

Strategies for Interpreting Genesis

Review

In our last lesson we looked at Enuma elish and compared that ancient unbelieving text with the Bible and what we found was there are only two fundamentally different worldviews. There may be 101 varieties in the details, but when we boil it down in the final analysis there are only two views, the unbelieving worldview (HVP) and the biblical worldview (DVP).

When we looked at these two views side-by-side we emphasized two key differences. First, was the **Creator-creature distinction vs the Continuity of Being**. The Continuity of Being basically says that god(s), men, angels, rocks only differ in degree, they are all just part of the universe, there is only one level of reality. Everything is on a scale of varying degree. There may be gods and goddesses, there may even be a god, but the idea is that he differs from us only in degree. In other words, think of IQ, he has greater IQ than we do, we have less IQ than he does, but he and we are connected by a scale only differing in degree. Think of strength, he may be bigger, he may be stronger but in the end he too shares the same environment we do.

Over against that idea, the Bible throws that idea out completely, at a very fundamental level. The Bible says that there is a Creator and a creation, and these realities cannot be bridged; there are two levels of reality, and there is no way for the creature to ever become the Creator. So there's that fundamental distinction. This is going to have tremendous implications when we get into the NT Christology, the hypostatic union, kenosis and other doctrines. We are preparing ourselves early on in the bible to recognize the coherence of Scriptures. It's wonderful, it's more than wonderful, it's the greatest orchestration ever. Nothing compares.

Second, was **Personal Sovereignty vs Impersonal Chance**. To get a good picture of Chance, think about the gods and goddesses warring with one another in Enuma elish. Each one trying to fight the other one off and this somehow brings into existence the universe. Somehow in unbelief, chaos leads to order. It's always that way. But the problem with chance and chaos is that you can never forecast what's going to happen tomorrow. I mean, if weathermen or stock brokers were running the universe we'd be in a lot of trouble because no one knows what's going to happen tomorrow. That has always been the dilemma of the unbelieving system. It never can stabilize. That's the pagan picture of how the universe is run. Contrast that with Scripture, 1 Kings 22 and Job 1, who's running the universe? Demons, even Satan himself, comes into His presence, do you see any of them warring with the Lord? There's no war. They're not going to take Him on. There's not a challenge there. A Person who is absolutely

sovereign is running the universe and He says what can and cannot happen in His universe. He says you will do this and you will not do that, and Satan has no real say about it. There's no chance there. This is the opposite of chance. That is a fundamental idea that we go back to again and again in the scripture. If you don't grasp this difference you cannot really come to know the God of the Bible. It's that fundamental.

So, all you have to do to discover whether a worldview is biblical or human is ask two questions. One, "How many levels of reality are there?" One or two? Every movie, every book, every religion will give one of those two answers. Second, "Who or what is running the universe?" A sovereign person or impersonal chance? There are no other options.

Review this chart and try to remember the differences, as we will refer to it over and over again.

DVP of Origins	HVP of Origins
Creator-creature distinction	Continuity of Being
2 Levels of reality	1 Level of Reality
God man nature	god(s) > man > animals > rocks
Personal Sovereignty	Impersonal Chance
God in control; man responsible	No one in control; man a victim

Evolution is not New!

With the ideology of evolution so prevalent in all that we read, watch, and hear it would seem that it is a newer way of thinking. Often the ideas of the bible are tossed aside as some sort of ancient thoughts. However, we need to recognize the beliefs of evolution for what they are...an old philosophy dressed up in new clothes.

The ancient belief of the Continuity of Being, the Chain of Being idea, has come down through time and is now packaged in what we call Cosmic Evolution, the evolution of all things in the universe. However there is not much new here. It's really nothing more than an outgrowth of that old HVP idea. It can be expressed mathematically, with slick equations, but after all is said and done it's the same old belief in a Continuity of Being. Secular scholars agree.

For example, this first quote happens to be Sol Tax, the man who edited the volume that was done at the centennial celebrations of Darwin's writings at the University of Chicago. What does he say:

"Far eastern philosophers thought of creation in evolutionary terms, a belief in an inherent continuity of all creation and second, a reference to the merging of one species into another."

Notice the phrase, "*an inherent continuity of all creation*" and also notice how the sentence ends, "*and second, a reference to the merging of one species into another.*" The merging of one species into another, that's exactly what evolution is. And what is he saying? Far eastern philosophers thought of that millennium's before Darwin. This is not new with Darwin. The way we are taught in schools, they love to present it like this is a brand new idea, this is *modern science*. It isn't modern science, its ancient philosophy in new clothes!

Loren Eiseley, a modern historian of evolution, very well known person, and he says quite frankly,

"All that the Chain of Being actually needed to become a full-fledged evolutionary theory was the introduction into it of the conception of time in vast quantities, added to mutability of form..."

See that "*mutability of form*". What's that? That's the Continuity of Being, where we see mutation from one level to the other. Interestingly this sounds strikingly like what Satan said as he fell from the presence of God, "*I will be like the Most High*". It's the same old story over and over!

Do you know why the evolutionary theory was so quickly adopted by Christians in the 19th century? Actually it was the Christian church who propounded and promoted Darwin in the Anglo-Saxon world? Now in the 20th century suddenly we realize "oops, we made a big mistake, why did we do that?" It wasn't the unbelievers who promoted it, because they weren't in power in the 19th century England, it was Victorian Christians that popularized all this stuff. And everyone just bought it hook, line and sinker, and the question is, "What prepared them to accept this, why did they become suckers for this idea?" That's what Loren Eiseley is trying to deal with.

That's the linkage. I just want you to see that scholars admit that there's a linkage going on between ancient paganism and modern paganism. Science really isn't involved in this debate, its philosophy that's involved, the philosophy of naturalism. The problem is the average biologist doesn't take one course in philosophy. That goes for all the sciences. Professors just teach all the data...all the theories as if they are

actually facts. But by doing a little research and out comes all the ancient philosophy that is behind it all but nowhere in the class curriculum. It isn't facts, it is a philosophical interpretation of the facts.

Jeremy Thomas recalls this kind of thing in his classes at Texas Tech:

"I heard in my plant taxonomy class, the teacher trots out the old German Ernst Haeckel's 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny', I've got it in my notes, the old disproven idea that an embryo, during development, goes through all the evolutionary stages. Well, Haeckel faked the drawings, this was well known over 100 years ago, his own peers said it was a hoax. Now I'm still hearing it in 1998 at Texas Tech University. In fact, it was in National Geographic this year, Jan 2007."

The lengths some professors will go to support their philosophy of naturalism. Blatant lies. It's amazing. But again, that is the HVP mind at work. Should we really be surprised that HVP has an agenda? There is no neutrality here. It's a war taking place and well-worn strategies at work.

Interpreting Genesis

Modern evolution has really created tension when it comes to interpreting the Genesis text. But what exactly is the tension? If we start with the Genesis text and interpret it literally then it won't take long to see that it is in total conflict with the story of Evolution. Think through this brief list of characteristics with me.

Genesis	Evolution
starts with God	starts with gas
cool liquid water	hot condensing matter
sun, stars - after life on earth	sun, stars - before life on earth
life created on land	life evolves in the sea
birds created with fish before mammals	birds evolve with mammals after fish
man created directly from the earth, woman indirectly from the man	man evolves from mammals
rain doesn't occur until after man is created	rain occurs millions of years before man
fundamental differences in kind	life is fundamentally one thing

Genesis	Evolution
creation completed on 6th day	all is continually evolving

Let's take a deeper look at that last characteristic and see how it effects the interpretive approach. Evolutionary processes are supposed to be still occurring today, the process of evolution is still happening. Ok...think about this, if I am a scientist and I'm doing measurements, I'm measuring a processes, decay rates and changes and I say they are still changing from ancient times, this is really going to effect how I interpret the data. They call that uniformitarianism. This means that the changes we see in science are the action of continuous and uniform processes.

But if you turn to Gen. 2:1-3 and count how many times you see the verb for complete, finished.

"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."

So we come now to a very different, very fundamental difference which effects our interpretation of data. Evolutionary processes continue today in the mind of the unbelieving evolutionist. In the Genesis text the processes that were used were turned off at the end of the sixth day. There's a BIG difference. The two world views are recording two different ideas of processes, one has the processes that are continuing, the other has the processes turned off. This has powerful implications about how you interpret data.

In the evolutionary worldview life is fundamentally one thing. Everything differs in degrees cats, mice, dogs, rocks, all have protons, all have electrons, they're just arranged differently. Life is all fundamentally the same thing, electrons and protons. In Genesis we have fundamental differences in kind. Animals reproduce "after their kind," plants reproduce "after their kind", and there's a reason for that. This is not just a little isolated detail, but has implications throughout the Scripture. In the context of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is explaining more on the doctrine of resurrection. Take a look at how he frames this doctrine and what truth in Genesis it is founded on.

35 *But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"* **36** *How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.* **37** *When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.* **38** *But God gives it a body as he has*

determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. 39 All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. 41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

Paul uses the truth in Genesis, that there are fundamental differences in kind to dramatize, describe and reveal what resurrection is all about.

Another thing which we'll get into later on is in the evolutionary worldview, death is normal, sorrow is normal, tears and pain are normal, they're adjuncts of mere existence. So don't get upset about suffering. Just accept it. Incidentally, because the Eastern religions believe in evolution what do they say about suffering? You should adapt to it. It's normal.

In the Bible God created everything very good and death was introduced later so death becomes abnormal. Death is something that came in after creation because of man's sin. Evolution uses death to bring about life. In the Bible we have life and then it descends into death.

Just hang on through this study because it will become much more clear how to recognize the differences between HVP and DVP. But for now we really need to see take a deeper look at our options for interpreting Genesis.

The Capitulation Strategy

By going through these different characteristics of Evolution and Genesis you can see the tension that Christians faced, particularly in the 19th century. Obviously the more they began to look at the issue, the more they began to say "Whoa, we got a problem here, what are we going to do about this?"

So the first strategy that was invented was what we call **The Capitulation Strategy**. Capitulation simply means to surrender. So this strategy has the idea that the church "surrendering" to the evolutionists. This started primarily with the liberal churches in the 19th century who had already drifted away theologically from orthodox doctrine;

so they had no problem buying into evolution in all areas. But this didn't give them a neutral ground in which to interpret Genesis. Rather, they put on their evolutionary goggles and when they went to Genesis how do you think they read it? As if it evolved over time.

The liberal scholars, starting with Julius Wellhausen and some others, began to apply what is technically called "higher criticism." That is, they came to the Bible and tried to explain it in terms of HVP unbelief. They didn't believe in ex-nihilo (out of nothing) creation, they believed in cosmic evolution. So what do you think they did with Genesis? Since it's not God's word and there's no such thing as inspiration of the Bible, we can interpret the Bible within a HVP framework.

Typical Scenario

Let's take a look at how they did this in Genesis 2 because this is still taught in public schools, High Schools and University. It is an all-too-common effort to undermine the faith of those who believe the Bible. So you should be forewarned and forearmed about Genesis 2.

One of the classic cases of a higher critical assault on the biblical text, is found in Genesis 2. You can feel it coming when you hear your instructor saying,

"Well, in the Bible there are multiple accounts of creation, and particularly there are two accounts of creation, there's one account in Genesis 1 and there's a completely different account in Genesis 2."

And usually a lot of naïve Christian students sit there in the class and think, "What!... there are contradictions in the Bible?" and because they are trying to learn and understand they begin to rationalize, "Wait a minute, if the Bible has contradictions it can't be true." This prepares the Christian to fall right into that mode of surrender.

Here's what they do. First, they explain how if you look at Genesis 1 you will see a chronological order of God creating animals and then man. And at this point the professor would be correct. Let's see:

24 *And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. **25** *God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.**

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Then they arrogantly have you flip over to Genesis 2 and have you read

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. **16** And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; **17** but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. **20** So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

After reading this the professor, now proud and confident, says

"See, I told you, here's the contradiction—in Genesis 1 animals then man, and Genesis 2 man then animals, a contradiction, two contradictory accounts here."

Without any thought the students sit there and begin to doubt what they learned growing up. As if the professor had enlightened them to something that was hidden from them all these years. And so begins the ever-increasing journey of capitulation.

But there is a problem with the information that the professor presented as fact. Let's take a quick look.

You need to remember that when you interpret literature, any kind of literature, you have some basic beliefs that you bring to it. For example, let's say you receive a letter in the mail you would assume that if another person took time to write this presumably they meant to communicate something to you, it's not just a bunch of nonsense. So if somebody wrote this letter, you give the person the benefit of the doubt that they probably intended to mean something coherent. You don't start your interpretation of a piece of literature trying to rip it to shreds; you start your

interpretation presuming that the author probably meant to communicate something coherent. That's why we write, that's why we talk...to communicate!

So let me just summarize what we see as far as the structure of Genesis 1. This is a very neat and tidy chronology of what God did in creation.

Genesis 1	
DAY 1: Light	DAY 4: Sun, stars, moon (light bearers)
DAY 2: Sky and Water below	DAY 5: Birds and fish
DAY 3: Dry land, plants	DAY 6: Animals and man

Do you notice anything significant about this chart? Do you see a structure? What do you observe? What's happening? What is the pattern that you see here?

On one side He creates, as it were, the room, and on the other side He populates the room, the space. He creates the domain then He populates the domain. God's work in that creation week was very structured; it's the work of an Engineer. He creates domains and then He populates domains.

However, when we get to the Genesis 2 account we have a specific style of writing that need to be considered. You would be acquainted with this if you've ever gone out to the front lawn and picked up a morning newspaper or surfed your favorite news website. We call it the journalistic style.

When a journalist writes a news story their goal is to tell the story as it happened, retelling the events that occurred. But wait, does a journalistic styled story start with a headline and then give you strictly chronological events as they happened? Think about it. When you read a news story doesn't the headline grab you then you read a brief summary, then the story jumps to more specific themes and then back to the events. Ever see that style done? Does that mean that news writers have contradictions in their stories? Or is it stylistic? Its simply an issue of style and the interesting thing is that we prefer to read our news that way rather than strict chronological progression.

The style used here in Genesis is called a "doublet". Archaeological discoveries of ancient Near Eastern works showed that "doublets" like Genesis 1-2 were common stylistic features in the ancient world. The author will give a chronological account and then he will go back and pull out some of those themes and talk about them. That's exactly what Genesis does. In Genesis 1 we have the chronology. In Genesis 2 the elaboration on more specific themes.

So to wrap up this capitulation strategy we see that liberalism prepared a large part of the church to accept evolutionary cosmology in the last half of the 19th century when Darwin published his works. Since they no longer accepted the supernatural biblical framework, the fallen nature of man, the deity of Christ, and literal resurrection, liberals willingly capitulated or surrendered to evolutionary cosmology. Why defend the book of Genesis when spiritually they had already abandoned the God of Genesis?

The Accommodation Strategy

Let's look at the second strategy, what we call **The Accommodation Strategy**. It's been called Theistic Evolution, the idea that "God used evolution." This strategy's goal is to use some tactic or tactics to get Genesis and Evolution together.

Most Christians find themselves believing this strategy, but they don't see the implications of it. They haven't thought it through clearly. They have actually bought into an ultimate belief and that is coloring how they interpret the Bible.

Let's look at an interesting quote from the professor of Church History at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr Hannah. Dr Hannah did an interesting research project where he went back into the 19th century and took America's most famous theological quarterly, called Bibliotheca Sacra and dug out old articles dealing with the issue of science and Genesis. What strategy were they using in the 1850's to deal with the claims of science. And it's clear they were using The Accommodation Strategy. In 1846 here's what one Christian wrote, an outstanding Christian scholar,

"Natural revelation is the basis on which written revelation rests."

Do you see what they're saying in that statement? They're saying that we began with the scientific study of the world and then after doing that we interpret Scripture accordingly to what we have found. This strategy spread throughout the whole Christian church.

The statement above was the ultimate belief the church operated from. So, every time science changed and added more time or changed the mechanism guess what theologians had to do? Go back to Genesis and re-interpret, re-interpret, re-interpret. So, ultimately what happened is that they bought into the idea that the scientific speculations of their day were without error. That was the final authority - science.

In the 19th century virtually everyone from Charles Hodge to C. I. Scofield bought into this. It was universally accepted even in fundamentalist circles. Quite frankly, about

the only people to hold the line were some Seventh Day Adventists. So, this is what led to the various ways of getting more time in Genesis. As one clergyman said,

"Moses seems to assign a comparatively brief period to the creation; astronomy and geology assert a vast period, how shall they be reconciled?"

Three basic theories have been used. First, a Gap Theory where we place an indefinite period of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 followed by divine creation in six 24 hour days. Second, the Day-Age-Day theory which places indefinite periods of time between the six 24 hour days. Third, a Day Age theory where each of the six days is an indefinite period of time.

Other theories have been used but they are all Accommodation Strategies. As Mayers said in the 1850's,

"If the Mosaic record is...reliable, we must admit an interpretation which will give the period the facts demanded."

See, the assumed the conclusions of science were "fact". This is what was going on 150 years ago. This is nothing new and unfortunately it's still going on in evangelical circles. Dr. Hugh Ross is selling this same old Accommodation Strategy.

Well, what's the answer to this strategy? Just think about this for a minute. We've just briefly compared Genesis and Evolution side-by-side and what did we find? Do they fit? What was wrong? The sequence. Is adding more time between the days going to change the sequence? No. Is making the days longer going to change the sequence? No. You can add all the time you want to but the sequence is still wrong.

Think about it. Does any evolutionist in his right mind agree that the stars didn't come into existence until after planet earth? I never read an evolutionist that believes that. It is impossible to ram, cram and jam the Genesis text into an evolutionary mold, even if you make each day a billion years.

Also, there's one fundamental mistake with the days becoming long ages and that is, at the end of each day the biblical text says,

"there was evening and morning the xth day"

This is a built-in formula that does not allow for anything except a 24-hour day. No Hebrew scholar, even the liberal Hebrew scholars who believe in billions of evolutionary years, admit that this formula means anything except 24-hour days, they just don't believe it. And all this strategy has done is cast a shadow of doubt on the infallibility and authority of Scripture. If we have to keep waiting for the infallible

assertions of modern science then we just have to keep on re-interpreting, re-interpreting, re-interpreting.

The Counter-attack Strategy

The last strategy is called the Counter-attack Strategy. This is the one that's created a storm of controversy in recent years. It was begun, oddly enough, by Christian men who were trained in the secular world. It didn't come out of Christian seminaries, which is intriguing.

These guys were true Christians, but they were men trained in the sciences, and as Christians they felt "Hey, we're not blind, we know there's a big conflict." The father of the movement was a guy named Dr. Henry Morris. Dr Morris was the head of the Civil Engineering Department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. He concluded that if the Bible could not be 'adjusted' to fit evolution, and if it was the word of God, then the problem, somehow, must be with the scientific interpretation of data. Somewhere in its development largely from within the Protestant reformation, science had taken a wrong turn.

In the early 1960's, these counter-attack scientists pointed out that the interpretive strategies from the past 200 years show us that we can't make the Creation and Evolution fit. They went back to the drawing boards and asked, "What went wrong?" They decided that what went wrong was that scientific interpretation had been contaminated by the HVP belief system, unbelieving ultimate beliefs! This was the heart of the problem.

So, you can Capitulate to modern science, you can try to Accommodate with endlessly reinterpreting the text, or you interpret the text as it always has been interpreted by Jesus Christ and the apostles and say "Okay, this is where I start, I don't understand how it fits together, but somehow over here there's a systematic mistake being made." It's a titanic claim, and it's extremely offensive in the intellectual world. This is why today creationists are thrown in with the Flat-earth Society, the radical right and all the rest of it.

There are several thriving ministries available to us today to help us to counter-attack all the typical arguments thrown at us. Men that are well respected scientists and PhDs in their fields. But the counter-attack strategy does not depend on knowledge of nature first, it starts with the final authority of God's Word and moves out from there.

Conclusion

In this lesson our goal was to see that the church has thought deeply about these things for many, many years. Equally we must think about these things and make a choice right here at the beginning of God's Word. Either you're going to rest your final authority on the infallibility of modern science or on the infallibility of God and His revelation to us.

Remember that your view of origins controls your view of God. That's what's at stake. Don't fool yourself, you have the intellectual freedom to choose one or the other, but once you have chosen you've locked in on a concept of God that colors everything else you believe. It colors your morals, it colors your ethics, it colors your epistemology, i.e. how you know what you know is true is true, and it colors your entire philosophy of life.