

237 CREATION AND ADVENTISM

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1. Why ask the question?

Adventists have always held the creation story to be the key to understanding the relationship between God and man. God is the Creator, man is the created. The scriptures can be understood only in the light of this fact. Because of its significance, one might naturally ask why any Adventist would want to question whether the Genesis story is really important. It is important that this issue be studied and understood, because the reliability of the biblical record of creation continues to be challenged in many ways.

Challenges to the biblical creation story come from many sources—the public schools, science museums, television programs, books and magazines. But perhaps the most significant challenge comes from within Christian churches. Most main-line Protestant churches, along with the Catholic church and many Jews, have rejected the literal biblical creation account (although the majority of their members may still believe Genesis to be true). In its place these churches have adopted the view that evolution is the process God chose to use when He created the world and its living things. This view is known as theistic evolution. Even some Seventh-day Adventists have become interested in the concepts of theistic evolution, and it seems inevitable that the issue of creation will receive greater attention among Adventists in the near future.

Bible prophecy seems to indicate that creationism will be an important issue in last day events. Seventh-day Adventists believe the three angel's messages of Revelation 14 will be of special significance in the final events of this world's history. The first angel's message is a call to worship of God as the creator. The fact of God's creatorship is the fundamental premise of biblical creationism. Creationism also is involved in the third angel's message concerning the mark of the beast. Adventists understand the mark of the beast to be acceptance of human authority in defiance of God's authority as revealed in scripture, with a major focal point around observance of the seventh-day sabbath. Since the seventh-day sabbath is based on belief in the biblical creation account, one's belief about creation will affect one's belief in the sabbath, and, therefore, one's relationship to the three angel's messages.

Results of a recent survey by Christianity Today showed that the most significant concern of those responding to the survey was proper observance of Sunday (see CT, 2 September 1988, pp. 25-28). This shows the potential for the sabbath issue to become a major focal point in the near future. But Seventh-day Adventists will be unprepared for this issue if doubts remain about creation, the biblical basis for the seventh-day sabbath.

At this point I would like to review what I consider to be the main points of biblical creationism. Each of these points has important implications for Adventist doctrine. The biblical basis for each belief will be presented, some theological implications will be discussed, and some alternative ideas will be examined. The points to be discussed are: God is creator, and sovereign over nature; man is a special creation; creation was accomplished in a week; creation was relatively recent; the original world was destroyed by a flood.

II. God is Creator of all, and sovereign over nature

a. *Scriptural basis for the doctrine.* The scriptures present God as all-powerful, and nature as obeying the will of her Creator. By His word, God created substance in place of space. By His word, God sets the limits of nature. By His word, Christ stilled the sea, calmed the storm, and brought life and healing. The God of the scriptures is sovereign over nature. Some texts supporting creation by command are given below:

Genesis 1:3. "Then God said 'Let there be light'; and there was light." NKJV

Job 38:8-11. "Or who shut in the sea with doors, . . .

When I fixed My limit for it, . . . When I said 'This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!'"

Psalms 33:6,9. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made . . . For He spoke and it was done; . . ." NKJV

Psalms 90:2. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God." NKJV

Hebrews 11:3. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." NKJV

b. Some theological implications of the doctrine. The creatorship of God establishes Him as the ruler over nature and the creator of natural law. As the creator of matter, God is the One who determined its properties and established the laws controlling its behavior. It is God who controls nature, and not nature that limits God. This view of God's greatness is seen throughout the scriptures, and gives us confidence that God will be able to fulfill whatever promises He has made. It would surely be futile to worship a god unable to intervene.

God's creatorship also establishes God's ownership of all, including man. God the creator has the right to hold man accountable, and man the creature has the responsibility to obey. God's interest in man and the other creatures, and the reason for His love are understood only in the light of the relationship of creator to creation.

c. Importance of the doctrine. Probably all Christians would affirm that God is the Creator, and this point may appear to be uncontroversial. However, many people seem hesitant to credit God with absolute power over nature. Some seem to feel that the properties of matter and energy are fixed by nature, and beyond the limits of God's power. While it does appear that God almost always works within natural laws, this by no means shows that He is unable to control nature, or to change nature's laws should He wish. This point may be more significant than it seems at first, because of the importance of miracles in the scriptures. Belief in miracles would seem to assume God's power over natural laws. Denial of God's sovereignty leads to skepticism toward the reality of miracles.

The rise of naturalism in science has resulted in challenges to any explanation requiring supernatural activity. Strictly naturalistic scientists have declared that nature is her own creator, that matter is eternal and self-existent, and that life is simply the result of a fortuitous combination of atoms and molecules. The big bang theory is an attempt to explain a natural origin for the universe. The theories of stellar evolution, chemical evolution, biological evolution, and cultural evolution are attempts to give naturalistic explanations for the origin of our solar system, the origin of life and the advancement of man. It is obvious that a naturalistic outlook provides no basis for hope of eternal life.

The biblical record of creation assures us that God's will is for us to live, that God is greater than death, and that someday He will re-create not only us, but the entire world in a state of perfection. The reality of the miraculous original creation gives us a sound basis on which to base faith in a miraculous advent and re-creation.

III. Man is a special creation

a. Scriptural basis for the doctrine. In the scriptures, man occupies a special position. Man alone was created in God's image. Man is a moral creature, created with the freedom of choice. He was given the responsibility of caring for his environment and the other creatures. Some texts supporting these points are given below:

Genesis 1:27. "So God created man in his own image . . ." NKJV

Genesis 1:38. "I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals." TEV

Psalm 8:5,6. "Yet you made him inferior only to yourself; you crowned him with glory and honour. You appointed him ruler over everything you made; you placed him over all creation . . ."

TEV (Quoted by Paul in Hebrews 2:6-8.)

Mark 10:6. "But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female." NKJV

I Corinthians 15:45. " . . . The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit." NKJV

see also Romans 8:19-23.

b. Theological implications of the doctrine. In the scriptures we find the basis for understanding man's nature. The story of man's creation and subsequent fall explains the presence of evil in the world, despite the goodness of God. The creation account explains man's moral accountability, the reason for his mortality, his need of salvation and his potential for receiving it. Created with intelligence, free will, and responsibility, Eve chose to disbelieve God's word because the evidence seemed to point to a different conclusion. Adam chose to follow, even though he knew the result. As a result of their choice, all of nature became subject to death and decay.

The plan of salvation was implemented to restore nature to harmony with God's will, which will finally be accomplished in a new creation (Rev. 21:5; Rom. 8:19-23).

c. Importance of the doctrine. Most scientists today believe that man has arisen from primitive ape-like ancestors. Probably a large number of these scientists would allow for the possibility that God was involved at some point, perhaps by revealing Himself to some ape-man Adam, implanting a "soul" into him, and giving him moral responsibility. There are logical difficulties in this scenario. For example, what was the difference in the first pair before and after their selection? What was their relationship to the rest of their population? How could such primitive creatures be held morally accountable? In what way is such an ape-man made in the image of God?

The origin of man given in scripture is not reconcilable with an evolutionary origin for man. The scriptural account describes man as falling from a perfect beginning. Conversion from ape-man to human seems more like a rise than a fall. If the first pair of ape-men did fall, one must question the fairness of God in expecting so much from them when they could understand so little. The belief that God gave man a soul to elevate him from beast to human is logically tied to belief in man's immortality.

The nature of man is difficult to explain without acceptance of the biblical creation record. I have never seen a logically consistent explanation of the origin of man, the existence of death and the possibility of salvation that was not based on the creation record of Genesis. The biblical account assures us we are not merely converted apes. Adam was created in the image of God, not from an ape-like creature. Christ, the second Adam, came with a nature similar to Adam's. There was nothing ape-like about Christ. The scriptures assure us that God is fair, that Adam and Eve were given a perfect beginning, and that God can and will restore us to the perfect environment He wills for us.

IV. The Creation Package: Recent, Six days, Worldwide flood

Three important elements of biblical creationism are: a six-day creation, a recent creation, and a worldwide flood. It is important to note that none of these three points is independent of the other two. Because the concepts of a six-day creation, the recency of creation and the worldwide flood, are all closely interrelated, I call them "the creation package". The reasons they are so closely tied together are discussed below.

If one examines the layers of rocks containing fossils, it soon becomes apparent that different layers of rocks contain different kinds of fossils. One explanation for this could be that the different fossilized organisms were buried at different times. According to this view, the sedimentary layers have been produced gradually. This would require long ages of time, and would mean that different kinds of organisms lived on the earth at different times. If this were true, it would obviously be impossible for them to all have been created recently, in six days.

Another explanation could be that they lived at the same time, but were buried separately. This explanation does not require long ages of time, but does require a worldwide catastrophe in order to produce the great quantities of fossils in a short time. A worldwide flood would meet this requirement. If the organisms buried in the different fossil layers were living at the same time, they must have been buried over a short span of time, not over millions of years. A worldwide flood is the only explanation available for organisms living at the same time to be rapidly buried in different layers.

If the fossils were produced in a short time by a worldwide flood, there would be no reason to think the earth is old. All the various kinds of organisms could have been created in one week. This is the explanation given in the Bible. It should be clear that one cannot reject a worldwide flood while defending a six-day creation. This is why I call the interrelationship of these concepts "The creation package". Evidence supporting one of the concepts supports the entire creation package. No one has been able to successfully separate the three concepts of six-day creation, recent creation and worldwide flood, and they must be accepted or rejected as a unit.

a. Scriptural basis for the doctrines. Although the doctrines of recent, six-day creation and worldwide flood are interrelated, the scriptural basis for each point will be considered separately.

1. *The six-day creation.* The creation story presents a picture of God as creating by command, in an orderly process, over a period of six days, with the seventh day set aside for communion with man. The six-day creation explains the origin of the weekly cycle, which has no other basis, and forms the basis for observance of the seventh-day sabbath. Some texts supporting the six-day creation are given below:

Genesis 2:1,2. "By the seventh day God finished what He had been doing and stopped working." TEV

Exodus 20:11. "In six days, I, the Lord made the earth, the sky, the sea, and everything in them." TEV

Exodus 31:17. "... for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." NKJV

2. *Worldwide flood.* The flood was a supernaturally caused, worldwide phenomenon. God sent the flood as a judgment because of man's wickedness, and only those on the ark were saved. Conditions near the end of time will resemble those that existed before the flood, and God will once again intervene to prevent man from destroying himself. Some texts supporting the worldwide flood are given below:

Genesis 6:17. "And behold, I Myself am bringing the flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; and everything that is on the earth shall die." NKJV

Genesis 7:21. "And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died." NKJV

Matthew 24:38,39. "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." NKJV

Hebrews 11:7. "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, . . ." NKJV

2 Peter 3:6. "and it was also by water, the water of the flood, that the old world was destroyed." TEV

3. *A recent creation.* The Bible does not state how old the earth is, or how long it has been since creation. Genealogies have been recorded in Genesis, and other periods of time are recorded so that it is possible to compile some estimate of the age of life on this earth. Some of the pertinent texts are listed below:

Genesis 5, 11. Genealogies from Adam to Abraham

Galatians 3:17. Abrahamic promise to Sinai

Exodus 12:40. Israelites in Egypt

I Kings 6:1. Exodus to the temple.

Establishing the exact age of the earth is not possible from the data given in the scriptures. One reason for uncertainty is the Hebrew tendency to name only the more important ancestors, leaving the possibility that some names may be missing from the genealogies. For example, the exact age of Terah at the birth of Abram is not clear from the scriptures. Another problem area is the starting date for the time the Israelites spent in Egypt. Compounding these uncertainties is the fact that different manuscripts of the scriptures sometimes give different numbers of years, and it is not known which are the most accurate. Nevertheless, it is clear that the scriptures consider the creation to have been only a few thousand years ago.

It does not seem to be important to know exactly how long ago creation took place, as no biblical doctrines seem to be directly dependent on the exact age of the earth. The scriptures do not tell us when the rocks and the water were created, and it doesn't seem to matter. However, the scriptures do indicate that the marine organisms, land plants, terrestrial animals, and man were all created in the same week.

Many creationists estimate the time since creation week to be about 6000 years. Other creationists, in order to avoid useless arguments, simply estimate the time since creation to be less than 10,000 years. The Septuagint figure, about 7500 years, may be the best available. But even if creation were slightly more than 10,000 years old, it would make little difference theologically, so long as it could be reconciled with a six-day creation and a worldwide flood. Since this "creation package" is based on supernatural activity, there seems to be little to be gained by arguing about the exact time since creation week, nor is any compromise with evolutionists possible by extending the age a few thousand years. The evolutionary theory requires millions of years, not thousands of years. Evolutionary theory also implies death before the creation of man. The differences are too fundamental to be patched over. Since this is so, it seems best to hold to the figure best supported by scripture.

b. *Theological implications of the doctrines.* The creation package has several implications important to Seventh-day Adventists. The Bible describes creation and the flood as supernatural activities. This requires that God be able to control nature. As pointed out earlier, the Bible presents God as sovereign over nature, creating by command, intervening when necessary, maintaining the creation by his power.

An implication of the creation package that is particularly important to Seventh-day Adventists is the six-day creation as the basis for observance of the seventh-day sabbath. Three reasons are given for Sabbath observance: six-day creation (Exodus 20:11, 31:17); deliverance from bondage (Deuteronomy 5:15); and sanctification (Ezekiel 20:12). Each of these reasons is important, and observance of the seventh-day sabbath symbolizes our faith in God's word, and our relationship with God as Creator, Deliverer and Redeemer.

The worldwide flood stands as a warning of judgment to come. The judgment hour message of Revelation 14 calls for worship of God because He is the creator. Since man is a moral creature, he will someday be called into account. The example of the worldwide flood gives us a sound basis for confidence in the eventual triumph of justice.

c. *Importance of the doctrines.* The importance of the creation package can be underscored by considering what would be the result if it should be abandoned. Alternatives to the biblical account of creation usually involve an evolutionary process that requires long periods of time.

The view of God's greatness and power over nature is difficult to harmonize with the view that God used evolution as a method of creation- "like a celestial mechanic changing wheelbarrows into space shuttles by changing or adding one part at a time." Not only is such a process contradictory to scriptures, it is also contradicted by science. The improbability of life arising by chance, the stability of species against change, the genetic mechanism of preserving information, the lack of fossil intermediates, and the implausibility of survival of intermediate forms are all evidence against the possibility of biological evolution.

The proposal that evolution is the process used by God in creation presents another considerable theological difficulty. Evolution can only occur when some individuals die and are replaced with other individuals. Most versions of evolution affirm this process to be driven by competition for resources that are in short supply, with better adapted individuals replacing those less fit. Creation by evolution requires death before man's sin, and makes death a part of God's method of creation, rather than a result of man's sin. This is theologically unacceptable. Beyond that, it portrays God as deliberately restricting resources in order to stimulate the process, a view contradictory to the scriptural view of God's provident care over His creatures.

The strongest argument against the six-day creation comes from the study of fossils. The earth appears to be very old, with different kinds of organisms fossilized in different layers. The different fossil layers are believed to represent different ages. Radiometric dating methods seem to support the antiquity of the earth. Because of this, most scientists believe that new types of creatures appeared over long ages of time. They believe that evolution was the process by which new kinds of organisms were created, either naturalistically, or with assistance from God. But the scientific evidence does not support the plausibility of the evolutionary process occurring naturally. If God's activity is invoked, the question becomes theological rather than scientific, and the scriptures become the final arbiter. The scriptures describe a creation process not compatible with evolution.

Harmonizing Science and Scripture

a. *The basis for harmony.* Loss of faith in God's word is probably the most serious problem facing Christianity today. The Bible is the final arbiter of doctrinal disputes, and any attempt to undermine confidence in its truthfulness should be viewed with concern. Loss of confidence in scripture leaves doctrine to be set by majority vote or ecclesiastical decree. It seems highly likely that the loss of confidence in creation has contributed to the loss of spirituality in many of the popular Christian churches.

Acceptance of secular thinking has an effect on one's views of scriptural authority. Some have suggested that scripture teaches about spiritual things, while science teaches about natural things. It is asserted that if each source of knowledge is acknowledged as authoritative in its own sphere, there is no need for conflict. This

Science deals only with natural law, so it is not capable of identifying supernatural activity. The scriptures are the only source able to identify supernatural activity. But most scientists refuse to accept the authority of scripture to identify supernatural activity in matters involving creation, the flood and the age of the earth. Unless scripture is acknowledged as authoritative to identify supernatural activity, one is left without any valid criterion for harmonizing science and scripture.

Failure to acknowledge the authority of scripture to identify supernatural events leads to the subjection of scripture to the authority of science in any area addressed by science. Scientists have never observed creation or a worldwide flood, yet they claim to know better than the Bible. There is much stronger scientific evidence concerning birth and death, both having been observed millions of times. Scientists have a much stronger empirical basis for denying the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ than for denying the biblical record of creation and the flood. If science can be used to deny the biblical story of supernatural creation, it is only logical that it can be used to deny the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ.

b. *The witness of Jesus.* Christianity is based on the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. Jesus kept the Sabbath, thereby supporting the basis for the Sabbath, which is creation. He accepted the authority of the scriptures in general, and affirmed the creation story and the flood in particular. Some texts illustrating these points are given below:

Matthew 19:4. "... Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female?" NKJV

Matthew 24:38, 39. "In the days before the flood people ate and drank, men and women married, up to the very day Noah went into the boat; yet they did not realize what was happening until the flood came and swept them all away."

Mark 2:27,28. "... The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." NKJV

Luke 4:16. "... And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read." NKJV

John 5:46,47. "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" NKJV

Belief in the creation account of Genesis cannot be given up without also compromising the authority and reliability of scripture. Those who refuse to accept Moses written account of creation are forced to also reject Christ's words affirming creation. Jesus Himself was the Creator, a point emphasized by the New Testament writers (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2). His statement that He was Lord of the Sabbath also implies that He is the one who created it. Even without other supporting evidence, the witness of Jesus should be sufficient to convince Christians of the reliability of the creation record in Genesis.

c. *The danger of being right.* Faith in the validity of the biblical record, including the creation account, is of critical importance to Seventh-day Adventism. There is no doubt that creation is the clear teaching of the scriptures. But there is a danger in being right. Some of the worst crimes in history were committed by religious people who knew themselves to be right. We must guard against the tendency to mistreat those who disagree with us. We have reason to expect a new round of religious persecution in the near future, and it would be well for us to practice the golden rule toward dissenters.

This is not to say the church should not take a position, or that any member should be free to teach anything he pleases. The church must state its beliefs if it is to have a purpose. And individuals have the choice whether they wish to be a part of the church or not. But relationships among those who disagree should be courteous. Jesus said the mark of His disciples was to be their love for each other. Truth can afford to be inspected. Those who are right can afford to be courteous, and to love everyone, including those we believe to be wrong.