

ADAM & EVE ... FUMBLER OR FORMED?

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So. Who do we believe? The atheistic evolutionist who says mankind is the product of random, chance processes? Or the Genesis account that insists mankind is the pinnacle of God's cosmic creation? Who is telling the truth? The atheistic evolutionist who says man is the product of unguided natural selection that has lifted him from the bottom of a primordial pond by all kinds of fortuitous permutations? Or, the Genesis account that teaches man is specially formed to reflect the likeness of his Creator? Are human beings dust and no more, or Divine image-bearers with destiny? Both can't be right can they? Or perhaps, the truth is somewhere in-between?

Of course, for the New Atheists like Richard Dawkins, to even propose the theistic alternative betrays incredible naivety. For Dawkins *et al* the idea that Adam & Eve were specially created beings begs the further question, "Who created God?" Hmm, Mr Dawkins, even if we grant your question is valid (the God of the Bible is uncreated, therefore beyond and outside space and time), have you not considered that we may legitimately ask you the very same question? Since you believe you are here because the Universe created you by chance, please tell us, "Who created your creator?" Touche.

Perhaps the very fact that we are able to ask questions about meaning and ultimate reality hints that we really are like our Creator? Matter or Mind, Materialism or Intelligence? I think these are questions that reflect we are made in the image of God who made us in His own likeness. Furthermore, these questions hint surely, that human beings are qualitatively *different* from the rest of the animal kingdom? We may bear 98% genetic similarity to chimps, but it's that final 2% --- plus a whole other dimension we shall examine below --- that keeps the chimps from asking these uniquely human questions!

So I better come clean. If you haven't already guessed it, it is my firm conviction that the Genesis account of the creation of Adam and Eve speaks of a humanity that was specially formed, not fumbled. That said, there may still be a few surprises in store as we delve a little deeper into the Genesis story. Hang in there with me, OK?

WHAT ABOUT CAVEMEN?

It may come as a shock to learn that long before modern science identified Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons, that many of the ancient Jewish Talmudic commentators knew about 'cavemen'.¹ And they knew of these pre-human hominid animals by reading closely the text of Genesis (in Hebrew of course) and not from the deep geologic table! These ancient Jewish writers pointed out that 'cavemen' were animals with human-like physiques and characteristics --- their cranial cavities are the same as ours, even having the three-layered structure we possess, and sometimes considerably larger --- for at least hundreds of thousands of years before Adam. But, according to the Talmudic writers, they lacked the *neshamah* ('the breath of life') to make them human beings.² But I am getting ahead of myself.

Unlike those Jewish commentators from antiquity, many Christian expositors have long struggled with the discovery of these human-like hominids and their high degree of social organisation. For instance, the Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnons accumulated material wealth. They employed various tools. They engaged in three-dimensional artwork and even had finely fashioned sculptures of various animals. Neanderthals lived in housing in highly socialised communities, and even buried their dead respectfully in graves. There are

¹ Talmud is the written story, in Hebrew & Aramaic dress, of Biblical interpretation and by-laws covering a period of almost one thousand years from the time of Ezra to the middle of the Sixth Century AD.

² Talmud Keliim 8:5 and Maimonides in *Guide For The Perplexed*, 1:7.

well-documented pre-Adamic settlements extending from France to the Ukraine.³ I think the record is all but irrefutable, and that we must either believe science has got it wrong or (as some Christian commentators have proposed), God placed the fossils in the earth to test our faith in a literal understanding of Genesis!

GUIDED EVOLUTION?

In my previous article *I Wish God Would Believe In Evolution!* I proposed there is nothing in the Biblical text to suggest that God could not have embedded within His creation certain regularities (laws) by which He may have employed a process of 'natural' selection in bringing forth biological diversity in the plant and animal kingdoms. We noted that observing 'natural' processes in meteorology, or embryology, or history does not deny God is the ultimate Mind and Power behind these phenomenon. In fact, we noted the Genesis text itself strongly hints that the waters and the earth were invested with certain capacities to help orchestrate life. Now it's time to add a few more necessary comments in relation to the process(es) God seems to have employed in the making of mankind.

Ten times in Genesis 1 we read, "and God said." This means God was directing the flow of cosmic events towards a goal (I now have the atheistic scientist who believes in unguided evolution gasping for air!). It is instructive to note that on Day 3 God spoke *twice*: First, to separate the waters from the land and second, to command the earth to sprout vegetation (Gen. 1: 9-13). God's speaking twice on Day 3 indicates there is a massive gulf between inorganic and organic matter. Into this gap God must speak --- in scientific terms to add new information --- in order to lift the process another stage higher.

Indeed, there was another Day in which God spoke *twice*: Day 6. On that day God said first, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures ..." and secondly He said, "Let us make man ..." (Gen. 1:24, 26). Once again, God's speaking twice on one day underlines the fact there is a massive gulf between the animals and mankind. Into this gap God must speak to inject further advancement. Divine punctuation into the flow of life is needed to bring the cosmos to its targeted goal ... human beings ... formed, not fumbled.

Each time God spoke twice on the one day, we see exponential change between inorganic and organic and between animals and human beings. Scripture suggests that natural processes embedded within the cosmos needed further Divine input at those critical stages of creation's development. As John Lennox comments,

"On this view, therefore, the six creation days themselves could well have been days of normal length, spaced out at intervals over the entire period of time that God took to complete his work. The outworking of the potential of each creative fiat would occupy an unspecified period of time after that particular creation day. One consequence of this is that we would expect to find what geologists tell us we do find --- fossil evidence revealing the sudden appearance of new levels of complexity, followed by periods during which there was no more creation (in the sense of God speaking to inaugurate something radically new)."⁴

A BIG SURPRISE

Now let's get back to Jewish commentary in the Talmud. Don't forget this commentary pre-dates modern science and is based on a reading of Genesis alone. According to this commentary it is not our physical makeup that makes human beings unique. These Jewish commentators indicate *there is no theological problem posed by*

³ I am well aware this raises the whole question about the age of the earth and whether the 7 days of Genesis 1 are literal 24 hours or something else. Sufficient for the time being to say that apart from any purely scientific considerations, Genesis 1:1 seems to separate "the beginning of the heavens and the earth" from Day 1. Thus, Genesis leaves indeterminate the age of the universe and that of the earth.

⁴ Lennox, John C. *Seven Days That Divide The World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2011. p55

human-like animals having our physical development come through a developmental evolutionary process (now I probably have some Christians gasping for air! Don't you just love being shot at from both sides?)

Nahmanides comments on Genesis 1:26 that the "us" of, "And God said, 'Let us make man ...'" refers to the joint contributions by God and the existing earth.⁵ Nahmanides notes that only before Day 1 was matter created from nothing, and thereafter all things were formed from already existing elements. For this reason it is written that at God's command, the waters and the land brought forth life.⁶

Commenting on this ancient Talmudic insight, Schroeder notes that mankind though physically related to his human-like predecessors is not connected by a spiritual line of evolution. According to the geological record Hominids roamed the Earth for some 300,000 years prior to the appearance of Adam. But neither the Neanderthals nor the Cro-Magnons evolved into human beings. At a critical juncture (possibly about 6,000 - 10,000 years ago) a quantum change occurred. This change is the reason for the Biblically stated partnership between God and the Earth in creating mankind.⁷ But as Gerald Schroeder aptly remarks, "Well within the scope of Biblical tradition is the fact of a directed evolution of man ..."⁸

THE "NESHAMAH" OR "BREATH OF LIFE"

What is the special ingredient, not mentioned before this juncture, that is summoned and introduced? We read,

"Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7).

The special 'ingredient' God puts into the creature of the ground is called "the breath of life" (Heb. *neshamah*). Many English readers of Genesis are unaware that up till this point all sentient animals, whether land or sea creatures, are described as "souls" or "living creatures" (see Gen. 1: 20-21, 24 where the Hebrew calls them *nephesh*). Thus, all animals in common with Adam are souls! The individual that was about to become Adam was no exception as to his physical being, but into that (we might say) animal form, God placed a revolutionary dimension found in no other creature. It was called "the breath of life" (Heb. *neshamah*). The verse reads this way:

"And the LORD God formed man [Adam] from the dust of the ground [*adamah*] and blew into his nostrils the breath of life [*neshamah*], and the man [Adam] became a living being [*nefesh*]" (Gen. 2:7).

Maimonides in his *Guide For The Perplexed* makes a remarkable comment. In the time of Adam there co-existed animals that appeared as humans in shape and also in intelligence but lacked the "image of God" that makes man uniquely different from other animals.⁹ Here is a revolution that no naturalistic evolution can account for!

Another, Nahmanides on Genesis 2:7, goes so far as to say that mankind developed through three distinct stages. The material of Adam's body was initially in the form of inert matter [the dust of the earth]. In the first stage of development, there was a force that produced growth, "like a plant." Then with further Divine input, the animal that was to become man "was able to move, first as the fish and then as the land animals."

Here Nahmanides, still commenting on Genesis 2:7, refers to Genesis 1:20 and 24. These two verses describe the sequential first appearances of aquatic life and then terrestrial animal life. Prior to attaining the unique attribute of mankind, Nahmanides continues, the animal that was to become man had both the physical structure and the

⁵ The "us" in Genesis does not refer to the Trinity. That is to impose later 'Christian' theology onto the text. Refer to *They Never Told Me This in Church!* pp94-99 for further substance.

⁶ Nahmanides in *Commentary on the Torah*, Genesis 1:26.

⁷ Op Cit. *Genesis and the Big Bang*, p150

⁸ Schroeder, Gerald. *Genesis and the Big Bang: The Discovery of harmony Between Modern Science and the Bible*. Bantam Books, USA. 1992. p 149

⁹ Maimonides in *Guide For The Perplexed*, part 1, chapter 7.

power of perception of a human. Only when this was accomplished was the spirit of God, the *neshamah*, breathed into him.

Nahmanides concludes his discussion with the observation that the grammatical construction of this verse (Genesis 2:7) indicates that reasoning, speech, and all the other capabilities of mankind, while not being a part of the spirit are subject to the spirit that was given to mankind alone among the animals. God's direct and newly created contribution of spirit came to man only after the material part was already intact and fully developed.¹⁰

We may say the Bible defines a human being as a creature from the soil with a "*neshamah*" directly bestowed by the Creator. As creatures of the soil we humans share genetic similarity to the birds, reptiles and beasts from the ground. But unlike atheistic evolution, Genesis clearly teaches that we are touched by the Divine Creator in a unique way.

Now, even if you are howling at me in protest at these ancient Jewish commentators and disagree that the text could possibly hint that God "formed" physical Adam by using an evolutionary process from plants to sea and land creatures, may I add this: How God physically made the first human bodies --- whether from scratch from the "dust" or from other primates --- ultimately is irrelevant to the final status of human beings who are bearers of the image of God. Either way we acknowledge the Sovereign God is free to use whatever method He wished in bringing Adam from the soil into his finished status in whom "the breath of God" dwelt. The bottom line from the Genesis story is that the phrase describing Adam as being "in the image of God" has exercised a profound influence on our Western understanding of the value of humanity.

For the moment however, let's continue to follow these ancient rabbis as they read their Bible long before the dawn of our modern scientific era ...

ADAM BECAME 'TO' A LIVING BEING

Approximately 1900 years ago the Biblical commentator Onkelos highlighted a subtle wording of Genesis 2:7 that is not in our translations. Indeed this subtle wording is not in other language translations either. This little Hebrew word not considered necessary when translating the Hebrew is the word "to". The Hebrew text reads,

"Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [the *neshamah*] and [the] man became **to** a living being [*nephesh*]" (Gen. 2:7).

The supposedly superfluous word "to" --- "and the man became **to** a living being" --- is in the Hebrew to teach us something significant, surely? Onkelos says it hints at a change from a lower to a higher form of existence. God stepped Adam up from one level of existence --- animal --- **to** a higher level altogether.

Onkelos read the verse this way, "And the man became a speaking spirit." That is, he understood the text to be teaching that man is not a speaking animal. It's not only that he can reason and discourse with his fellow human beings, but primarily that he can receive and give rational interaction with his Creator. As a communicating "spirit" being, man is able to receive propositional truth from his Creator. It is the "*neshamah*" that elevates us from being a mere animal and lifts us up "to" the status of being Divine image-bearers.

By this special inbreathing creative act of God, human beings are now differentiated from the rest of God's world in that we can stand in loving relationship before our Creator. Man is given the capacity to stand in awe of his significance in God's created order. Here stands an unprogrammed part of the cosmos --- a real man in a real history --- a wonder in that he is truly like His Maker. Man is a communicating, rational, spiritual, living being who bears testimony to Who God is. In every human being, no matter how marred by sin and unbelief since Adam's

¹⁰ Op Cit. *Genesis and The Big Bang*, pp 150-151

defection soon after, God has left a witness that cannot be removed (Augustine called it a God-shaped vacuum). That's why deep down we are different to the animals.

It is significant that Genesis informs us the difference between animals and humans is not only that God assigned to humans the responsibility of stewardship "over" the animals, plants and environment (Gen. 1:26). But that difference particularly between Adam and the animals is underscored in the context of finding a "suitable helper" for the Man. We are told there was no helper found for Adam amongst the animals. No animals corresponded exactly to Adam among the countless animal types and species --- including, be it noted, the non-human hominids that must have been there. Such animals lacked "the breath of life", the *neshamah*, the image of God.

The very first task God assigned to Adam was to name the animals that paraded before him. How significant that the very first lesson God taught Adam was that he was fundamentally *different from all other creatures!*

A DOUBLE-TRIPLE!

Darwinian evolution can deny this all it wants, but we are at heart hungry for God because we are His special creation. Note the double-triple emphasis the text gives to man which is found for no other part of the creation:

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:27).

This threefold emphasis on the special creation of man is repeated:

"This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him; male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created" (Gen. 5:1-2).

Observe the triple emphasis on the word "create" in both passages. This six-fold emphasis appears after no other aspect of God's handiwork in all creation, including the material heavens and earth, the sun, moon and stars, and so forth, even though they also "declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). It is as though God is putting multiple exclamation marks when Adam & Eve appear. It is as though God is saying, "Sure I created the vast universe out of nothing. Yes, I created all the laws and processes you may study in my vast laboratory. But after you have studied everything else, do you get how special you are? Well, in case you don't get it, let me say it three times over; I created human beings in My own likeness! No, no, no. That's not even enough. Let me repeat Myself three more times that I created Adam & Eve in my own image. Yes, I created men and women to reflect and represent Me in this world." Exclamation! Exclamation! Exclamation! Exclamation! Exclamation! Exclamation! Six times exclamation! It's kind of like the exuberant dad who claps his eyes on his new born baby, "Look dear, look at our baby boy! Look at our darling girl! S/he is just like you! Look!" How satisfied Father God was ... "behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1: 31).

AN EXTRA 'YOD'

Gerald Schroeder goes on to add that based on the literal meaning of Genesis 2:7 and 2:19 animals and all living creatures were formed from the same material "ground" or earth. But once again we note something significant in the original Hebrew text. In these two Hebrew texts there is an important difference in the spelling of the verb "formed". True, in both verses the tense and the person of the verb are identical, and the structure of both verses is the same. But when describing the formation of mankind there is an extra (apparently) grammatically superfluous 'yod' (Hebrew letter) in the verb "formed".

'Yod' is the first letter in the Hebrew Name of God and is used as an abbreviation for His Name. By the addition of the extra 'yod' we are being told that in the forming of mankind, God touched Adam in a way that is unique ...

mankind stands in the place of Yahweh God on this earth.¹¹ This is why the Talmud can point out that cavemen (Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons) were animals with human physiques and similar emotions and capacities, but lacking the essential “*neshamah*” that stamps us as God’s special representatives and agents in His world. These Jewish commentators predated modern science by at least 1,000 years! And they got this information from the Biblical text itself. It’s only been seriously discussed by modern science in the last 150 years or so!

CONFIRMATION BY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIANS

Many of the great “conservative” Christian theologians and academics endorse these textual findings, thereby concurring with the science of astronomy, mathematics, geology, palaeontology, biology, and genetics as confirming the Genesis story. For example, they don’t come any more “conservative” and committed to Biblical inerrancy and inspiration than the Presbyterian and Princeton theologians Charles Hodge, Benjamin B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen. Each of these impeccably ‘orthodox’ theologians espoused that the earth is ages older than a mere 6,000 -10,000 years. And A. A. Hodge (Charles’ son) was open to biological evolution. Several other orthodox theologians including James Orr and the Princeton palaeontologist and grandson of Charles Hodge, William Berryman Scott, accepted God and evolution were not incompatible. This is not to mention the great majority of contemporary Christian biologists and palaeontologists who accept evolution as a valid scientific theory not at odds with the Genesis account. One might ask, why are some evangelical circles so hesitant still?¹²

John Lennox himself states that,

“There is a way of understanding Genesis 1 that does not compromise the authority and primacy of Scripture and that, at the same time, takes into account our increased knowledge of the universe, as Scripture itself suggests we should (Rom. 1:19-20).”¹³

Indeed. It’s such a pity there has been so much falling out between science and theology over what turns out to be a straw man. As Gerald Schroeder, MIT trained nuclear physicist and oceanographer and Hebrew scholar pithily remarks,

“If we are ever to reach an understanding of our cosmic origins, an understanding that is compatible with all the information we have, then sceptics looking over each of my shoulders must look carefully into each other’s texts as well.”¹⁴

Yes please. A little mutual respect goes a long way. Perhaps the God of the Genesis creation does believe in [Directed] evolution after all? One thing is certain. Scientific theories morph and change when new data comes in. Objective reality will eventually prevail. Empirical data will triumph. I have confidence in such science.

And another thing is certain. One school of interpreting the Bible is not necessarily infallible either. Remember the old fixed-earth theologians? The science of astronomy buried their wrong interpretation of the Biblical text once and for all. So, the Bible and science can really be the best of friends and massively benefit from each other. How can it be otherwise when both the works of God in His cosmos and the words of God in His Book have the same Author?

I am aware that I have not answered every question about Adam & Eve in this brief article. I hope to do this in the coming days. Sufficient to conclude for now, that the Genesis claim of mankind being the special creation of God living in a world prepared for him is galaxies apart from the evolutionary claim of an accidental world with no existential meaning. The Bible is very clear, regardless of which Christian creation theory you hold to --- whether God used a guided evolutionary process or whether He directly created Adam in a moment from the dust --- men

¹¹ Op. Cit. *Genesis And The Big Bang*, p 152

¹² *Christians and Evolution*, Edited by Professor R. J. Berry. Monarch Books, Oxford, England. 2014. pp 236-237

¹³ Op. Cit. *Seven Days That Divide The World*, p62

¹⁴ Ibid, p 176

and women are created in the image of God. Each of us is formed, not fumbled. Sorry Mr Dawkins, but who really did create your creator?