

## Creationist Funhouse, Episode Two

# The Curse

In the first in this series, we found that creationists believe God red-shifted the light from the stars to make a young universe look like an old one. In this episode, we will discover that creationists believe God corrupted his own perfect and beautiful world.

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Creationists believe that when God created the universe, he made it perfect and good. In fact, each day of creation in the first chapter of Genesis has a refrain: “And behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1 is a song, not a scientific account. It has refrains, just like a song.) The goodness of creation is something that nearly everyone can instinctively feel when they go hiking in the natural world.

You are out in a forest of green leaves. Your soul is bathing in the beauty of nature. To the Japanese, this is quite literally what you are doing: *shinrin-yoku* means bathing in nature. A gentle susurrus stirs the leaves. A little songbird flits into view with a little insect in its mouth then flies away. You may not see them, but you suspect there are predators hiding in the branches. At such a time, even an atheist might echo the words of Genesis 1: *Behold, it is very good.* And the more you behold it, the closer you look at it, and the more you study it, the better it looks. Even an agnostic might not restrain from saying, “Praise whatever god there may be for this beautiful world!”

And this is the image presented in Psalm 104. The psalmist says:

God makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth. He makes wine that gladdens the hearts of humans ... and bread that sustains their lives. Birds build their nests in the cedars and storks make their home in the junipers ... . When God brings the night, all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey, and seek their food from the hand of God. When the sun rises, they hide in their dens. Then people go to work and labor until the evening. In wisdom God made all these things.

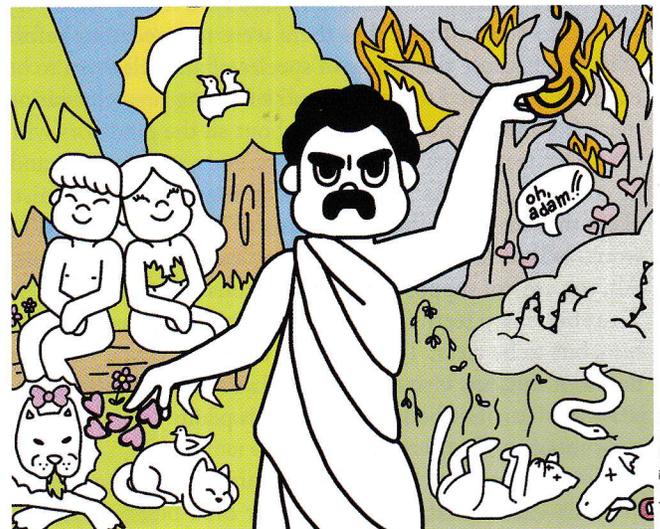
This psalm describes how beautiful the natural world is *right now* and how human activity can fit into this natural

world. But if you feel that the natural world is perfect and beautiful, as the author of Psalm 104 apparently did, you would be very, very wrong from the viewpoint of creationists. In fact, they believe the natural world is damned and cursed.

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Creationists believe the world of mountains, trees, streams, birds, and mammals was indeed perfect when God made it in Genesis 1. And it was perfect when God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In fact, the world was so perfect that it seems impossible to distinguish between the inside of the garden and the outside. If this is so, where were the boundaries of the Garden?

But then one day, one of these beautiful and perfect animals—a snake that had legs and could talk—told Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Most people think the fruit was an apple, but according to one creationist film I saw back in the 1970s, it was an avocado. Eve ate it and then gave some of it to Adam, and he ate it also. That was when the world went to hell in a handbasket. This event is popularly called The Fall or The Fall of Man. That turned out to be one expensive avocado.



Lorraine Thompson

According to early Christian theologians, and to many conservative Christians today, The Fall was Eve's fault. This is what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11. In the first letter to Timothy, chapter 2, the writer (who may not have been Paul) said that Adam was not deceived: "It was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." What, then, can save a woman from sin? "But women will be saved through childbearing," said the letter to Timothy. That's right, ladies, you'd better get busy popping out babies if you don't want to keep shouldering the blame for all the evil in the world.

Adam and Eve, after eating the fruit, made garments for themselves out of leaves and tried to hide from God. This seems really strange if indeed God is all-seeing. But maybe God was not in fact all-seeing. Genesis chapter 3 depicts God as a person walking around in the Garden looking for Adam and Eve. In fact, He was walking around "in the cool of the evening," the time of day in the Middle East that is most pleasant. When God found them, he asked them what was going on and actually seemed surprised at their answer, which is strange if God is, in fact, all-knowing. When God discovered that Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden avocado, the following events occurred, according to Genesis:

- God said that the ground was cursed because of Adam and Eve.
- God ejected Adam and Eve from the Garden out into the world.
- Out in the world, Adam and Eve had to make their living as farmers, which was hard work.
- But when they tried to raise crops, thorns and thistles came forth from the ground.
- God made clothes for Adam and Eve out of animal skins and told them they could now eat meat.
- God turned the snake into a legless animal without a voice.

But to creationists, this list is extremely incomplete. Before The Fall, they believe, there were no bad mutations in DNA. (DNA is the molecule that encodes all of our genetic information.) There were no parasites or diseases. There were no predators. While you may think that there is nothing evil about a bird eating an insect or a hawk eating a mouse, these are evil from the creationist viewpoint. And it may seem very strange to you to think that there were no predators before The Fall, because thousands of species of animals seem to be exquisitely adapted to chasing and subduing prey and eating meat from their carcasses. What about all the predators with big, sharp teeth, such as wolves, bears, lions, and tigers . . . and, of course, T. rex? As incredible as it may seem, creationists claim that all of these animals ate plants before The Fall. Why would a T. rex need such teeth to eat leaves, fruits, and nuts? Ah, you are not supposed to ask questions like that. God gave T. rex big, sharp teeth for whatever reason might have pleased him, but to be clear: T. rex did not eat meat. If you have any doubt of this, just visit a creationist museum and see the displays of sharp-toothed dinosaurs with plants hanging out of their mouths. That settles it.

In addition to all this, the creationist group Answers in Genesis claims that no animals ever died before The Fall.

The Bible does not say this. Maybe, as I said in the previous article, they should call themselves Answers Not in Genesis.

According to the first Chapter of Genesis, God repeatedly commanded all the animals to "be fruitful and multiply." That is, to reproduce, and not just reproduce a little but to *multiply*. This is, in fact, the way populations grow: not by addition but by multiplication. If animals reproduced but never died, very soon they would have filled the world with their populations and eaten every bit of plant food that such a planet, no matter how green, could have produced. This seems like a ridiculous arrangement; it would seem that God would have made animals either reproductive or immortal but not both.

A possible answer to this dilemma is that when creating the world, God *knew* that the Garden paradise was not going to last. He knew that the snake was going to walk right up to Eve and give her a line of talk. He knew that his zoo of infinitely reproducing vegetarian tigers and immortal caterpillars was only a temporary arrangement. The Bible, of course, says nothing of the sort.

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For animal death to suddenly enter the world, the entire ecosystem of the world had to be altered. What did God have to do to make the world into the arena of competition and death that it now is? Here are a few examples:

- A predator needs more than sharp teeth and claws. It also needs a digestive system that is adapted to meat. If you have any doubt of this, just try raising your guinea pig on dog food or your dog on hay. Pre-Fall predators would have needed a vegetarian digestive system, complete with an entire suite of bacteria that help the vegetarian stomach and intestines break down the complex roughage that is so abundant in leaves. God would have had to change herbivore digestive systems into carnivore digestive systems when Eve ate the avocado.
- Predators do not merely eat prey. They have a whole system of instincts for hunting their prey, and the prey have the instinct to hide. God would have had to rewire the brains of all the predators and all the prey to make them hunt and hide.
- Many prey animals have camouflage, which would have been useless before there were any predators to eat them. Other prey animals have toxins in their skins and have bright coloration to warn predators to not eat them, and this would also have been useless in a world without predators. God had to invent a whole suite of coat colors for prey, even of the smallest frogs and insects. Creationists wax rapturous when they describe how a praying mantis, which grabs and eats other insects, looks just like leaves. They say this is an adaptation that only a creator could have given, but why would a praying mantis have needed to look like leaves if it did not have to hide from predators?
- Animals do not simply die. They undergo senescence. Senescence is a very complex genetically programmed shutdown of bodily systems. All animals are *built to die*. This is why your hair gets thinner as you get older. God

had to design all of these genetic programs.

Some creationists go even further. They claim that the Second Law of Thermodynamics began at the time of The Fall.

The Second Law is one of the basic laws of the universe. It indicates the universe is running down and becoming more disorderly. For example, big molecules break apart into smaller molecules. This is happening all the time right now in your body. The reason you do not fall apart is that you have enzymes that keep rebuilding you, molecule by molecule, every moment. Your enzymes create order. But to create order in one place, they have to create disorder someplace else. That's The Law. Eventually, your body loses the race against the Second Law, and you start to gracefully but inevitably degenerate.

To some creationists, a perfect world as created by God could not have included any form of degeneration, and therefore God created the Second Law at the time of The Fall. This meant that he had to reconfigure every physical and chemical process in the universe. The stars (including the sun) had already been shining for at least a few days, by means of some mysterious form of thermodynamics that we cannot imagine today. Plants carried out photosynthesis, and animals digested plants, through chemical reactions that had to be totally different from the ones they now have, because biochemistry is based on thermodynamics. God therefore had to recreate the whole universe at the moment that God issued his curse.

And all of this happened *after* Genesis 1 said that God had *finished* the creation.

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It is interesting to note that if we limit ourselves to just what the Garden of Eden story *actually says*, without burdening it with creationist imagination, it gives a fairly accurate, although figurative, picture of human prehistory. The evolution of agriculture did in fact involve two characteristics to which Genesis alludes:

- Hunter-gatherer humans did, in fact, live in a kind of Eden, although it was a hard life. Once they began raising their own food on farms, all of human society changed. Agriculture allowed the production of more food than humans could gather from natural habitats. But it also resulted in the concentration of power in the hands of the rich and the oppression of the poor. Humans, *as a whole*, did not raise their crops “by the sweat of their brows,” to use the language of Genesis. *Poor* humans, mostly slaves, did this; rich humans just ate the food. Agriculture was, in fact, associated with “the sweat of your brow” for most of humankind.
- Once farmers began tilling the soil, making it into fertile ground for the growth of crops, the soil also became the ideal place for weeds (“thorns and thistles”) to grow. Weeds are not, generally speaking, wild plants. They are plants that have adapted, within the past few millennia, to living on farms. Their life cycles are adapted to the annual pattern of plowing. This is why many weeds are annual plants; like the crops alongside which they grow,

they complete their life cycle, from seed to seed, in a single year. The only difference between crops and weeds is that humans breed crops and plant them, while weeds grow on farms without our permission. Agriculture, in fact, inevitably results in the evolution of weeds.

If we read the Genesis story figuratively, we see a picture of human prehistory. It takes creationist imagination to make that story ridiculous. (If you have ever wanted to have this figurative version of Genesis explained to you by a talking gorilla—and who hasn't?—you should read the novel *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn.)

This is why when you see the gentle beauty of a forest or a mountain, what you are actually seeing is a damned and cursed world according to the creationist view. But it is interesting to note that this view of creation is not too different from the ecological and evolutionary view of nature. What seems to a hiker a gentle forest is actually pervaded by competition. The trees are competing against one another—very slowly and not consciously—to get as much light and water as they can at the expense of neighboring trees. Both predators and prey are on the verge of starvation. They can never take a day off from their hunt for food, for if they do, the other members of their species will gobble up the resources. The early bird gets the worm, every day. Populations grow as big as they can, pushing right up against—and sometimes going beyond—the limits of their resources. When you hear a male bird singing, it is not singing for happiness but to announce its territory (“Mine! Mine! Mine!”) and to attract mates (“Come here, baby! I've got a good territory with plenty of food for our chicks!”). Plants produce flowers not to be pretty but to attract pollinators; flowers are an investment on the part of the plant, an expensive one at that. That is what the natural world is like. It isn't pretty. It's ecology. You could say that the natural world is laboring under the curse of natural selection and evolution. No animal, plant, or even bacterium could just sit back and enjoy life. If they did, other organisms would drive them into extinction. It isn't pretty. It's evolution. And there's no way to stop it.

But remember that it was this world of competition, predation, and hard work that the psalmist praised in Psalm 104. The psalm exclaims what a beautiful world it is when lions are on the prowl and when people get up and go to work by the sweat of their brows. If we join in with the psalmist, we see that the evolved and evolving world is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be experienced.

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In the next article in this series, we will discover how, in the creationists' view, God played with atoms—and with our brains—to create a deceptive world. ■



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