble adjudicator between interpretations that naturally suggest themselves from a thorough reading of Scripture alone. Thus science has usurped a position belonging to the Word – which alone can interpret itself. For you brothers also, I notice science plays a bedrock immovable role: you are 'convinced of an old earth for geological and astronomical reasons'. So I could not persuade you, despite my best efforts biblically, because you already have an extra biblical authority that ranks higher (if only in this area)? What would it take to persuade you? What more would the Bible have to say on the matter?

If these ideas use aright the true force of the living Word, then this will be demonstrated to your heart. For will become a struggle not just against reasoners such as myself, but against conscience, to continue suggesting the most outrageous handlings and interpretations of texts, running against all exegetical rules, simply to maintain such views.

As pagans have said: 'The simplest explanation is to be preferred.' One that involves 'Bible code' complexity leaps away from that massive doctrine: the perspicuity of Scripture. Yet time and again I find brothers doing it in this area!

One incredible example in your response was the suggestion that Jesus and Peter used 'inherited genre forms', with the appearance of historicity but without the reality. 'Enoch, the seventh from Adam.' Oh, no that's them just picking up on old literature types, he wasn't really the seventh from Adam. I could go on, but that wasn't a thought-through suggestion surely?

A deeper problem - unbelief

At its roots this is not an academic discussion, as it deals with potentially really dangerous seeds that could in time cause abandonment of the faith and loss of all eternity.

In seeking much more complex interpretations that are in no way equally scripturally supported, you reveal an underpinning issue with the Bible being true only as far as it is 'obviously possible'. Like I said, the resurrection is 'scientifically' a joke, apply this hermeneutic on that subject and you are up a gumtree. The Bible does not allow for any death pre-Fall interpretation, yet many continuously labour to justify and make room for it anyway. This reveals doubts about the truth of the Bible on creation.

As Wurmbandt said: 'To every one of us doubts come, but do not allow doubts about essential doctrines of the Bible such as the existence of God, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or the existence of eternal life to make a nest in your mind. Every theological or philosophical doubt makes you a potential traitor. You can allow yourself doubts while you

have a nice study and you prepare sermons, and you eat well - or you write a book. Then you can allow yourself all kinds of daring ideas and doubts. When you are tortured these doubts are changed into treason because you have to decide to live or die for this faith. One of the most important things about the spiritual preparation of an underground worker is the solution of his doubts.'

To doubt creation by Word-miracle, the verity of chunks of the Bible, to accept alteration of the character of God rather than face the shame of embracing no death before 6000 years ago is to set up potentially deadly doubts. They merely await a specific life situation in which to reveal themselves as such. Doubting not quite on the same key scale as the death and resurrection of Christ, but not insignificant.

This deeper problem particularly presents itself to people who have read this far, I think having a full biblical picture and still saying 'NO, there is death, it's OK ...' amounts to a rejection of God's Word, in the face of your own worldly-influenced interpretations.

As I've said before, many believing brothers and sisters have never really had the full Biblical data on the subject set before them, or had time to consider it. I fear that some have been distracted from such full consideration by folk reasoning from within 'science'. I have studiously avoided this so that you can take a view on what the Word alone permits, forbids and encourages.

Conclusion!

Neither atheism or naturalism had even crossed my mind as I penned any of this [4]. For me, it has always been about the things we've chatted about: muddying the Scriptures, making my God into a cruel killer and liar, removing interpretation from the layman (hence the aim to put 'the gun back into the layman's hands'), setting up that deadly precedent where an extra biblical 'authority' creates/governs interpretation (i.e. the breach of sola Scriptura) ... God is plain and simple, as well as deep! This whole area is simple. I trust the superabundance of references have made it clear; our view is the one supported by the breadth and depth of Scripture, yours puts a complex reading on one bit of scripture (Genesis 1) and thereby has to change meaning across the breadth and depth of scripture using such peculiar interpretations as we have heard – from bible code Kabbalistic numerology to misleading inherited genre forms ...

Once all the biblical information has been truly grasped (and a fair bit more could be said) I can only see that it is truly wilful refusal to accept the Scriptures for some reason, on the part of a Christian who won't accept a near-literal reading of Genesis 1-11, certainly one who allows the possibility of death pre-Fall. What could be the reason? Perhaps the feared loss of intellectual respectability, or having too great a trust in 'science', but only the reader still committed to contrivances around this subject can know his own heart before the Word of God, which will expose every thought and motive.

Some of this is as new to me in its absolute clarity (the animal death stuff) as perhaps it is to you, so I think time to think this stuff over before our Father and Creator and his Word is fairly essential. Come up with an opinion of creation that is honestly springing from his Word alone, and makes sense of it all in context.

Finally, I must really thank one and all for the extremely challenging material. I will not for a long time be studying in this area (to avoid dietary imbalance), believing that, thanks to your probing, we've gone to the extremes – beyond which it would be unprofitable to go (given the world's need of hearing the saving message of the crucified Christ).

So my hearty companions in this discussion and in Christ Jesus,

God bless you in Him, and grace and peace,

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PS I well accept we may still wind up with differing views, though I find it hard to understand! And I will not be 'biting' you on this subject next time we meet! Though, I'd be interested to know your thoughts in time.

[1] The breadth of arguments available to the Christian on this issue probably led me into this apparent position. I was seeking to look at Genesis 1-11 (and refer to 12 onwards) to observe literary type (and consider if there were genre pointers/breaks). My proposition was that 5 & 11 demanded a historical reading – also 6 and flood account – and that it was really very hard to discern any break in style, except possibly at the first toledoth (2:4). I also wished to highlight that theistic evolution, while at face value only asking you to reject the plain reading of Genesis 1-3, will almost inevitably also ask you to reject a plain reading of 4-11 as well. So in considering the biblical validity of this view I merely wished to ensure that it was evaluated in its entirety and not by a mere part.

[2] Let me also raise that in the sixth day narrated order has been artistically edited. Genesis 1 has man and woman created at the middle/epicentre of the day – after the animals. Genesis 2 then picks up on Genesis 1's focus on day 6 in a fuller account, in which mankind is created in two stages: man, animals [looking for partner] and then woman.

Genesis 1 is very brief and tight, and there was simply not room for this aspect to be recounted – further, the writer knew it would get fuller treatment in the very next chapter, so it is of no concern to him. It is not a mistake, just a factor of space allocated and function within chapter.

Such artistic license is perfectly legitimate – much as the street level mugger in his poem writes:

'Gonna put a hole in your heart
b-b-blast you apart ...'

He could have written:

'Gonna blast you apart,
put a hole in your heart.'

However, he wishes to have 'heart-blast' connected as closely as possible, and at the epicentre. Thus despite the technical problem of the blast coming first, and only then the hole in the heart, he rejects rigidly accurate narration. Instead he chooses a more artistic

form of telling a story which nonetheless would not lead one to any confusion about the nature of events that took place!

Incidentally, it should be noted that deep chiasmic structure does occur in historical narratives elsewhere in the Scriptures; no one, however, suggests that these are not history. So to find structure in an account and conclude it's clearly not real is error. There are patterns in life and in history! There are parallels between Napoleon and Hitler – both were short European dictators who went to war with the world, never conquered Britain, and were finally broken by taking on Russia. Mmm ... but no one [yet!] says such parallels indicate that they were not historical persons.

To argue that in Genesis 1 God was merely forced to 'break it down' for 'primitive man' is surely ludicrous. If six year olds can be taught by a fallen teacher and manage to grasp the basic tenets of evolution – how much more could God, the master communicator-Word, have taught it to an unfallen adult Adam, with the perfect use of his faculties?

[3] One more point is that God brought animals before Adam (Genesis 2) to consider for partnership, obviously in God's mind they were not to be that, he knew that Eve was the thing, so Adam just named them, and realised that he was distinct from them all. However, would it not seem strange if God brought before Adam a Zebra, and then later that day, perhaps during a break, Adam comes across the same Zebra being chewed by a Lioness he'd also been offered as partner? This Scripture and others implicitly suggest that animals in their pre-Fall state had a certain dignity and composure. They were not intended to be mere fodder for one another in the endless struggle for life. I only raise this for the sake of exhaustivity! I have kept the arguments to the strongest texts.

Another minor aside that could be found in early Genesis (9:4) is the prohibition of eating the 'lifeblood' of animals, perhaps a reason behind all carnivorous animals being unclean according to subsequent Levitical food laws. If it defiled man to eat an animal's blood, could it have been 'very good' for animals to have eaten each others blood?

[4] I do, however, agree with Dawkins that some issues of concern are the racism/social darwinism logically spawned by evolution. Much much more could be said on this. I loathe the legacy of evolution, with 10,000 aborigines in the Smithsonian Museum as examples of the missing link and all the cruelty that happened in that and many other evolution spawned social evils.