

The Physics of Genesis

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by

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Table of Contents

[Preface](#)

[Chapter One: Radical Scriptures in a Quantum World](#)

[Chapter Two: Clearing the Ground](#)

[Chapter Three: Pythagoras and the Age of Information](#)

[Chapter Four: Quantum Genesis: Reading the Language of Life](#)

[Chapter Five: Setting the Limits of Reality: Day Two of Genesis](#)

[Chapter Six: The Mystery of Three: Unlocking the Secret of Life](#)

[Chapter Seven: Day Four: A Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven](#)

[Chapter Eight: The Darkness Rises: Day Five](#)

[Chapter Nine: Ecce Homo: Genesis Day Six](#)

[Chapter Ten: Summing the Divine: The Seventh Day of Creation](#)

[Endnotes](#)

Preface

This is a book written for believers and unbelievers who are not happy with the picture of the world offered by either evolutionists or creationists. At the same time, the people for whom this book is written retain a lively interest in the Bible. They want to know what the text really says but without the usual overlay of denominational dogmas. If you are such a person this book was written for you because it was written by a person just like you.

My journey through Genesis has been a long and winding road. At sixteen years old I was an assistant to a biology teacher who, for religious reasons, refused to teach the theory of evolution. At that time, I had no knowledge of the religious debates surrounding evolution and creation. But I did sense that there was something wrong with his attitude. I wasn't disturbed by the topic of evolution; my concern was different. I had a feeling that this teacher was somehow missing the point of Genesis. That year I stepped in at his request and taught my first class on evolution and Genesis. I don't remember much of what I said but I do recall making the point that Genesis is not so much the opposite of evolution as it is something completely different, something strange and wonderful.

The years that followed took me through college, a mainstream theological seminary and finally graduate studies at the University of California, Berkeley. When a person follows that kind of path they usually pick up the habit of accommodating the words of the Bible to whatever theory of history or science happens to be in vogue. I was always drawn a different way. I suspected that ancient wisdom offered great insights and that modern people would be better off if we tried to accommodate our thinking to the wisdom of the past rather than reinterpreting the past in light of contemporary ideas. This instinct was not based on any conservative tendency on my part; it was, rather, based on my observation that the world of the ancients and especially the world of the Bible was a lot more interesting than the rather bland notions being offered by mainstream scholarship then and now. After all, which is the most exciting idea, the claim that God supernaturally created the universe in six short days or the notion that everything just muddled its way into existence through a long slog of mindless accidents? I am not asking at this point which of these ideas is true; I am only asking which idea is more interesting? I suspect a great many people, believers and non-believers, would secretly cheer for the claims of Genesis if they could be somehow presented in a way that makes them credible.

What stops people from accepting the claims of Genesis is the fact that for them the text is not believable. This poses a serious problem for many people. Because Genesis does not seem credible they live in two worlds. On one hand there are all sorts of things such as the tales about Moses parting the Red Sea and Jesus walking on water that mom and dad told them, things they might still wish in their heart of hearts were really true. For such people, this is the realm of religious faith. On the other hand are all those things they as maturing adults "know" are true, the realm of fact and science. The first world is full of fascinating ideas and inspiring possibilities; the second is redolent of dull lectures in a windowless basement classroom. The sad part is that many of these people presume that the mantle of truth belongs to the droning voice in the basement lecture hall.

This book challenges and reverses that assumption. The reason I can write this book is that my respect for the wisdom of the ancients and my continual technical study of the Bible over many years has confirmed my youthful instinct that we who are troubled by the text of Genesis may not be reading that book accurately. I no longer believe that Genesis is a book of faith. I believe Genesis offers a careful scientific presentation that resembles the best thinking at the cutting edge of contemporary research going on today. In this book I will share my discoveries with you.

Make no mistake; the book you hold is not a Creationist tome. Nor is it a text that is friend to any theory of evolution. The ideas you are about to encounter find their correspondence in quantum mechanics, information theory, and chaos theory. This is so because when we look closely into the words of Genesis we find a text deeply rooted in physics and mathematics. The title of this book is important. This book is not about oddball speculations concerning paleontology, geology or biology. This is a description and analysis of the physics of Genesis. This book contends that the first chapter of Genesis is a serious study in physics.

I have not written this book to persuade anyone to believe in the Bible in the religious sense. My objective is to help people better understand a key part of the Bible. The findings I report will offer encouragement to the faith of people who want to believe but who find in Genesis, as they understand it, an intellectual barrier to faith. But in the end, faith is always a gift, a gift neither I nor any other author can give. If at the end of this book you find it has in some way changed the way you read the Bible I would very much like to hear from you at www.physicsofgenesis.com. I also invite questions or comments that might result from your reading.

This book could not have been written without the help of a multitude of people whose lives touched mine over many years, all of whom deserve thanks. But in this preface I want to extend a very personal thanks to the people of the churches I served in my active career as a parish pastor and the people I serve today as a hospice chaplain. It is not fair but a fact of life that people have to accept as their pastor a person who is, like many of them, struggling to figure things out. But we all spend our lives, clergy included, as seekers after truth. The good news is that God's grace shines brightest where human weakness and ignorance are most evident.

It is to the people I have served as pastor that I dedicate this book. To them I say, these are the lessons I could not preach when I stood in your pulpits. These are the insights it took a lifetime for me to figure out. I hope a few of you on reading this will sigh and say, "Well finally he got part of it right!"

I want to express my personal thanks to Janis Holmberg, my editor, whose telephone call, out of the blue and at the right time, set my dormant manuscript on the way to publication and whose editorial work improved the text beyond description. I also want to thank my wife, Lynn, whose constant pressure to finally do something with these ideas, pressure I usually took as mere aggravation, actually reflected a deep belief in me and in what I could do.

Above all, to God, who really did in fact create the heavens and the earth in six short days, be all praise and glory, now and forever.

Chapter One: Radical Scriptures in a Quantum World

Acts 19:11-12: God gave Paul the power to perform unusual miracles. When handkerchiefs or aprons that had merely touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases and evil spirits were expelled.

What a strange Bible verse that is! The verse comes from the New Testament book of Acts. Acts is the story of the early Church, a story that focuses largely on the ministry of St. Paul, an extraordinary man God used to bring good news of His grace to the people of the Roman Empire. Paul supported himself during his missionary travels by working as a tent maker by day and a preacher by night. Working in the midday sun, Paul would have worn a sweat band to keep perspiration out of his eyes. This verse is telling us that so much power flowed through Paul's life that people would grab the dirty sweat bands he had used and bring them to the sick, place them on their skin, and the sick would be healed of their diseases or released from demonic possession.

Sounds a little nutty, doesn't it? I seem to recall a few television faith healers pitching prayer cloths that sound a lot like Paul's sweat bands. Of course, they didn't offer any sweat and the prayer cloths were never given away (minimum donation required!)

St. Paul's sweat bands are not the only oddity we find in the Bible. One of my favorite passages involves the prophet Elisha, an 8th century BCE miracle worker active in the northern part of Israel. Stories about him are told in the Second Book of Kings in the Old Testament. One of those stories goes like this:

Elisha now returned to Gilgal, and there was a famine in the land. One day as the group of prophets was seated before him, he said to his servant, "Put a large pot on the fire and make some stew for the rest of the group." One of the young men went out into the field to gather herbs and came back with a pocketful of wild gourds. He shredded them and put them into the pot without realizing they were poisonous. Some of the stew was served to the men. But after they had eaten a bite or two they cried out, "Man of God, there's poison in this stew!" So they would not eat it. Elisha said, "Bring me some flour." Then he threw it into the pot and said, "Now it's all right; go

ahead and eat." And then it did not harm them. (2 Kings 4:38-41)

I like that story, perhaps because the reaction of the prophets reminds me of what happens when I serve my meatloaf to my family. I can even relate to the strategy of putting flour into the meal, in my case in a futile effort to thicken the already cooked gravy. (Did you know you get a sort of beefy Elmer's glue when you do that?)

Passages of this kind have gone a long way toward putting people off from listening to the message of the Bible. I was one of those people. But now I am inclined to a different view. I tend to think of passages of that kind as the most interesting and important material in the whole Bible.

PREVENTATIVE THINKING

When people open a Bible, what do they hope to encounter? It seems to me that most people, believers and non-believers, would like to find themselves addressed by God. But what does that mean? Again, it seems to me that most people want to be told something they did not know before. Most people would be disappointed if the Bible offered nothing more than common-sense observations and textbook orthodoxies.

But it is at this point where many people let themselves down. We often ignore passages of the kind I quoted, in effect reading them out of the Bible, and restrict our attention to more commonplace passages and pedestrian interpretations that offer no challenge to our habitual ways of seeing the world. When we do that the Bible becomes tedious and pedantic and we become disillusioned. We came to the Bible hoping to receive a word from the Lord but all we get is reiteration of commonplace things we have been told all our lives.

It is for that reason that passages of the kind I quoted become important. These passages, verses that some call "radical scriptures," are the amplifiers that open our ears to hear the deeper message of the Bible. They alert us to the fact that more is going on in this book than we may have guessed while listening to the boring sermons we may have endured as children. Radical scriptures reveal that the Bible presents a view of the world that is nothing like anything we learned in public school or even in most Sunday Schools.

Any satisfying reading of the Bible will begin, I believe, with careful attention to those parts that qualify as radical scriptures. I say that because only such a reading will give us new information

that is both interesting and potentially enlightening. This does not mean that we turn our back on everything we know and believe and instead just read the Bible. It does mean that we let the Bible teach us how to approach our world with a sense of wonder again. Instead of starting with conventional wisdom and fitting the Bible into that, it is a lot more fun to start with the Bible and use the Bible to reinterpret and challenge conventional wisdom.

There is a good reason for doing this. Peril, whether for an individual or a civilization, arises not from the things we recognize that we do not know but rather from things we think we know but that are not so. Ignorance, when it is perceived as such, should not frighten us because ignorance is an emptiness that will be filled. Knowledge, on the other hand, is a container already filled. If the container is filled with truth, well and good. But if the container is filled with illusion, then we have a problem.

Ignorance requires only instruction, but deceptive knowledge demands a deeper fix. When knowledge is false our minds must first be emptied of errant premises and faulty assumptions before any learning can take place. The greatest gift the Bible gives might not lie in what it teaches us but in what it un-teaches us.

Think about this radical scripture spoken by Jesus Christ:

You don't have enough faith, Jesus told them. I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it would move. Nothing would be impossible. (Matthew 17:20 NLT)

Many would accept this verse as a piece of religious inspiration, hyperbolic perhaps, but well intentioned. I am suggesting that we try accepting Jesus' words as a statement of fact. The inspirational approach turns the Bible into an extended Hallmark card. But when we accept Jesus' words as a statement about reality, those words open a series of questions that have the advantage that they are, at the very least, interesting.

For example, is the physical appearance of this world something beyond our control or is that appearance in some way related to the way we observe our world? It might surprise some people to know that there is an entire field of physics, quantum mechanics, that is based on the Law of Nonseparability. Stated briefly (more on this later) nonseparability simply means that there is no way to talk about the material world as something separate from the observations and measurements we make. Seen in the light of quantum physics, Jesus' statement about moving mountains by the power of transformed perceptions is an idea that finds an echo in contemporary

research. The problem was that it took us two thousand years to discover the principles underlying Jesus' assertion. We could have greatly advanced our understanding of the universe had we for purposes of argument provisionally accepted Jesus' statement as a description of the operation of our world and asked ourselves, "What kind of universe might we be living in if Jesus' statement were true?"

Radical scriptures open our minds to unimagined possibilities. In the case of Jesus' words, many believed in the messenger but few actually investigated his message, at least on this point. As such we fell into the most dangerous type of error. Blaise Pascal defined two types of mental errors. A type I error rejects the truth of a hypothesis outright. A type II error accepts a false hypothesis. Of these errors, the most dangerous, Pascal said, is the type I error. A false hypothesis can always be tested and refuted. Experiment will soon falsify a wrong idea. But with the type I error, an idea is never even explored. The greatest damage done to the lives of persons and civilizations is done by the paths not trodden, the risks not taken, and the ideas deemed too radical to carefully examine. I believe history confirms this at every turn. Every notion and each invention that has eventually transformed our world in a positive way has been met with scorn the first time it was proposed and its implementation was needlessly delayed by a resistance to taking it seriously. One need only recall the refusal of Vatican astronomers to even look through Galileo's telescope.

Radical scripture passages offer a preventative against deadly type I errors. But to use these scriptures in that way we need to follow a few rules.

For one thing, we have to be serious about the texts.

I recall a radio talk show where a caller complained about the criticisms directed against Islam. Arguing that Judaism is just as brutal and nasty as any Islamofascist terrorist organization the caller pointed to the story about the Golden Calf in Exodus Chapter 32. In that story the people made a Golden Calf and worshiped it, saying, "Here is your god!" The response was violent. Moses gathered to his side those loyal to the God of Israel and told them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Each of you, take your swords and go back and forth from one end of the camp to the other. Kill everyone, even your brothers, friends, and neighbors." The Bible tells us that about "3,000 people died that day."

The caller wanted his audience to interpret this event as an example of religious intolerance. But to make that point he had to ignore the main thrust of the text. As the story is told events in Exodus Chapter 32 occur in the very presence of God. This is not a group of people getting all riled up at a church service. These people are seeing the flames of God's presence, they are wrapped in His clouds, they are literally hearing God's voice in the thunder. This is Israel at Mt. Sinai. On top of that, the people had just made a solemn pledge to God, a pledge spoken face to face, "We will do everything the Lord has commanded" (Exodus 19:8). The actual presence of God together with the sacred vow so fresh on their lips changed their decision to worship a golden idol from a lifestyle

issue into an act of suicidal insanity.

Taking into consideration the context of the event, there is no parallel whatsoever between the 3000 who died that day at Sinai and the nearly 3000 who died in the 9/11 attacks. But the caller's comment underscores a typical problem in Biblical interpretation, a tendency on the part of many to read the supernatural elements out of Biblical events and so reduce the texts to a matter of moral instruction.

BIBLICAL REALITY

Any accurate reading of a Biblical text has to include the supernatural element that will always be part of the context of the text. It won't do to remember what the people said and did while forgetting the setting in which they did it. But that is precisely what many readers do. They forget that the world view of the Bible is radically different from any secular progressive world view. Secular world views presume a closed universe where human actors dominate the scene and God is completely absent. In the Biblical world view God is always the most important actor on stage in every circumstance and every event.

This means that the Bible will be a difficult book for secular people to read. It is going to take serious effort for people influenced by secular mindsets to understand any of it, at least at first. Because we have all been impacted by secularist presumptions, it will take hard work (and not a little Divine help) for any of us to move out of our habitual ways of thinking and extend ourselves any distance into the Biblical thought world. But I believe we will find that effort worthwhile because of the fresh insights and surprising and useful information we can gain.

This information I speak of is not the same as believing. I am in not speaking here about faith nor am I trying to trick someone into becoming a believer. I am speaking about accuracy. We cannot gain anything from the Bible unless we read it accurately. And we cannot read the Bible accurately unless we approach it with serious attention to the actual content of the text. That content necessarily includes the supernatural context in which every Bible story is framed. But where careful attention to the Bible's own way of viewing the universe is in place, a fascinating journey full of interesting discoveries awaits the reader.

In the case of the story about the Golden Calf the text has nothing to do with religious tolerance or intolerance. It does, however, say something about the human soul. The point of the story is that even if we stood in the very presence of God with every blessed assurance of that presence exploding in front of us, we human beings would still rebel against Him. Many say that if only God would show himself to them in miracle, sign or wonder then they would believe. The story about the Golden Calf answers and says, "No, you would not believe." The story tells us that human ways

of understanding are not just uninformed; they are malignant, infected with a cancer that keeps our minds from ever functioning as they should. This text calls into question the accuracy of all our premises and all our assumptions; it questions even the truth of our observations. When it comes to understanding reality, we are, it says, infected with Pascal's type I error. Our minds are clouded not by false ideas but by our refusal to see what stands directly in front of us. This is especially the case when we are confronted with insights that arise from a source beyond our world. "'My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways', says the Lord." (Isaiah 55:8) Human habits and thoughts are not just different from God's ways; it is the message of the Bible that they are usually the very opposite of God's ways and therefore tend to be not just a bit misguided but fundamentally wrong.

If we are going to let the Bible help us break out of our illusions we have to take its text seriously. But there is another condition that must be met. We must also take the text literally.

One of the most pernicious tendencies in Biblical interpretation is the effort of many to "spiritualize" the message of the Bible. Many take the plain text of the Bible and apply interpretations to it that have nothing to do with the literal content of the text. The most common example has to do with Israel. It is commonplace in many denominations to read the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) in such a way as to refer all statements about the future of Israel to the Christian Church. The problem is that the Bible is packed with prophecies about the future of Israel that are specific and precise and related to no one but Israel. They draw us forward in hope to a vision of a future for God's chosen people that has not yet found fulfillment and through them for the entire world. This hope-filled vision is lost when promises made to Israel are squeezed into the rather small box that is the Christian Church. What was offered as a cosmic vision of a renewed planet gets shrunk to the dimensions of a Church council meeting.

The Bible is interesting only to the degree that we take it literally. A literal reading of the Bible informs and instructs us. But when we turn its wild promises into symbols and metaphors we turn a tiger into a pussycat and our hearts - which yearn to be addressed by a Word that comes from God, a mighty Word that challenges our premises and assumptions - are left hungry.

Look with me at what can happen if we stop reading the Bible as a collection of platitudes and begin to read it with respect to the literal meaning of the words. I want to share with you a passage from the Bible that will either prove to be one of the murkiest bits of writing you have ever seen or the most astonishing.

A period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your people and your holy city to finish their rebellion, to put an end to their sin, to atone for their guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy Place. Now listen and understand! Seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until a ruler, the Anointed One, comes. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and strong defenses, despite the perilous times. After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, and a ruler will arise whose armies will

destroy the city and the Temple. The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end. The ruler will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven, but after half this time, he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings. And as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the fate decreed for this defiler is finally poured out on him. (Daniel 9: 24-27)

As we read this passage one thing becomes immediately clear. These words resist metaphorical interpretation. The language is specific and precise. Daniel was a Jew so the words "your people" are easily understood. The phrase "your holy city" can only refer to Jerusalem, and, indeed, Jerusalem is named in the text. It is clear that after a set period of time someone called "the Anointed One" will be killed and the holy city will be destroyed along with its temple. There is much more we could say about this text but that would be the subject of a different book. The question before us is what happens when we read the Bible with attention to its literal meaning instead of spiritualizing it.

When we read the text literally what catches our attention are the numbers. It is easy to see that the text offers predictions concerning events that were future to the writer. The unusual feature of these predictions lies in the fact that they are linked to specific numbers. What do the numbers mean?

A BOOK OF NUMBERS

The first time reference speaks of "a period of seventy sets of seven." To understand that phrase it is important to know a bit about the background behind these verses. In 586 BCE the leading Jews in Jerusalem were taken captive and forced into exile by the Babylonian Empire. The Bible tells us that Daniel, the man who is credited with writing these words, was one of those Jews. Daniel had been reading the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who long before it happened, predicted this exile and said that it would last 70 years. Seeing that this time was coming to an end, Daniel cried out to God asking for a revelation regarding the future of his people. In response to his prayer, he tells us (v. 21) that he was visited by the angel Gabriel who communicated the message we just read. The substance of the message was that God will not abandon his people. He had, in fact, a detailed plan for the future of Israel. Gabriel described the key events in this plan, but more than that, fixed those events to a precise time frame.

How precise was this time frame, you might ask. The context makes clear that the reference to "seventy sets of seven" refers to years. The issue is what will happen after the seventy years of exile. The nature of these years is defined by the physical setting of the book. The Book of Daniel was written in Babylon where the sacred calendar consisted of a 360-day year. It is noteworthy that the same 360-day sacred year was observed by the Jews, Egyptians, the Mayans in Central America, and many other people scattered all over the world.

The text speaks of two time segments. The first segment consists of "seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven" (v. 25) or a total of 69 sets of seven. It is helpful to translate this into days. Using the Babylonian and Jewish sacred year, the days in question here total 173,880 days. This time segment begins at a very specific point. The starting point is "the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem" (v. 25).

Do we know the date on which that command was given? The answer is that we do. Persian records tell us that authority to rebuild the city of Jerusalem was given by Artaxerxes Longimanus on March 14, 445 BCE.

The clock on Daniel's prophecy began ticking on that date. Now the question becomes, what happens when the clock runs out? According to the text, "a ruler, the Anointed One, will come." Since the entire prophecy has to do with the fate of Jerusalem, the words "will come" can only mean come to Jerusalem. The words Anointed One are equally clear. These words always refer to the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, the Son of David whose Hebrew name means anointed, which translated into Greek, is rendered as Christ.

So let's do the math. We need to add 173,880 days to the starting date of March 14, 445BCE. What do we get? We get the date April 6, 32CE. What is significant about that date? April 6, 32CE falls exactly seven days before Passover eve that year, the day on which Jesus would be killed. The end date of the prophecy was the day that would come to be celebrated in the Church as Palm Sunday. According to the New Testament this was the day Jesus Christ entered the Holy City of Jerusalem with the pomp and honors due a king, honors given not by the city as a whole but only by Jesus' immediate disciples.

There is, obviously, much more that could be said about the prophecy in Daniel. But this is not a book about Daniel or about prophecy. The point I want to make has to do with the specificity of Biblical language.

We could have read this entire passage as a set of colorful metaphors and come away as bored as most people are by last Sunday's sermon. Or we could have read the passage literally and found something interesting, even amazing. In this book we chose the latter course.

Unfortunately, this attention to literal detail is not the usual way in which the Bible is read. The events of Holy Week culminating in Israel's execution of her Messiah suggest that Israel had stopped reading its scriptures with careful attention to their literal message. It is precisely this failure that Jesus spoke of as he approached Jerusalem and looked upon a city where most people

were unprepared to receive their King:

If thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day, things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. (Luke 19:42 KJV emphasis added)

The key words in this passage are contained in the phrase, "even thou at least in this thy day." The verse says that the Old Testament had revealed to Israel not just a plan for her future but the very day on which a key event, the visitation of her Messiah to the temple, would happen but because the nation had forgotten to attend to the details of prophecy, Israel had lost the opportunity for the fulfillment of all her hopes. The results were certain to be tragic. Jesus' lament concludes with a prophecy of his own:

Days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation. (Luke 19:43 emphasis added)

Note the text's insistence that it was because Israel did not know the time of her King's coming that destruction fell upon the city and the nation was destroyed. The point of this set of verses is that Israel had been told when its Messiah would come right down to the day it would happen but because they did not give attention to the details of the texts, most of the nation was not ready to receive him. True to Jesus' prediction, thirty-eight years later the fifth, tenth, twelfth, and fifteenth Roman legions laid siege to Jerusalem. In an effort to find treasure purportedly hidden in Jerusalem, the Roman army searched every corner of the scorched city until not a single stone remained in place and the city was "leveled."

I have offered this excursus to make just one point. The Bible challenges us to read its text with attention to the literal meaning of its words. This is particularly so in regard to Radical Scriptures of the kind we have just examined. Those texts most outrageous in their claims are exactly the sort of text that require closest attention to the literal content of the message. In fact, only in the literal meaning of the words does the message come through at all.

This does not mean the Bible doesn't use figures of speech to render its message. Bible scholars have identified more than 200 different kinds of figures of speech at work in the text. A literal reading of the Bible requires that a figure of speech be taken for what it is. If a figure is being used figurative interpretation is literal interpretation. If the text presents a matter as historical it must be read that way even if the text seems to be in error in light of current historical knowledge. We cannot receive anything new from a Bible text unless we first let it speak in its own voice before we as readers react to what it says. We cannot let our premises and assumptions pre-determine what

a text can say but we might learn something valuable if we permit a text to challenge our presuppositions.

We will turn now toward one of the strangest examples of what we are calling a Radical Scripture to see what happens when we read it in just that way. The scripture I speak of is Genesis chapter One, the story of the Creation of the world.

Chapter Two: Clearing the Ground

Radical Scriptures come in two flavors. There are those that deal with matters germane mostly to Biblical interpretation. In these cases the challenge is simple: read the text and give account of what it says. In the example of the dating of the arrival of the Messiah, all we had to do was read the text and count the days and the message delivered itself. But another kind of radical text contradicts ingrained habits of thinking ensconced in a given culture. Genesis Chapter One falls into this category.

Whenever we encounter texts that challenge cultural conventions, it is not sufficient to simply read the text. The problem is that we cannot receive new information when our mind is already full. This problem is exacerbated when the habit of mind is supported by an ideological commitment. In that case, evidence alone will not be enough to overcome the errant idea. Evidence informs the mind but dogma lives in the emotions. All the evidence in the world cannot overcome the stranglehold of a falsehood that has become a dogmatic commitment.

A good example of this problem is the dominance enjoyed for centuries by a cosmology that placed the earth at the center of the solar system. There was always evidence that this cosmology did not quite work but it was not evidence that held the theory in place. The geocentric picture of the solar system was sustained in some measure by fear of the punishment that would be imposed by the Roman Catholic Church upon anyone challenging this picture. More powerfully, however, it was held in place by a mutual consent born of fear of what would happen to a culture deprived of the only cosmology it knew.

Today we find ourselves in exactly the same situation regarding the theory of evolution and various theories of origin associated with that idea. As we will demonstrate, these notions have no weight as scientific theories although they are sustained by deeply felt emotional commitments shared by their supporters. For many, these are the ideas that hold their world together, a world based on faith in what they think of as "science." Even if an idea has no merit, the difficulty is that until these emotional attachments are overcome it is hard for science or the culture that supports it

to embrace more likely possibilities. It is also impossible under such conditions for a wide audience to glean any insights from the literal text of Genesis no matter how true or helpful such insights might turn out to be. Although Genesis clearly offers a very different and compelling picture of how things work, it is human nature to defend our habits, mental as well as behavioral, even if those habits are based on beliefs that are completely wrong. In this chapter I want to present information that can help us do that in regard to the line of speculations first set forward by Charles Darwin. I do not intend to fully analyze or refute Darwinian conjectures (others have already done that very successfully.) I simply want to establish that Darwinism is not the collection of irrefutable facts that many non-scientists assume it is and in so doing prepare us to take a fresh look at questions of origin.

At the level of evidence the Darwinian theory of evolution can quickly be dispatched.

SPECIOUS SPECULATION.

When a scientist offers a hypothesis, s/he must also offer predictive statements based on the theory that allow it to be falsified depending on how the predictions turn out. As a scientist Charles Darwin offered such statements.

First let's look at what Darwin proposed. Darwin speculated that all lifeforms can be traced to a common ancestor and that present lifeforms have emerged through the gradual and steady accumulation of incremental changes under the influence of natural selection that would, he thought, take the form of a tendency on the part of creatures possessing a survival advantage to generate off-spring who would live and propagate themselves in greater numbers than those lacking the advantage.

To shape this speculation into a hypothesis, Darwin offered three predictions that presented opportunities for testing that could falsify the theory. Darwin's first test concerned the fossil record. He said: "The number of intermediate and transitional links between a living and extinct species must have been inconceivably great." 1

If Darwin's theory was correct, the natural world would have a unique look. It would be a world in which taxonomic identification would be exceedingly difficult because biotic communities would exhibit constant morphological change. Scientists would not search for missing links because no form would achieve such stable expression as to suggest the need for a link to another form. The question of intermediate forms would not come up because nature would offer nothing but intermediate forms.

Darwin was aware that in his day the fossil record did not support his theory, but he proposed that with time it would. Unfortunately, the evidence he hoped for has not emerged. Paleontologist Niles Eldridge has reviewed the fossil record as it is known today and has stated its evidence in this way:

Evolution, at least on a grand scale is not forever tinkering, trying to come up with a better mousetrap. It's the other way around: species, and the ecosystems that their component organisms staff, are tenacious. They "work" perfectly well, and, once entrenched, are unlikely either to change or to be displaced by newly evolved taxa - unless and until extinction knocks ecosystems off their tracks. Then evolution breaks loose. 2

Eldridge claims that the most prominent characteristic evidenced by nature is stability not change. Referring to the life work of a prominent paleontologist, he writes:

Lieberman's...fossils came from an ecological setting - the Middle Devonian Hamilton Group of eastern North America - in which some 300 species have been discovered. The vast majority of those species are present at the beginning of Hamilton times. Most make it to the very end - when environmental conditions changed and most species became extinct. Many show some signs of change as the six million years went slowly by. But the last members of nearly all those species ended up looking very much like their forerunners six million years earlier. It is a stunning fact that it is possible to illustrate the variation within each of these species in the same small number of photographs or drawings used to depict variation (males, females, juveniles; seasonal plumage changes; geographic variation) in a typical modern guidebook to today's birds in eastern North America. This is stunning because it means that six million years of evolutionary history rarely increased the variation much beyond what was already present within a species over its entire geographic range at any one point in time. This is not what Darwinians of any stripe would expect.

3

The fossil record reveals a pattern of persistence. Species survive as identifiable units for millions of years until, in the end, they usually become extinct. The following sentence needs to be clearly understood. After 150 years of searching for "missing links" the fossil record does not offer one single example of a species evolving into another kind of creature. Changes that are observed usually turn out to be a matter of oscillation as different groups of genes that were always part of the genome of a particular species achieve dominant expression under changing conditions. Eldridge described the process in this way:

Anatomical traits do shift around a bit as time goes by. But rarely do we see progressive transformation in any one direction lasting very long. What we see instead is oscillation. Variable traits usually seem to dance around an average value. 4

The oscillations that we actually observe in nature (the emergence of pesticide-resistant insects, for example) have nothing whatsoever to do with the emergence of a new species. Quite the contrary, these sorts of changes tend to assure the survival of an existing species. Darwinism is a speculation about an event that has never, not even once, been observed in either nature or a laboratory.

Can we consider Darwin's theory to be falsified on this particular point? Darwin's supporters widely admit that the fossil record does not support their speculation. But they argue that the record is incomplete and that when it is complete it will sustain their position. What this argument does not address is the proven stability of the natural world over most of its history. Carl Sagan used to say that critics of Darwinism had to remember that nature had billions of years in which to shape the biotic community we see. His argument was hard to refute because given enough time almost any kind of development would seem to be theoretically possible. The problem is that nature seems to waste most of its time. We simply do not see the gradual and steady morphological changes that would make those billions of years a useful explanation for evolution. It may well be that given enough time and enough monkeys one could generate a folio of Shakespeare but it won't ever happen no matter how many monkeys you have or how long you give them if they will not type. It appears that nature, for the most part, simply does not type. Nature wallows in lazy stability for millions of years at a time and only becomes active in sudden bursts connected with extinction events.

NATURAL LEAPS

This brings us to the second falsification test that Darwin offered along with his speculation. Darwin's idea requires that natural changes be gradual and steady. This is so because evolution as he defined it depended on a single factor, the natural tendency of organisms bearing a beneficial adaptation to thrive and reproduce in greater numbers than creatures lacking that adaptation. If nature exhibited sudden leaps that resulted in large-scale changes in biotic communities such leaps would indicate that some other force besides natural selection was at work and research would have to be redirected toward identifying that mysterious force. Such a study would necessarily draw biology away from Darwin's single-minded focus on natural selection by suggesting the possibility that other factors might play an even more significant role in natural history. Acceptance of the possibility that nature could exhibit sudden leaps might even lead to a re-examination of the possibility that natural history could be influenced by the actions of a Creator. With these possibilities in mind Darwin had to admit that any example of a leap or saltation found in the history of natural life "may be truly urged as a valid argument against the views here entertained." 5 *

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