

When Adam Fell

Lazarus Spengler (1479–1534); tr. Johann Christian Jacobi (1670–1750)

When Adam fell, the Frame entire
Of Nature was infected,
The Source, whence came the Poison dire,
Was not to be corrected,
But by God’s Grace, which saves our Race
From its entire Destruction.
The fatal Lust, indulged at first,
Of Death was the Production.

Since Eve by Satan was enticed
T’indulge her Deviation
From God’s Command (which she despised)
And ruin the Creation;
What should be done? but God the Son
Must in our very Nature
Retrieve our Loss by Blood and Cross,
And save the Rebel-Creature.

By one Man’s Guilt we are enslaved
To Sin, Death, Hell and Devil;
But by another’s Grace was saved
Mankind from all this Evil:
And as we all, by Adam’s Fall
Were sentenced to Damnation;
So the Man-God has by his Blood
Regained our lost Salvation.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Erecting the Right Fences in the Right Places, Part 12: Young Earth Creationism

Kevin T. Bauder

Gavin Ortlund’s book, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*, explores how different doctrines affect different levels of Christian fellowship. Top-rank doctrines are essential for Christian fellowship, second-rank doctrines affect some levels of fellowship, and third-rank doctrines should not be permitted to hinder Christian fellowship at any level. One doctrine that Ortlund selects to illustrate the third rank is young-versus-old-earth creationism.

Full disclosure: Ortlund has critiqued me on this topic in the past. A decade ago I questioned the Gospel Coalition for embracing “progressive creationists” among its leadership while claiming to defend biblical authority. Ortlund responded with a refutation of more than twice the length of my original essay while still leaving some of my main contentions untouched. I did not rejoin then and would not now if Ortlund had not chosen creationism as an example doctrine over which Christians should not divide.

In *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*, Ortlund offers one short and one long reason for seeing the age of the earth as a third-rank doctrine. The short reason is that this question does not practically affect the “organization of a local church.” My short reply is that if the purpose of a church includes equipping its members against secular myths such as evolution, then getting a biblically correct answer certainly is important.

Ortlund’s longer answer consists of an extended appeal to church history. He cites theologians from the Church Fathers through recent evangelicals who have held to some version of old-earth cosmogeny. I concede Ortlund’s factual data, but I don’t think it means what he claims.

Doctrines are developed at specific defining points in church history. Before those defining points, we can find articulations that are vague and even mistaken. Theologians do not usually take the trouble to work through a doctrine until its significance has been clarified by some challenge. Then they do the hard work of study and definition, after which the imprecision of earlier articulations is no longer permissible.



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.
Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

In the case of creationism, the defining point was triggered when Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859. The timing was not propitious for doctrinal definition, however, for two reasons. First, the Christian world was still stinging from (mainly false) accusations that biblical literalism had resulted in the Galileo fiasco. Nobody wanted a repeat of that episode, so many were prepared to make exegetical concessions to a putatively scientific theory. The second reason is that almost simultaneously, religious liberalism began to take over the mainline denominations. Conservative Christians had to defend other fundamentals of the faith. Such individuals were in a poor position to pursue new doctrinal exploration. They were only able to turn seriously to that task during the 1950s and 1960s.

But the Galileo problem is a red herring. Evolution has never been a scientific theory, nor could it ever be. No theory of origins can qualify as science. Scientific method builds upon empirical observation and quantification, leading to the development of cause-and-effect explanatory hypotheses, the verification or falsification of which is subject to repeatable experimentation. No theory of origins can ever be developed in this way. Evolution is naturalistic philosophy or theology masquerading as science.

Imagine Adam coming to full consciousness immediately after creation. The world around him is filled with processes that are already functioning. Fruit hangs on trees, suggesting that arboreal reproduction has been going on for some time. The trees themselves are mature. Indeed, adult instances of every form of life abound. The world is full of empirical evidence that it has a long history. Then God comes to Adam and tells him that this is only day six. What should Adam trust: his senses or God's word?

The situation in which we find ourselves is no different. Our awareness of the processes has expanded, as has our ability to measure the time those processes take, but our inability to penetrate the veil of beginnings remains intact. If we want to know where we came from, then we have no choice but to take God's word for it.

God has not expressed Himself ambiguously. While the prose of the creation accounts is elevated, it hardly exceeds ordinary human ken. The language does not contain jargon, technical terms, or complicated structures. Even a child can grasp what the text says; only a skilled exegete can muddy it up.

Some exegetes do just that. They argue that Genesis 2 is out of sequence with Genesis 1, that day six must have involved too much activity for Adam (or God!) to accomplish, and that Genesis 2:4 uses the word *day* in the generic sense. All such matters are easily explicable, as a quick trip to any decent young-earth creationist web site will show.

What is not explicable is how God could pronounce His creation *very good* (Gen 1:31) if it included agony, terror, and death, which any old-earth view

requires. How could death have entered the world through one man's sin (Rom 5:12) if it had been going on for millions of years beforehand? There is no *good* old-earth answer to this question.

The truth is that nobody ever denied young-earth creationism just by reading the Bible (including those Church Fathers whom Ortlund cites). No, the fundamental problem is one of embarrassment. Those Fathers were embarrassed by accusations made by their opponents, so they backtracked from a plain reading of the text. Nowadays, in an age when evolution has been mistaken for science, and science has been mistaken for Truth, some evangelicals are just as embarrassed to hold a young-earth cosmogeny. I would personally be more embarrassed to appear at the Bema and have to explain why I ignored the plain words in which God chose to communicate.

Ten years ago, Ortlund criticized me for not being willing to "advance the conversation." The truth is that I don't see a conversation to advance—not a serious one. Evangelicals who reject young-earth creationism spend massive amounts of energy and creativity to try to explain why Scripture cannot mean what it plainly says.

But young-earth creationism *is* important. Too much hangs on it to relegate it to third rank. Through creation we understand who we are, what our nature is, what place we occupy, what we are made for, and what went wrong. We understand why we sin, why we suffer, and why we die. We understand what Christ had to do to make right what was wrong, and we glimpse what a restored creation must look like. To some extent, any old-earth view is going to skew the answers to these questions.

Not all old-earth views are equally obnoxious. Not all of them need to hinder Christian fellowship at every level (though some—for example, the denial of a historical Adam—should). To suggest, however, as Ortlund does, that "we should not divide, at any level" [126] over these issues is simply astonishing.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
