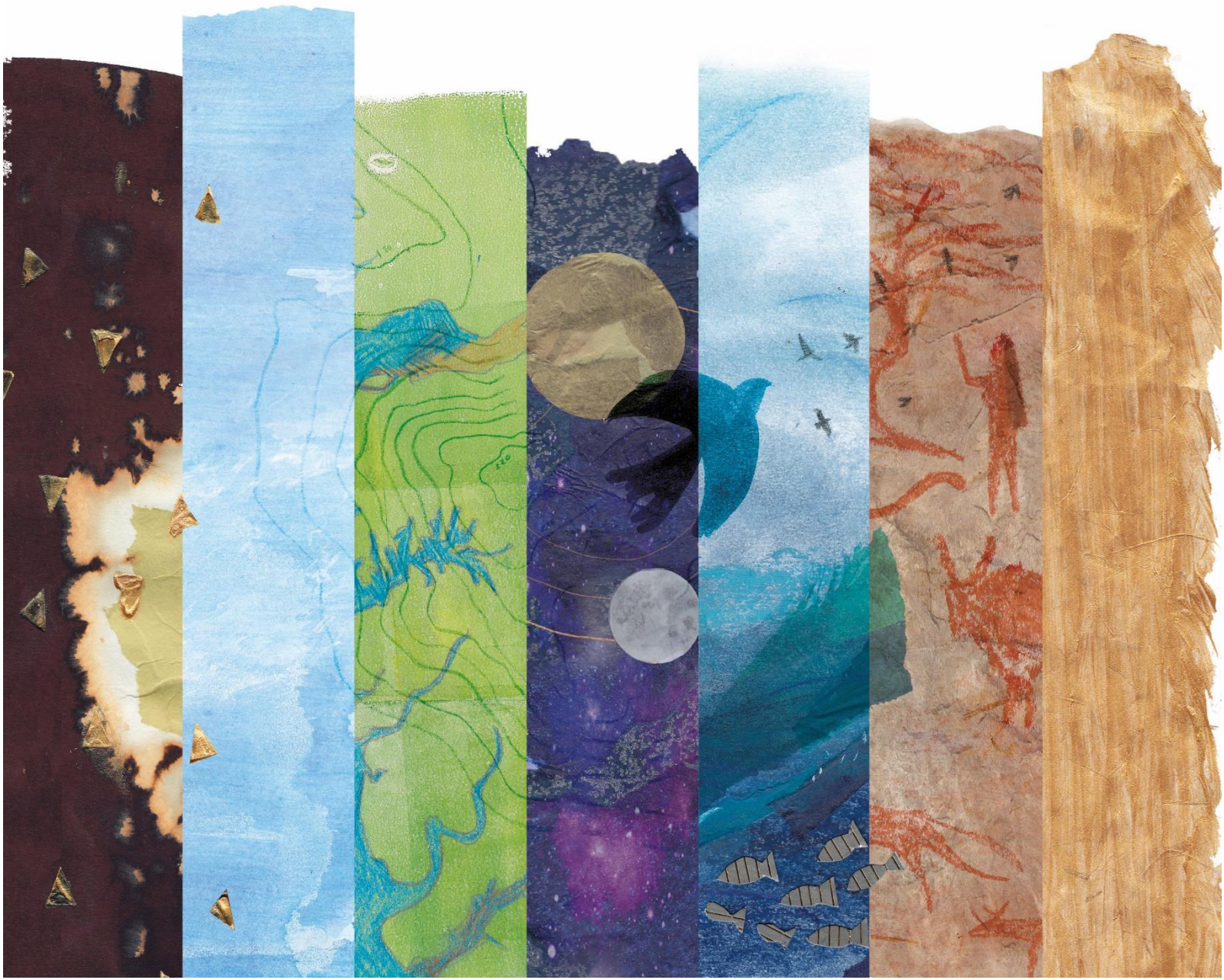


# WHAT SHOULD WE BELIEVE ABOUT CREATION?

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# WHAT SHOULD WE BELIEVE ABOUT CREATION?

## INTRODUCTION

- What kind of origins account do we find in Genesis 1?
- Can Genesis 1 be harmonised with a modern scientific account of origins?

Pencil, blood and ink

## PART 1: THE MODERN SCIENTIFIC ACCOUNT OF ORIGINS

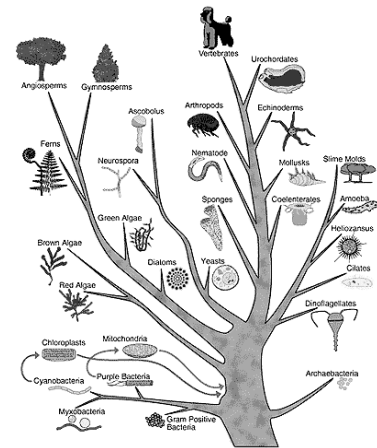
### Darwin's theory of evolution:

- All living and extinct species have evolved from simple life forms that existed millions of years ago.
- This means that all species are interrelated: they are branches on the evolutionary tree of life.
- Evolution is a result of purely natural processes.

### Conflict with Genesis?

There are many reasons why some Christians reject the theory of evolution. These include the following:

- Some say that evolution challenges the concept of **God as creator**. Darwin's theory explains life in all its complexity and diversity without any reference to God.
- Some are especially troubled by the idea of **human evolution**. The theory of evolution says that humans are an evolved species and simply another branch on the tree of life. This would seem to contradict biblical teaching about the uniqueness of humanity.
- Another issue is the **age of the earth**. A literal reading of the Book of Genesis suggests that the earth is no more than about 10,000 years old. Evolution requires tens of millions of years.



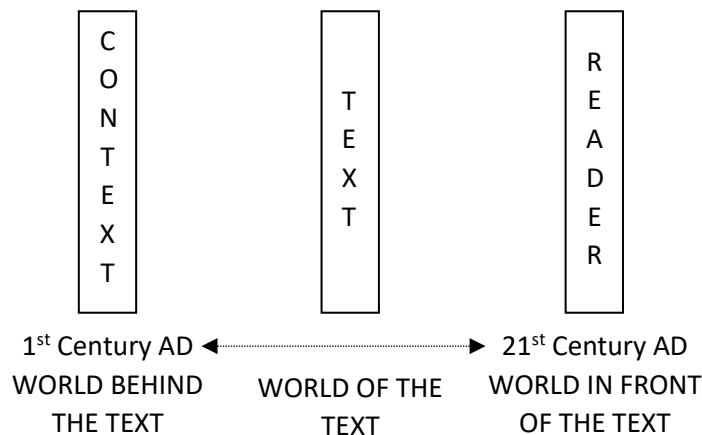
### Creation or evolution?

This is the wrong question!

“All Christians are, by definition, creationists” (Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?*)

The real question is about the *mechanism* of creation. All Christians believe that God creates, but does he use evolutionary processes to do it?

## PART 2: HOW SHOULD WE READ ANCIENT TEXTS?



### i) The world of the text: *what kind of literature are we dealing with here?*

- Historical literature?
- Poetic, figurative literature?

### ii) The world behind the text: *what were the conditions of the original audience?*

- Babylonian exile?
- The text was written *for us*, not *to us* (video: *Genesis Through Ancient Eyes*).
- We need to distinguish between *affirmation* (the message that the author intends to communicate) and *accommodation* (where God might be using the assumptions of the original audience) (John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*).

E.g. The Bible talks about thinking with our **hearts** or **intestines** (Hazel Russman, *Seat of Wisdom*).

- The text communicates in those terms because that was what the ancients believed (it was their “science”).
- However, this doesn’t undermine the text’s authority. The intention of the authors isn’t to make claims about physiology or anatomy.
- It was part of the *framework* of their thinking but wasn’t the *focus* of their teaching.

### Why is this important?

The authors of the Bible were people of their time (it’s impossible to be anything else!). They assumed a whole bunch of things which we now know aren’t true.

BUT...

This does *not* mean that the Bible isn’t authoritative for us.

### iii) The world in front of the text

- What are the factors that influence the way you read the Bible?
- Are you suspicious of scholarship?

## PART 3: MAKING SENSE OF GENESIS 1

2 main schools of thought:

- Genesis 1 is essentially a scientific account of origins. It has modern science embedded in it or it tells us what modern science *should* look like.
- Genesis 1 is not a scientific account of origins. It neither supports nor contradicts modern science. It has *nothing to say* about science.

Genesis 1 <i>is</i> a scientific account	Genesis 1 <i>isn't</i> a scientific account
<p><b>Young-Earth Creationism</b> Creation occurred about 6,000-10,000 years ago, during six 24-hour days, in the order described. Sceptical about secular scientific theories.</p>	<p><b>Literary framework view</b> The number and ordering of the days are chosen for literary and theological reasons rather than historical reasons.</p>
<p><b>Old-Earth Creationism</b> Creation occurred over billions of years. Events occurred in the order given in the text but each “day” of Genesis 1 corresponds to a longer time period. More positive about mainstream science.</p>	<p><b>Polemical view</b> Genesis is written in the context of and in direct opposition to other accounts of creation from Ancient Near East religions.</p>
<p><b>Gap Theory</b> A particular example of an “old earth” theory which holds that the earth was created long ago (Gen 1:1), <i>became</i> “formless and empty” (Gen 1:2) and was restored about 6,000 years ago during six 24-hour days.</p>	<p><b>Cosmic-temple inauguration view</b> Genesis 1 is the story of God establishing the cosmos as his temple: the place where he dwells and the “control room” from which he rules and where he rests.</p>

Sources: Haarsma & Haarsma, *Comparing Interpretations of Genesis 1* & Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*

### My view (written in *ink!*)

The general approach represented by the views on the left hand of the table is misguided.

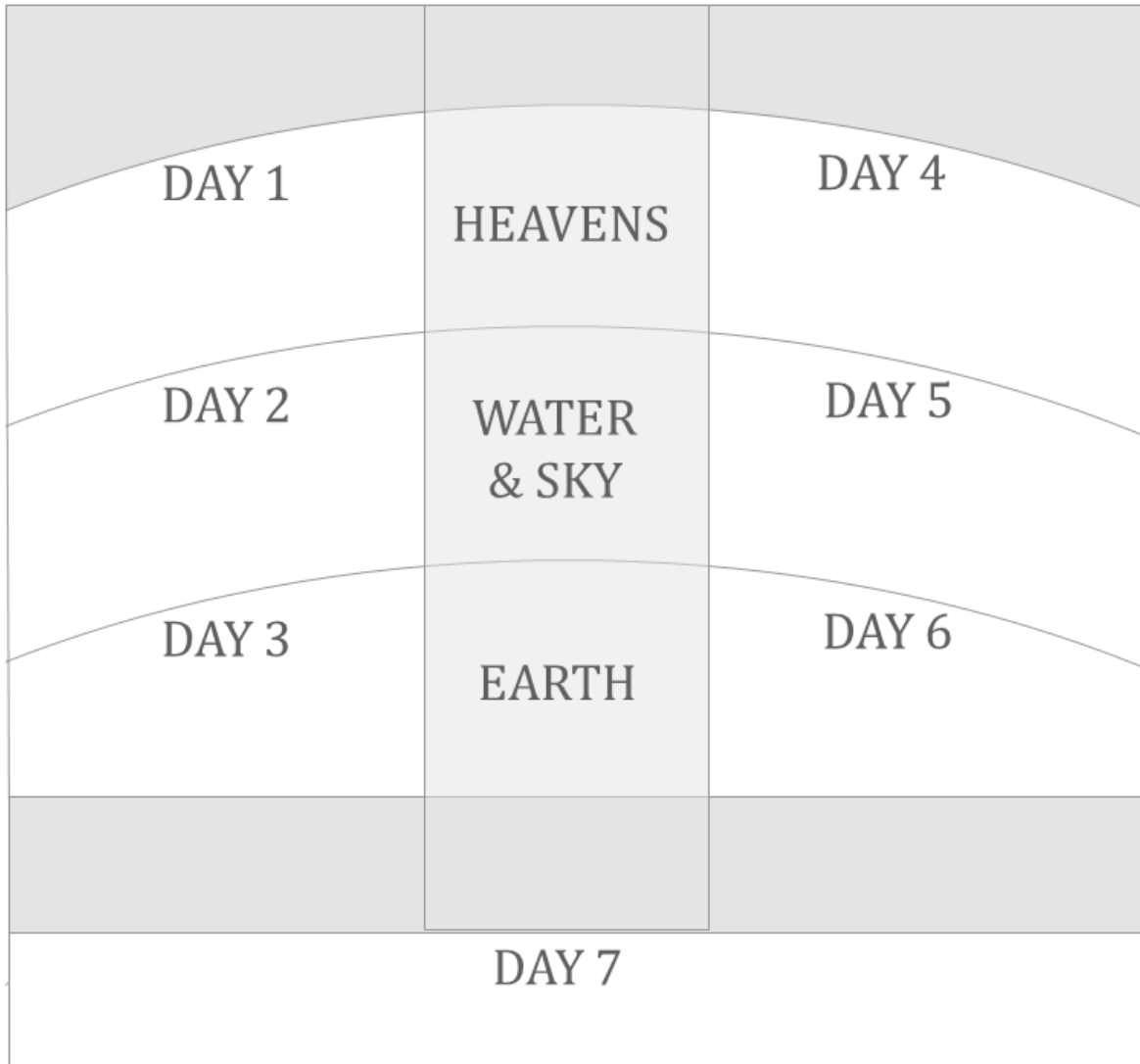
Why?

- Genesis 1 is ancient cosmology
- Science is constantly developing

- **For further detail, see *Genesis 1 is Ancient Cosmology* from *The Lost World of Genesis One* by John Walton**

Three important things to remember:

- None of what I’m saying is based on an assessment of the science. Darwin’s theory of evolution may be right or wrong. Our concern isn’t with what the science is telling us. It’s with making sure that we read Genesis *on its own terms*.
- In rejecting young earth creationism, my point is not that the Bible supports the idea of an old earth. My position is that the Bible is *silent on the age of the earth*.
- We’re not debating whether God is creator. As Christians, we’re taking this as a given!

**PART 4: THE LITERARY FRAMEWORK VIEW***Tohu and bohu*

## PART 5: THE POLEMICAL VIEW

- Advance Theology Course (Andrew Wilson): Israel worships the real God, and the gods of the nations are useless parodies of the real thing

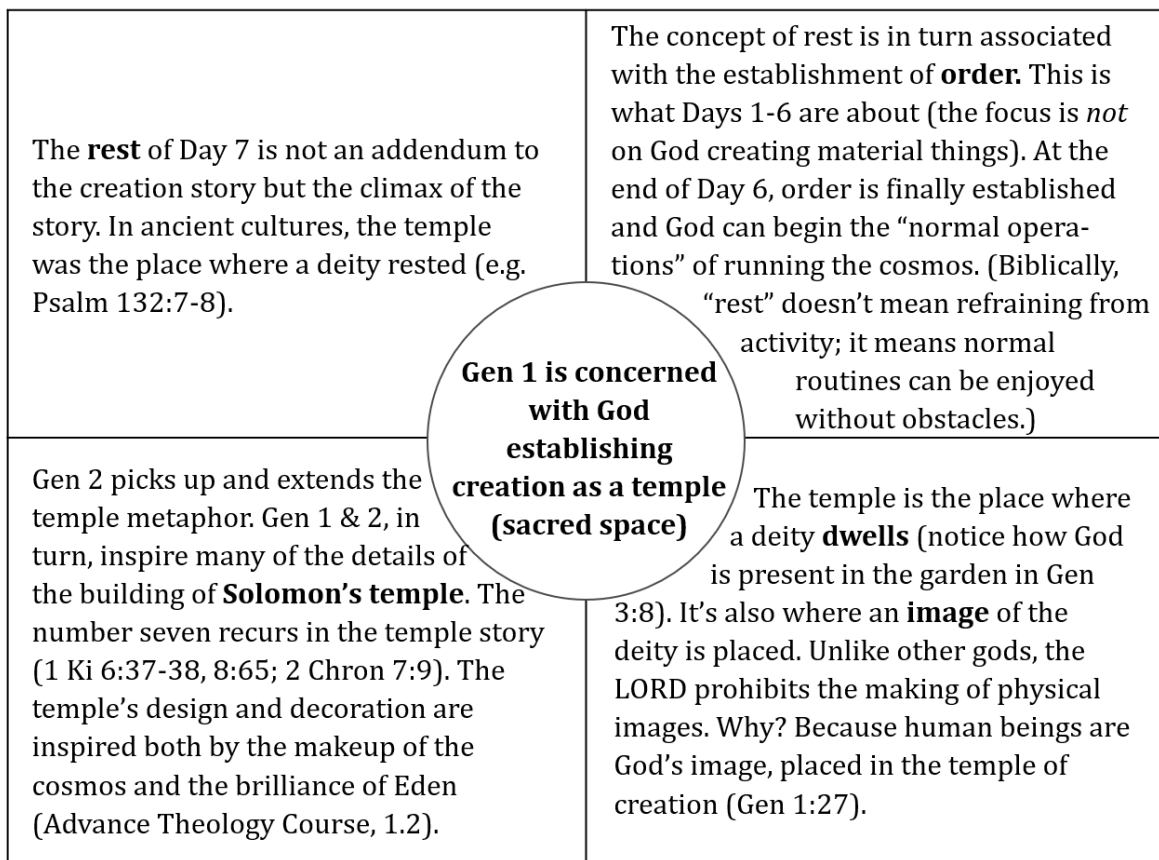
- The whole chapter is written in such a way as to emphasise the sovereignty of God over all the "gods" of the nations, and the total contingency of the latter
  - God is completely sovereign. He says "let there be light", and there is light. The phrase "and it was so" keeps recurring, as if to emphasise the immediacy of creation's response to its Creator
  - God made the sky, divided the waters, "and it was so". In contrast, in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, Marduk uses half the cadaver of an evil goddess to make the sky and control the waters: "Then the lord paused to view her dead body, that he might divide the monster and do artful works. He split her like a shellfish into two parts; half of her he set up and sealed it as sky, pulled down the bar and posted guards. He bade them to allow not her waters to escape"
  - The astral deities of other Mediterranean religions are humiliated by being created on day four, after light itself (and with stars, which receive priority in *Enuma Elish*, being made last, and casually: "also stars")
  - The writer also refers to the "greater light" and "lesser light", rather than using the words for sun and moon, because these words were frequently names of deities in the Near East
  - In the Ugaritic creation narrative (in which Baal is the chief deity), the sea and the great sea creatures are pictured as enemies of Baal that need to be conquered. On day five, however, God simply creates the sea creatures
  - Many Mesopotamian religions would have a place for the king, or a senior official, to be in the image of the gods. What is radical about the biblical picture is that all humans bear the divine image
- In a sense, then, Genesis 1 is a polemic against the "gods" of the nations

- **Compare and contrast Genesis 1 with the Babylonian creation myth (Enuma Elish)**

## PART 6: THE COSMIC TEMPLE INAUGURATION VIEW

John Walton: Building a house vs. making a home

“[The ancients] were not interested in how the material objects of the house came into being – God did it and that was enough for them. Of much more interest to them was how this house (the cosmos) had become a home for humans but even more importantly how God had made it his own home.” (*The Lost World of Adam and Eve*)



## PART 7: GENESIS 1 FOR LIFE

### i) What do we learn about God?

John Mark Comer:

“Nothing about creation says that God is a tightfisted, utilitarian, bean-counting pragmatist; God is a lavish, opulent, extravagant *artist*, and creation is his beauty on display.” (*Garden City*)

- Read extract: Michael Reeves, *The Meaning of Creation from The Good God*

### ii) What do we learn about the world?

Eugene Peterson:

Genesis 1 is a protest against gnosticism, “spirituality without the inconvenience of creation.” (*Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*)

God loves this world so much that he’s going to save it – all of it (e.g., Rom 8:19-21; Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:19-20; Rev 21:1-5, see also Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope*)

“When Christ shall come with acclamation...”

### iii) What do we learn about humanity?

Gen 1:27-28

- Subdue (rule):
- Fill (multiply):

Andrew Wilson on the meaning of life (talk on *Origin of Humanity*, 28 July 2015):

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## PART 8: CAN A CHRISTIAN BELIEVE IN EVOLUTION?

### 1. PRELIMINARY POINTS

- “All Christians are, by definition, creationists” (Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?*)
- Pencil, blood and ink

### 2. THREE QUESTIONS (Tim Keller, *Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople*)

Keller’s conclusion:

“... Christians who are seeking to correlate Scripture and science must be a ‘bigger tent’ than either the anti-scientific religionists or the anti-religious scientists. Even though in this paper I argue for the importance of belief in a literal Adam and Eve, I have shown here that there are several ways to hold that and still believe in God using [evolutionary biological processes].

“When Derek Kidner concluded his account of human origins, he said that his view was an ‘exploratory suggestion...only tentative, and it is a personal view. It invites correction and a better synthesis.’ That is the right attitude for all of us working in this area.”

**QUESTION ONE:** If God used evolution to create, then we can’t take Genesis 1 literally, and if we can’t do that, why take any other part of the Bible literally?

**Answer:** The way to respect the authority of the Biblical writers is to take them as they want to be taken. Sometimes they want to be taken literally, sometimes they don’t. We must listen to them, not impose our thinking and agenda on them.

Walter Brueggemann: “The Bible is not an answer book to all of the curious questions we may ask.” (*Genesis: Interpretation commentary*)

**QUESTION TWO:** If biological evolution is true—does that mean that we are just animals driven by our genes, and everything about us can be explained by natural selection?

**Answer:** No. Belief in evolution as a biological process is not the same as belief in evolution as a world-view.

Knocking off the “philosophical barnacles” (Denis Alexander, *Viva La Evolution!*)

**QUESTION THREE:** If biological evolution is true and there was no historical Adam and Eve how can we know where sin and suffering came from?

**Answer:** Belief in evolution can be compatible with a belief in an historical fall and a literal Adam and Eve. There are many unanswered questions around this issue and so Christians who believe God used evolution must be open to one another's views.

**Considerations** (from Michael Reeves, *Does It Really Matter Whether Adam Was the First Man?* & Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*):

- Sometimes Genesis uses the word "adam" to mean "humankind" in general (e.g. Gen 1:26-27).
- Several genealogies go back to Adam as the first father (Gen 5, 1 Chron 1, Lk 3).
- Jesus refers to the marriage of Adam and Eve in his teaching on marriage (Mt 19:4-6).
- Paul refers to Adam and Eve in his teaching on the roles of men and women (1 Cor 11:8-9, 1 Tim 2:11-14).
- Paul draws an analogy between Adam and Christ in his teaching on salvation (Rom 5:12-21, 1 Cor 15:21-22).
- We can accept the historical existence of Adam and Eve without believing that they were: (i) the *first* human beings, (ii) the *only* human beings, or (iii) the universal ancestors of *all* human beings.
- Whatever we make of the story in Genesis 3, the New Testament views sin/death as an alien intrusion in God's creation.

- **Denis Alexander, *Different views on Adam and the Fall***

## CONCLUSIONS?

Adapted from John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*

### i) **The cosmos is Yahweh's temple**

- Implication: *The cosmos is sacred space. It demands our respect and responsibility to nurture. We need to understand that "salvation" in the Bible means restoration of the whole cosmos.*

### ii) **God supervises the normal operations of the world in a state of "rest"**

- Implication: *God is sovereign. We remember the sabbath day by recognising that he is at the controls, not us.*

### iii) **Everything in the cosmos functions on behalf of people who are in his image.**

- Implication: *Human beings have an honoured status. Every human life is sacred.*

### iv) **While the Bible is silent on the mechanism by which God creates, it's clear that the world operates by the LORD's design and under his supervision to accomplish his purposes.**

- Implication: *A biblical worldview can be fully integrated with modern science???*

Written in **pencil**:

Written in **ink**:

Written in **blood**:

## RESOURCES

Many of the resources, including the participant handout and Powerpoint slides, can be found at <https://gracetruro.org/resources/what-should-we-believe-about-creation/>

### Resources cited

Denis ALEXANDER, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Monarch, 2008a)

Denis ALEXANDER, *Viva La Evolution!*, Third Way magazine, Vol 31, No 6 (2008b)  
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Walter BRUEGGEMANN, *Genesis* (John Knox Press, 1986)

John Mark COMER, *Garden City: Work, Rest, and the Art of Being Human* (Zondervan, 2015)

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<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/adam-first-man/>

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<https://www.newscientist.com/lastword/mg24532751-400-seat-of-wisdom-have-we-always-known-its-the-brain/>

John WALTON, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (IVP, 2009)

John WALTON, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Origins Debate* (IVP, 2015)

John WALTON, *Genesis Through Ancient Eyes Pt 1* (video, 2013)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOnsqCVq42A>

Tom WRIGHT, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (SPCK, 2011)

### Additional resources

Andrew SAMPSON, *Creating a Culture of Dialogue in the Church* (paper). A personal plea to engage with contentious issues with an attitude of generosity and grace. Very applicable to issues of science.  
<https://andrewsampsontoughts.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/creating-a-culture-of-dialogue-in-the-church-nov15.pdf>

Andrew SAMPSON, *Big Question: Science vs Christianity* (video). An outline of my (personal) view about how the relationship between the Christian faith and science can best be understood.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URdC6gW8bcU&feature=youtu.be>

Conor CUNNINGHAM, *Did Darwin Kill God?* One-hour documentary made by the BBC several years ago. Cunningham covers a huge amount of ground: young-earth creationism; scientific atheism; how Genesis has been interpreted through church history; intelligent design; evolutionary creationism, etc.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6Sk\\_4qz\\_m0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6Sk_4qz_m0)

Nick SPENCER and Denis ALEXANDER, *Rescuing Darwin*. A thoughtful plea from the thinktank *Theos* for the Church to recognise that Darwinism doesn't present a threat to the Christian faith.  
<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/Theos-Rescuing-Darwin-report.pdf>