

# Scientific Creationism: Adding Imagination to Scripture

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Scientific creationism has been interpreted by most observers as a resurgence of belief in biblical literalism. I have surveyed the material of sixteen years of the creationist journal *Creation Research Society Quarterly* and have discovered that many creationist beliefs, while based upon biblical literalism, consist largely of extrabiblical and occasionally wild imagination. Therefore, a discussion of the appropriateness or the inappropriateness of biblical literalism can only be a partial treatment of the controversy.

Most theologians have not only rejected the literalist approach to the Bible but insist that such an interpretation was never intended by the Bible writers. Bernard Ramm called the version of literalism that is specific enough to give rise to scientific creationism "hyper-orthodox" (1954). Bruce Vawter made a distinction between the "literalistic" interpretation used by scientific creationists, in which each word has an exact meaning independent of the context, and a "literal" interpretation, which conveys the author's intended meaning (1983). Langdon Gilkey says that the kind of literalism used by scientific creationists is not a "carry over from the old" traditional Christianity but is a *product* of our technological society's very literalistic way of thinking (1983). Bernard Anderson insists that the meaning of Genesis accounts cannot be made to stand as an independent basis of science and separated from the historical context of Israel's liberation from Egypt (1983). There are many other Christian books and articles critical of the young-Earth creationist position (Beck, 1982; Bube, 1972; Fischer, 1981; Kenkel, 1985; Peacocke, 1979; Olson, 1982; Hyers, 1984; Young, 1982).

All of these publications have made the incorrect assumption that scientific creationism emerges directly and only from biblical literalism. The extrabiblical additions, which I will describe later on, include belief in not just *one* but two or more additional creations and in not just *one* worldwide catastrophe but in two

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or more. Writers such as Hyers (1984), Newell (1982), and Ruse (1982), who base their criticism of creationists on just a few of the popular creationist books, would not encounter these beliefs, to which the creationists do not generally like to alert the public.

The young-Earth creationists, therefore, do not subscribe to the motto of those true, humble literalists who say, "Speak where the Bible speaks, and keep silence where it keeps silence." Instead, they want to help the Bible out. This seems to occur for two reasons. Some extrabiblical beliefs are necessary in order to rescue biblical literalism and bring it into line with modern scientific knowledge. Because these beliefs are necessary corollaries of biblical literalism, they have achieved a doctrinal status among the scientific creationists and are given nearly equal credence with scripture itself. In other cases, the extrabiblical emendations are wholly unnecessary flights of fancy, upon which many creationists place as much emphasis as upon scripture itself. I do not impute personal blame upon all young-Earth creationists for these excesses, of course, and many of them are no doubt embarrassed by them. I only wish to illustrate the tendency of creationist writers to mix imagination with scripture and then to defend both.

As a Christian, I am distressed that these creationists present their own speculations as if they were biblical truth. It is my hope that the critics of creationism will concentrate their criticism on those individual creationists who have proved themselves scientifically and scripturally irresponsible rather than on the Bible and the Christian church in general. And it is my further hope that these creationists will begin to be more careful in their handling of scripture.

### **Events Suffounding the Fall**

Some young-Earth creationists have attempted to translate the Fall of Man into scientific terms. The Bible teaches that "As in Adam all die . . ." (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). This passage and others have led to the doctrine of original sin, which has inspired lengthy disputations among theologians for centuries. One central difficulty the theologians have had to face is that they believe that Jesus was without sin yet was born a human just as we have been. Did Jesus inherit original sin? And, if so, how could he have been sinless?

In his 1980 book, *The Seed of the Woman*, Arthur Custance suggested that there was a poison substance—perhaps alcohol—in the forbidden fruit of Eden. Adam and Eve partook of it, but in some manner or other this poison got itself incorporated into Adam's sperm but not into Eve's eggs. The poison—which causes original sin—is passed on only through the sperm in each generation. Needless to say, such a scenario is completely impossible. A poison cannot get passed from one generation to the next, since only genes are passed on. Moreover, the genes get rescrambled each generation during the cell divisions that produce eggs and

sperm. There is no way in which an entity would be passed on only in the sperm and never in the eggs unless it is in the Y-chromosome. But an appeal to the Y-chromosome does not help in this case because, on the average, half of the sperm have no Y-chromosome. Would Custance suggest that half of all children—specifically, all girls—are born free of original sin? And, of course, the little bit of alcohol Adam might have assimilated would have gotten overwhelmed by the massive amounts of drinking that his descendants did. Custance's elaborate scheme seems to have been motivated by one thing: he wanted to believe that original sin has a chemical basis.

Many scientific creationists have interpreted the word *death* to refer not only to human spiritual death but also to human physical death. In doing so, they fly directly into the face of the scripture that says "*In the day that thou eatest thereof. . .*" Adam lived nine hundred years or so after the Fall, but God told him he would die the very day he ate of the tree. Obviously, God was referring to spiritual death. "*I die daily,*" said Paul (1 Corinthians 15:31). "For you have died," he says in Colossians 3:3. These passages use the same word, *apothnesko*, as in 1 Corinthians 15:22. "We have passed from death into life" (1 John 3:14) uses the same word, *thanatos*, as in 1 Corinthians 15:21. Thus, the Bible uses *death* in more than one way. But many scientific creationists insist that whenever the word is used it must imply all of its meanings and therefore can never refer only to spiritual death. Riss insists that, if our resurrection is to be physical, like Christ's, then the death from which we are saved must likewise be physical (1983). (He obviously does not believe that Christians live forever physically after being saved, but he does not explain adequately how he escapes the necessity of this conclusion.) The Bible, however, unabashedly uses the word in more than one way—whether or not the creationists like it.

*No death of animals.* But many creationists do not stop there. They insist that there was no death of animals before the Fall, because Romans 8:19–22 mentions that the whole of creation is under bondage to sin and because the "very good" world that Genesis says God created could not have contained death of animals. To conclude from this that animals did not die before Adam's fall is at least uncertain. Lambert goes so far as to claim that there was no death of animals before the Flood (1983). Thus, the scientific creationists are obliged to explain, first, how carnivores were supposed to survive without eating meat and, second, how the populations of organisms were supposed to be controlled before the Fall.

Since most creationists have not attempted to address these implications of their doctrine, they refer to them, if at all, in vague generalities. A few creationists, however, have attempted to be more specific. Colin Brown claims that carnivores can get along just fine on a vegetarian diet (1983). He cites one example: Elsa the lioness in *Born Free*. From this one example, Brown concludes that all the lions, tigers, wolves, falcons, eagles, vultures, and so forth, in the world could get along

on plant food if they had to. Never mind the fact that we do not see them doing so in nature even when they are starving. But suppose that all mammalian carnivores could convert to vegetarianism. There are many other carnivores that these creationists have forgotten about. What did spiders, with their sucking mouthparts, eat before the Fall? And there are countless species of parasitic wasps and mites that are unable to eat anything other than specific host animals. Can you imagine a mosquito, with no teeth, trying to suck blood out of a beef? Did ticks and fleas find satisfaction in biting dogbane and catnip rather than dogs and cats?

Brown dealt with the second problem by saying that predators are not necessary to keep animal populations in check. Animals keep their own populations under control by territoriality and instinct. This is sometimes true, of course, but some notable exceptions stand out—for instance, the explosion of deer populations on the Kaibab Plateau in Arizona, resulting, apparently, from overhunting by humans of predatory pumas, and of moose populations on Isle Royale in Lake Superior before the introduction of wolves. Even if all animal populations could be kept in check without predation, they could not be kept in check without death. They continue reproducing, the way God commanded them to in Genesis 1, and overshoot their food supply. Only death can prevent or solve overpopulation. Jansma brought this point to the attention of the creationist readership (1974). He added that *humans* could not reproduce without causing death, since during human procreation billions of sperm die. White responded that God commanded the animals to fill the Earth—not overfill it (1975); therefore, when the Earth was filled with animals, reproduction ceased. But this is not what the Bible says. Genesis 1 gives no hint that “be fruitful and multiply” had any anti-overpopulation mechanism built into it. How were the animals to know that the moment had come for them to stop reproducing?

In addition to not having death, a world created “very good” could not, claim these creationists, have had any decay or disease. Thus, all disease-causing pathogens had some alternative innocuous life-style before the Fall. Viruses—which can only live inside of living cells and can reproduce only by tricking host cells into replicating—could not have existed as we know them today. Because there was no decay, vultures could not have existed; their bald heads and gastrointestinal tracts are specially designed to facilitate the eating and digesting of rotting flesh.

An incalculably large number of biological modifications would have been necessary to transform a pre-Fall world—without predators, disease, or decay—into our present fallen world; in other words, a whole new biology was needed. To accommodate their interpretation of just a few verses of scripture—verses that were themselves capable of other literal interpretations—many creationists have fabricated a whole new dogma of biology.

Everrett Peterson is one creationist who believes that God intended carnivores to eat meat, even before the Fall; he claims they acted as “housekeepers” helping Adam keep the populations of prey in check (1982). As far as I am aware, his article

is unique in the scientific creationist literature.

*Evil design.* Who created this whole new biology at the moment of Adam's fall—God or Satan? Most creationists believe the former, but A. E. Wilder Smith hints in his book, *Why Does God Allow It?* that the latter is true (1980). He described an imaginary atheist saying:

Take, for example, the process of malaria transmission. It shows signs of what looks like careful, well-devised planning, with the single purpose of plaguing and torturing the victim. To me, the whole system looks like a remarkable plan, as if both the good and the bad were planned for mankind and biology.

Wilder Smith is aware of, and sympathetic with, the trouble caused by such appearances of not just evil but evil *design* of such an extent that it seems to him to be beyond the power of evolution to accomplish. Just as the builders of the Cologne Cathedral cannot be blamed for the rubble of its destruction by bombing in World War II, so the designer of all life (God, according to Wilder Smith in his other books, 1970, 1981) cannot be blamed for this evil design. Someone else came in and messed things up. Although he does not make it explicit, he clearly implies that this someone was Satan. But the Bible nowhere indicates that Satan is powerful enough to have redesigned the world of nature.

Wilder Smith was aware of this paradox of evil design, but other scientific creationists seem to not even notice it. Willis Keithley, for instance, wrote an article about a certain carnivorous plant, the serpent's snare:

The translucent top of the head entices those hapless insects into its crown with a false corona of light. As they buzz futilely around that unholy halo, they eventually fall exhausted into the main stem, where barbaric bristles . . . thrust them relentlessly down the stalk. [1980]

One can almost hear the flower hissing, he says. His conclusion was that this plant could not have evolved. This "sinister" plant had to be designed by a loving intelligence! He never notices that he contradicts himself.

*Entropy.* But many creationists won't even stop there! Another doctrine, almost universal among the scientific creationists, is that the second law of thermodynamics came into existence at the time of the Fall. The universe is currently "running down," becoming more disorderly. But since God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), then disorder, or entropy, could not have existed in a sinless Eden.

It has been known since the time of E. Willard Gibbs early this century that the change in energy status of molecules as they undergo a chemical reaction can

be calculated as the change in heat minus the product of the temperature and the change in entropy. If, indeed, this law of entropy was not in effect before the Fall, then every chemical reaction in the world was different at that time. God would have had to practically re-create the entire Earth and all its living and nonliving components in order to institute the second law of thermodynamics.

Yet, when Robert E. Kofahl attempted to convince the scientific creationist readership that the second law of thermodynamics would have to have been a component of the orderly and good world as God originally created it (1973), he was rebuked by Henry M. Morris (1973). Kofahl said, "Such speculations, if correct, would surely require a totally redesigned and re-created physical universe . . . of such there is no suggestion in the Scriptural record . . ." (1973). If there had been no entropy in Eden, it would have been "irrational, crazy, a nightmare to live in. . . ." Morris's reply is that 2 Peter 3:4-5 refers to and condemns uniformitarian scientists and charges that Kofahl is one of these uniformitarians, stating that Kofahl is opening a "can of worms," trying to "yield to pressures from uniformitarians," and making a "concession" to them which is "dangerous theologically" (1973). Morris's view remains in the ascendancy among scientific creationists—after all, he is director of the Institute for Creation Research. "No entropy before the Fall" seems to be a creationist doctrine, since any objection raised to it is treated as at least mild heresy.

### Events Surrounding the Flood

Re-creating the whole universe in response to Adam's sin is not the only gigantic re-creation invented by some creationists. The Flood and its aftermath provide other imaginative opportunities.

*A vapor canopy.* The Flood itself has been expanded in scope by creationists to require numerous extrabiblical miracles. This becomes abundantly clear when reading *The Genesis Flood* by Whitcomb and Morris as well as Whitcomb's *The World That Perished*. In the *Creation Research Society Quarterly*, D. Russell Humphreys claimed that the Bible taught, or at least suggested, that Earth's pre-Flood core consisted of water (1978). His biblical evidence was that the Bible made occasional reference to water coming from underground: the springs feeding the rivers of Eden, the mists that rose from the earth in Genesis 2, the opening of the "fountains of the deep" in the Flood. Joseph C. Dillow criticized Whitcomb in a letter to the *Quarterly*, saying that the biblical writer could not have had this theory in mind when he wrote these passages (1979a). This same Joseph C. Dillow, however, was not bothered by extrabiblical speculation when he wrote a series of articles for the *Quarterly*, which since have been organized into book form, about "Earth's pre-Flood vapor canopy" (1982). He presents many calculations concerning how

a vapor canopy could have remained suspended above the atmosphere without falling to Earth and how it would have produced a uniformly tropical Earth and later provided the Flood rains. He admits that the Bible does not unmistakably teach that there was such a vapor canopy; the most he could say is that "scripture does not rule out a vapor canopy" (1979b).

Glenn Morton calculates that Dillow's model would produce an Earth with surface temperatures far in excess of what life could tolerate (1979). He encouraged "new thinking about the cause of the Flood and the antediluvian climate." In his article, "The Warm Earth Fallacy," he indicated that belief in a canopy and universally warm planet was not a necessary biblical teaching (1980). But this same Glenn Morton invented perhaps the most imaginative extrabiblical emendation of all.

*Post-Flood catastrophism.* Most creationists believe that virtually all of the fossil-bearing rocks were deposited during the Flood and that the apparent evolutionary order of the fossils resulted from ecological zonation, organism mobility, and hydrodynamic sorting. "Ecological zonation" means that the "oldest" deposits were the ocean habitats, and, since they were already at the bottom, they were buried first by the Flood. The lowland terrestrial habitats were buried next, and so forth. "Organism mobility" means that the "most advanced" animals were able to outrun the flood waters and so were buried last. "Hydrodynamic sorting" occurs when smaller, denser objects settle to the bottom first in turbulent water. Whitcomb and Morris wrote *The Genesis Flood* (1961), which is still the standard creationist book on the subject, and therein describe these extrabiblical explanations. Glenn Morton, however, rejected the entire idea that fossil-bearing rocks were deposited during the Flood (1982). Indeed, he claimed that practically *all* the fossiliferous deposits were produced *after* the Flood during several hundred years of local catastrophes (floods, earthquakes, and so forth). While his theory is an improvement on the usual Flood geology, it provides a breathtaking amount of extrabiblical emendation: the Bible provides genealogies and an outline of historical events from Noah to Abraham and totally neglects to mention that Earth was still writhing and seething with local catastrophes on a scale many hundreds of times greater than today. Morton has filled in this major component of Earth history that the Bible writers forgot to mention.

Glenn Morton is not the only creationist to have put forward an imaginative reinterpretation of the fossil record. Steven Austin studied some Cenozoic deposits in Oregon up to seventy-five-hundred feet thick and concludes that they could not have been deposited underwater (a.k.a. Stuart Nevins, 1974). He argues that they were terrestrial volcanic deposits, although he accepts the Paleozoic and Mesozoic strata underneath them as Flood deposits. Constrained by the young-Earth creationist time-frame that insists on a Flood about four thousand years ago, however, the question arose as to how he could preserve belief in a young Earth, a global Flood, and yet explain seventy-five-hundred feet of terrestrial deposition. There was only

one solution: invent a new catastrophe.

Austin does not explain how most modern species of plants and animals managed to avoid getting buried in the Paleozoic and Mesozoic deposits, even though they had been in existence since creation week. But he argues that, after the Flood, Earth was repopulated by animals, plants, and humans for seven hundred years. During this time, the weather was very warm (he concludes this from the presence of tropical plants in the Cenozoic deposits). How did the weather become so warm? He postulates the formation of a *new* vapor canopy, similar to the old one which had covered Earth before the Flood. It was this new canopy that caused Earth to become tropical once again. Seven hundred years after the Flood, the new catastrophe began with exploding volcanoes and a collapsing canopy. This time, however, the catastrophe produced not a flood but the Ice Age. So Austin fabricates a whole saga of a postdiluvian warm Earth, canopy, and catastrophe in order to bring his field data into conformity with young-Earth creationist doctrine.

It is not quite fair to say that there is *no* scriptural basis for this scenario. There is a verse that lends itself to this kind of wild imagination—one we have seen before. It is good old Genesis 10:25, which says that Earth “was divided” in the days of Peleg. The Genesis writer did not specify what *divided* meant, so these creationists feel justified in assigning any meaning to it they can possibly use.

An article by Robert Morton in the same *Creation Research Society Quarterly* said that, if Earth had been at its present radius at the time of the Flood, it could not have (without a violation of the second law of thermodynamics) distributed enough sediments to have produced the entire fossil record (1980). This would seem to be a decisive blow against the typical creationist insistence that all sedimentary rocks were produced by the Flood. But Morton comes up with another alternative: the radius of Earth was *smaller* at the time of the Flood. Since he does not specify *how* Earth expanded or with what the newly created volume was filled, I presume he is positing a miracle not hinted at anywhere in scripture. Glenn Morton wrote an article with a similar viewpoint (1983).

*Post-flood creation.* While many creationists posit post-Flood catastrophes, others believe in post-Flood creation. They find it impossible to explain how all the genetic variation in animal populations could have been represented by a single pair of each kind on the ark, and they cannot explain why many kinds of plants and animals show very localized centers of distribution instead of being descended from Flood survivors that dispersed from Ararat. So what do they do? Again, it is no problem at all to invent another gigantic miracle: God created much or most of today's biota *after* the Flood. Armstrong invoked this explanation for the origin of desert animals (1973) and Lammerts and Howe in reference to plants (1974). Morris insists that, since Genesis 2:1 says that God *completed* his creative work on day six of creation week, post-Flood creation is a willful ignoring of the Genesis record and that anyone who believes it is condemned in 2 Peter 3:4–5, one of Morris's most frequently

used verses (Morris, 1974). Lammerts defends himself by saying that Psalm 104:30 makes reference to post-Flood creation (1975). Morris likes to believe that there was no entropy before the Fall, even though the Bible does not teach this, but he criticizes Lammerts on the grounds that the Bible does not teach post-Flood creation. Thus, many leading creationists take their imaginary emendations to scripture very seriously, elevating them to doctrinal status.

*The Tower of Babel.* From the story in Genesis 11:1-9 of the Tower of Babel, many creationists conclude that, after the Flood, God miraculously intervened in history and supernaturally created all of the world's languages in one fell swoop. Thus, the origin of linguistic diversity was instantaneous rather than evolutionary.

However, James E. Strickling warned readers of the *Quarterly* not to read too much into the Tower of Babel account (1980). He argued that the only thing needed was for the faculty of speech to be interrupted (the "confusion of tongues," the loss of the ability to communicate) and the people would disperse. From this, linguistic diversification would follow. The supernatural creation of languages, complete with vocabulary and grammar, is not an essential teaching of Genesis 11.

*Peleg's division.* This same author, however, did not use such caution when he wrote an article in the same journal two years earlier concerning "Peleg's Division" (Strickling, 1978). Here he focused on Genesis 10:25, which says in part: ". . . the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided. . . ." This might mean a political division, but Strickling opted for a geographical meaning. He claimed that this passage refers to the catastrophic cracking open of East Africa's Rift Valley and formation of the Red Sea after the Flood. Patrick Hansen was even more imaginative in his interpretation of this passage, claiming that it referred to the splitting up of the New and Old Worlds, leaving the Mid-Atlantic Ridge as a scar (1983).

## Conclusion

So we see from these examples that the scientific creationists have a proclivity to blithely flesh out the skeleton of biblical history with their own fruitful imaginations and even add extra vertebrae to the skeleton and, in some cases, whole new body parts. There is a recurring pattern of one creationist criticizing another's imaginative new theories, only to do a great amount of such theorizing in return. Some theories, like those surrounding Peleg's division, are totally useless, while others, like the vapor canopy and post-Flood catastrophism, are necessary to creationists in their attempts to force geological history into a "biblical" mold.

Scientific creationists are not the only people within Christian tradition to possess extrabiblical emendations. The Catholic church, of course, has a large body

of tradition and liturgies that function parallel to scripture. The Mormons have whole books full of emendations. And each denomination of Protestantism and fundamentalism has its own traditions which can and often do function parallel to scripture. The Bible is the core around which their doctrines are elaborated, but the genuineness of the core does not automatically make all their emendations acceptable to the rest of us. The emendations must stand on their own.

Many old-Earth creationists and theistic evolutionists have, of course, also gone outside the Bible to obtain information about the history of Earth. Some of their theories—for instance, the “gap” or “ruin-reconstruction” theory (see, Blocher, 1984)—are largely imaginary. Why, then, do I bring criticism upon the young-Earth creationists for a practice that appears common among Christians?

The reason is that, since young-Earth creationists claim themselves to be the sole defenders of biblical truth and to base their beliefs upon direct and straightforward biblical teaching, they have implied that their opinions have biblical sanction and that these opinions deserve respect from all people who revere the Bible as inspired scripture. The impression is created that these gigantic sagas are not only true science but straight two-hundred-proof Christianity. In this way, despite their zeal to defend the Bible, these creationists are bringing harm upon it.

I reach two conclusions, one for the benefit of the creationists and one for the benefit of their critics.

First, the creationists should be more careful about the way they use the Bible and be more careful about the quality of articles—whether scientific or theological—that they allow to represent them in their *Creation Research Society Quarterly*. Indeed, the most recent issues of the *Quarterly*, and the publications of the younger creationists in the Students for Origins Research, have had far fewer reprehensible articles in them than did the issues of the *Quarterly* I reviewed for this article. Problems remain. The creationists have still not faced up to the extrabiblical status of the vapor canopy theory and the no-entropy-before-the-Fall theory, which they still defend in print.

Second, I encourage the critics of creationism to not let their opinion of the Bible be lowered by the flights of fancy published by these creationists.

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