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Did Death of Any Kind Exist Before the Fall? What the Bible Says About the Origin of Death and Suffering

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Abstract

Death is a sad reality that is ever present in our world, leaving behind tremendous pain and suffering. Tragically, many people shake a fist at God when faced with the loss of a loved one and are left without adequate answers from the church as to death's existence. Unfortunately, an assumption has crept into the church which sees death as a natural part of our existence and as something that we have to put up with as opposed to it being an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26) that came into God's very good creation.

This paper will argue that the biblical understanding of death, whether animal or human, physical or spiritual, views it to be a consequence of man's disobedience towards his Creator and an intrusion into His "very good" creation.

Keywords: death, physical, spiritual, Fall

Introduction

Death and disease are a heartbreaking reality of the world we live in and daily we hear news stories of people dying as a result of natural disasters, terrorist attacks, disease, and crime. People often ask why death exists in the world if there is a loving God, and many simply assume that death is a natural part of life. However, this has not been the belief of the church for much of its history. The orthodox Christian understanding of the origin of death has been commonly understood in terms of the "Fall" of mankind found in Genesis 3. Death was brought about as a result of Adam's disobedience to the command of God in Genesis 2:17. As Vos states:

> On the basis of these words the belief of all ages has been that death is the penalty of sin, that the race became first subject to death through the commission of the primordial sin (Vos 1975, p. 36).

Nevertheless, many scholars in recent years have taken issue with the orthodox view of Genesis 1–3 and the origin of death. Pannenberg notes that "From the 18th century onward…the opinion gained ground in Protestant theology that…death is part of the finitude of our nature" (Pannenberg 1994, p. 267). Lyn Bechtel argues that the orthodox Christian understanding of the origin of death and the Fall found in Genesis 3 is not seen as being original to the text, but as a development over the last few centuries of the first millennium BCE (Bechtel 1995, p. 4). Meanwhile, James Barr, in *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, writes:

> My argument is that, taken in itself and for itself, this narrative is not, as it has commonly been understood in our tradition, basically a story of the origins of sin and evil… (Barr 1992, p. 4)

There can be no doubt that the eighteenth century's emphasis on rationalism combined with the nineteenth century's belief in the great age of the earth and the later acceptance of Charles Darwin's theory in *The Origin of Species* has impacted the interpretation of Genesis 1–3 more than anything else. Darwin's evolutionary understanding of the world has had a devastating effect on how many people interpret Genesis 1–3. In his book he wrote what was essentially a history of death and suffering. He described the modern world as having arisen from "the war of nature, from famine and death" understanding death to have always been a permanent part of the world (Darwin 1859, p. 459). The late evolutionary astrophysicist Carl Sagan said,

> The secrets of evolution are time and death: time for the slow accumulations of favourable mutations, and death to make room for new species (Sagan 1980).

Sadly, Darwin's evolutionary assumptions have caused many not only to doubt the existence of God but also to deny His existence. As Darwin's own great, great grandchild said "I don't believe in God: how could I, given my great, great grandfather's theories?" (Anonymous 2000).

This paper will demonstrate that human physical and spiritual death, together with the death of animals, came about through the disobedience of one man by examining nine key passages: Genesis 1, 2, and 3; Acts 3:21; Romans 5:12–21; 8:19–22; 1 Corinthians 15:22–55; Colossians 1:15–21 and Revelation 21–22. In evaluating these Scriptures, the paper will also highlight certain theological problems with the existence of death before the Fall including:

- What changes came about after Adam disobeyed God if the earth is billions of years old and death and suffering have always been a part of life anyway?

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- Is God or man to blame for the current condition of creation?
- How can there be death and suffering in creation with God's pronouncement that at its completion it was "very good?"

Finally, the paper will consider the missiological implications in teaching that death existed before the Fall.

Nothing New Under The Sun

The idea that Adam's sin did not bring death into the world is not new. In the fourth century a fierce debate broke out in the early church between a British monk by the name of Pelagius and a Roman theologian in North Africa named Augustine. Pelagius believed that Adam's sin did not result in the corruption of his nature nor did it result in natural death as Adam was created mortal. According to Pelagius, Adam's descendants did not inherit natural death but they died because they too were mortal. Adam's Fall injured himself alone, not the human race (Schaff 1891, p. 685).

For Pelagius there was no connection between Adam's sin and ours and, therefore, Adam's transgression bore no consequence to the essential nature of the human race. Man was born in a state of righteousness. In the year AD 418, the Council of Carthage condemned the teachings of Pelagius as did the Council of Ephesus in AD 431. The Council of Carthage even stated: "Whoever says, that Adam was created mortal, and would, even without sin, have died by natural necessity, let him be anathema" (Schaff 1891, p. 690).

In our modern culture, to pronounce someone anathema sounds bizarre and even un-Christian. However, when these early church councils pronounced people anathema they are using terminology from Paul in Galatians 1:8. The Council of Carthage saw this issue as central to the Christian gospel.

What is Life?

It is necessary to understand the meaning of the term "life" in order to understand the meaning of "death" according to the Bible.

Genesis 1–2 describes the beginning of life on earth and how God created it. Kennard notes that the Hebrew concept of life as shown in the words חָיָה and נֶפֶשׁ. חָיָה is the primary word for life together with its cognates and about 70% of instances refer to human life, 17% refer to animals and 11% refer to God as living. נֶפֶשׁ is a strong secondary word for life. At least 43% of its uses (295 times) clearly indicate life (Kennard 2008, p. 170). In Genesis 2:7 the creation of the first human life is described when God breathes into man the breath of life, and this is "…a clear indication of life—and thereby the lifeless body became a living soul, a living being" (Cassuto 1944, p. 106). The expression *hayya* in Genesis 2:7 is a common expression in the Old Testament for "living being" as a description of people or animals (Genesis 2:19). The breath of life (Genesis 2:7; 6:15; 7:15) is used to describe humans and animals but not plants. "Plants are never the subject of חָיָה" (Gerleman 1997, p. 414) neither are they "… alive in biblical Hebrew or in second Temple Jewish literature…" (Kennard 2008, p. 169), which is important to note as plant death is an argument used by some for death before the Fall. It is the breath of life that separates humans and animals from plants because when it is gone they cease to exist (2 Samuel 1:9; 1 Kings 17:21–22). Blood is the sign of life in both humans and animals (Genesis 4:10; 9:4–6), and its shedding causes the loss of life (Leviticus 17:11, 14). Plants do not die in the same sense animals and humans do because they are not living in the same sense that humans and animals are.

What is Death?

With regards to understanding the term "death," Kennard writes that, "Various words are used…but the concept is dominated by (מוּת/*mwt*)" (Kennard 2008, p. 173). It is primarily used of human death (Genesis 25:8) although animals are also said to die (Genesis 33:13; Leviticus 11:39). It is the soul who sins that will die (Ezekiel 18:4), and God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies (Ezekiel 18:32). The only mention of (מוּת/*mwt*) referring to a plant is in Job 14:8 were the stump of a tree is said to die. This is a common objection to the argument that plants don't die. However, a closer look at the context of Job 14:8 shows that the tree is not really dead but only appears so (Job 14:7–9). Death in its final analysis according to the Old Testament is the permanent cessation of breathing and the end of life (Job 34:14–15; Psalm 104:29; 146:4). However, in the sadness of death there is the promise in the prophets that death will be done away with (Isaiah.25:6; Hosea 13:14).

In the New Testament two different Greek words are used primarily for death—both are nouns—*thanatos* θάνατος (Romans 5:12) and *nekros* νεκρός (Ephesians 2:5)—plus the verbal forms of the words. *Thanatos* is a more generic word used to refer to the death of the body and spiritual or eternal death (Thayer 2007, pp. 282–283).

The New Testament contains two passages where the author uses "death"—*apothnēskō* ἀποθνήσκω, a variation of *thanatos*, to refer to plants. In John 12:24 (Jesus uses the language of appearance in verse 24 as a symbol of his future resurrection) and Jude 12 (is used to symbolize the judgment of the false teachers). Both these passages are word pictures and are not teaching that plants die. Revelation 8:9 is the only place where animals are said to have died.

There are three aspects of human death in Scripture. Firstly, there is spiritual death, which is alienation from God (Genesis 3:8; Ephesians 2:5; 4:18). Secondly, physical death (Genesis 2:17; 3:17–19; Romans 5:12–14; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22) which is separation of the soul from the body. The third aspect is the, "second death," (Revelation 20:14), which occurs at the end of the age.

Genesis 1

There are three lines of evidence in Genesis 1 that rule out the possibility of any kind of death or disease before Adam's disobedience: the length of the days of creation, the vegetarian diet prescribed to man and animals in Genesis 1:29–30, and God's declaration that His completed creation was very good.

1. The length of the days of creation

The first line of evidence concerns the length of days in Genesis 1. It is probably fair to say that most Christians and Christian leaders today do not accept the days of creation in Genesis 1 to be days of 24 hours. Some understand the days as long periods of time with the Creation account spanning over millions of years, whilst others view Genesis as being more concerned with teaching theology (God's relationship with the universe) as opposed to cosmology (how the universe was created).

The idea of an old earth is based upon uniformitarian geology which understands the fossil record to have been laid down over millions of years. Lee Irons comments that the fossil record describes nature as "red in tooth and claw" which he believes "implies that plants and animals died before the Fall" (Irons 2007).

If Genesis is interpreted through the lens of uniformitarian geology then the fossil record documents that millions of years of earth's history are filled with death, mutations, disease, suffering, bloodshed, and violence. However, if the days of creation in Genesis 1 were only 24 hours long then there is no room for the millions of years of death, struggle, and disease to have taken place before Adam disobeyed God.

In Matthew 19:4–6 we gain valuable insight into how our Lord interpreted the early chapters of Genesis. Jesus quotes from Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 understanding these verses in their plain, natural sense without allegorizing them or using them symbolically for theological truth. Jesus clearly trusted the accuracy and trustworthiness of the Creation account in Genesis and, therefore, there is no reason to not trust them. Furthermore, the apostolic writers, Christ and Paul always interpret Genesis 1–11 as straightforward historical narrative according to the plain sense of the text (Matthew 24:37–38; Mark 10:6; Luke 11:49–51; 17:26–34; John 8:44; Acts 17:26; Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45; 1 Timothy 2:13–14; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:5–6; Jude 14).

The literal approach, or rather, to interpret the text plainly and straightforwardly according to its literature takes into account such things as metaphors and figures of speech (Genesis 2:23; 4:7; 7:11). The plain meaning of the text may be understood as "…the meaning intended by the human author, as that sense can be plainly determined by the literary and historical context" (Silva 1996, p. 40).

The young earth view of Genesis 1 is that the Hebrew text is not written as myth, parable, or poetry[1] but as a chronological, historical narrative recording God's divine acts of creation that occurred in space-time history (Kaiser 2001, pp. 80–83).[2] The repeated use of the *waw* consecutive, which is an essential characteristic of narrative adding to the past narration an element of sequence, helps to identify it as so (Kaiser 2001, p. 80). Appearing 55 times in the 34 verses in Genesis 1:1–2:3, the *waw* consecutive is consistent with the narrative material found in the remainder of Genesis (McCabe 2009, p. 217). Genesis 1–11 is obviously historical narrative in that it intends to give historical data. For example, Genesis 5:1–5 gives dates and events for Adam's life.

Furthermore, in Genesis 11–12 there is no transition from non-historical to historical and it is not treated as a separate literary category from Genesis 12–50. Genesis 12 begins with a *waw* consecutive verb, *wayomer* ("and he said") indicating that what follows is a continuation of chapter 11 and not a major break in the narrative. Genesis 1–11 also contains the same characteristics of historical narrative as Genesis 12–50, most of Exodus, much of Numbers and 1 and 2 Kings.[3] Genesis 1–50 is all in the same literary category as they use the same rubric *toledot* to tell the story (Kaiser 2001, p. 82).

Genesis 1 then should be understood as historical narrative giving us an explanation of events that occurred in space-time history. The days of Genesis 1 are six literal 24-hour days (Exodus 20:11) which occurred around 6,000–10,000 years ago. The context of *yom* in Genesis 1 makes this clear (McCabe 2009, pp. 225–228). Moreover, even scholars who reject the

[1] See Chaffey 2012.

[2] Walter Kaiser believes in the day-age theory but he does argue that Genesis 1 is historical and chronological.

[3] The critical scholar Claus Westermann noted that "The average reader who opens the Bible to Genesis 1 and 2 receives the impression that he is reading a sober account of creation, which relates facts in much the same manner as does the story of the rise of the Israelite monarchy, that is, as straightforward history" (Westermann 1964, p. 5).

literal 24-hour approach recognize that "…whoever wrote Gen. 1 believed he was talking about literal days" (Hamilton 1990, p. 53) and that

> …the original Israelite audience would have understood the word "day" in the context of Genesis 1 to have been twenty-four-hour days (Walton 2001, p. 154).

The Bible elsewhere regards the days of creation as ordinary days (Exodus 20:11; 31:17).

Genesis 1:1–2:3 is clearly a historical narrative giving a sequence of six chronological days of 24 hours ruling out any ideas of uniformitarianism along with its history of death.

2. Vegetarian diet

A second reason why Genesis 1 demands that there was no death of any kind before Adam rebelled is the vegetarian diet prescribed both to man and animals in Genesis 1:29–30 ruling out any carnivorous behavior before the Fall.

There are objections to this, however, as some believe that if plants were eaten then this would have brought about the death of the plants. John Lennox reasons that since man ate plants then plant death cannot be an issue or a consequence of human sin, even though plants did die (Lennox 2011, p. 78). This overlooks the fact that plants are not looked upon as being "alive in biblical Hebrew or in second Temple Jewish literature" (Kennard 2008, p. 169).

Plants neither feel pain nor die in the sense that animals and humans do as "Plants are never the subject of חָיָה" (Gerleman 1997, p. 414). Plants are not described as "living creatures" as humans, land animals, and sea creature are (Genesis 1:20–21, 24 and 30; Genesis 2:7; Genesis 6:19–20 and Genesis 9:10–17), and the words that are used to describe their termination are more descriptive such as "wither" or "fade" (Psalm 37:2; 102:11; Isaiah 64:6).

A further objection to no death before sin is again raised by Lennox who suggests that no animal death before human sin makes the existence of predators problematic (Lennox 2011, p. 79), suggesting that if predators were the result of the Fall:

> …would it not make that sin the trigger of a creation process—a feature that seems very unlikely, and on which the Bible appears to be silent? Or did God foresee the change, build the mechanisms into the creatures in advance, and then do something to set them in operation? (Lennox 2011, p. 79)

The problems that Lennox raises for no animal death before the Fall are understandable, but they can be answered within a biblical framework. The Bible never uses the Hebrew term *nephesh chayyah* (living soul/creature) when referring to invertebrates, but it does when referring to humans and fish (Genesis 1:20; 2:7). Also, insects do not have the same sort of "blood" that vertebrates do, yet "the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11) (Sarfati 2004, p. 211). It is reasonable then to assume that the pre-Fall diet of animals could have included invertebrates. Even so, if we consider the fact that God foreknew the Fall (1 Peter 1:18–20; Ephesians 3:11; Revelation 13:8), then it is also logical that he programmed creatures with the information for attack and defence features, which they would need in a cursed world. This information was "switched on" at the Fall (Sarfati 2004, p. 212).

Another objection concerning animal death before the fall is presented by the BioLogos forum who believes that the Bible passages which teach about sin and death are clearly referring to the death of humans and not of animals. They believe that: "Some Bible passages portray predatory animals as part of God's original plan for creation (Job 38:39–41; 39:29–30; Psalm 104:21, 29)" (BioLogos 2012).

The passages that BioLogos raise however, do not portray predatory animals as part of God's original creation, but rather as part of a fallen creation. Except for Job 38:3–7 (which refers to Genesis 1) and Job 38:8–11 (which refers to Genesis 6–8), Job 38–41 is talking about the creation that is visible to Job in his day. This can be seen from the repeated questions asked by God to Job 38: v. 12—Have you commanded…? v. 16—Have you entered…? v. 31—Can you bind…? v. 34 —Can you lift…? v. 35—Can you send…? Also, In Job 38–41 the text mentions war, battle, rain, city, threshing floor, weapons, quiver, spear, javelin, trumpet, slain (killed people), Jordan River, rope, fishing hook and spear, traders, merchants boiling pot, millstone, sword, spear, dart, bronze, arrow, threshing sledge, and jar of ointment, but none of these were in existence in Genesis 1.

In Psalm 104 only vv. 2–5 and 19–20 refer to the Creation week and vv. 6–9 refer to the Flood. The rest refer to the Creation at the time of the psalmist. The verses that mention predation refer to the present day creation and not the original creation.

Genesis 1:29 states explicitly that the food for humans was to be vegetation while v. 30 tells us that animals also were to eat green plants for food. This means that both animals and humans were vegetarian from the start. Hamilton notes the clear meaning of Genesis 1:29–30:

> At no point is anything (human beings, animals, birds) allowed to take the life of another living being and consume it for food. The dominion assigned to the human couple over the animal world does not include the prerogative to butcher. Instead, humankind survives on a vegetarian diet (Hamilton 1990, p. 140).

Because both humans and animals were originally vegetarian, then death could not have been a part of God's Creation. Even after the Fall the diet of Adam

and Eve was vegetarian (Genesis 3:17–19). It was not until after the Flood that man was permitted to eat animals for food (Genesis 9:3). The Fall in Genesis 3 would best explain the origin of carnivorous animal behavior.

Isaiah 11:6–9 and 65:17–25 also refer to a future state of the earth which seems to parallel the pre-Fall world, when there was no carnivorous activity. It is also a fallacy to read the present state of the world, which includes predators, back into the biblical account of creation. This is the uniformitarian principle "the present is the key to the past" (popularized by Charles Lyell), which assumes that the processes we observe in our present world is the way it has always been. This is a common assumption among old earth creationists. However, revelation, and not the present, is the key to understanding the past.

Furthermore, if animals were suffering in God's "very good" creation then this would raise questions against His character, especially when He condemns men for being cruel to animals (Proverbs 12:10) and told the people of Israel to take care of animals (Exodus 23:5, 12).

While texts such as Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15:22 show that human death came about as a result of the Fall, there are a number of biblical texts concerning no death of any kind before the Fall (Genesis 1:29–31; 3:1–24; Romans 8:19–22; Revelation 21:4; 22:3).

3. A very good creation

The third reason in Genesis 1 for there being no death of any kind before the Fall is found in God's declaration of His completed creation as "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

Placing natural evil in Genesis 1 affects our ethical system and our view of God's character. Were the tsunamis in Asia in 2004 and 2011 and the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 which both killed thousands very good? David Hull comments:

> Whatever the God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural history may be like, He is not the Protestant God of waste not, want not. He is also not a loving God who cares about His productions…The God of the Galapagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent and almost diabolical (Hull 1991, p.486).

Because of Hull's view of earth history, he does not believe that God is loving, or that His creation is good. On the other hand, R.J. Berry, a professing Christian, comes to a different conclusion concerning God's goodness. Berry believes that we should not assume that "earthquakes and cruelty" are not good; such an assumption merely reflects our own cultural perspective. He writes:

> As God is good, so is creation; any defects and blemishes which we find in the original (i.e. pre-Adamic) creation can only be our interpretation of it (Berry 1999, p. 42).

However, Berry bases this on a few assumptions. The first is that the fossil record interprets the Genesis narrative and the second is that Psalm 104 is commenting on God's original creation.

Nevertheless, if what God has revealed to us in the Bible has a different meaning (that is, cultural perspective) for Him than for us then surely the meaning of Scripture is incomprehensible and unknowable. The Bible itself then would not be reliable.

Hull and Berry, although taking similar views of earth history, come to different conclusions regarding the goodness of God. Hull appears to come to a logical conclusion whereas Berry has to redefine how humanity interprets natural disasters in order to conclude that God is still good. Berry in his article "This cursed earth: Is 'the Fall' credible?" (Berry 1999) rejects the orthodox view that the Fall brought death into the world, not because of what Genesis describes but because of his interpretation of the fossil record.

Berry's understanding of the Fall relies heavily upon an interpretation of earth history and especially the fossil record. It should be noted, however, that like Hull his is only an interpretation of the data. Christians should be very wary of using secular assumptions about the history of the earth, especially if it is a scientific framework of naturalism that relies heavily on the assumptions of the scientist (that is, whether God exists or not, whether geological features were formed by a gradual or cataclysmic process).

A further objection comes from BioLogos regarding some of the language used in Genesis 1 implies there being death before the Fall:

> The Garden of Eden has a reputation as a perfect place, with no death, pain, or even danger for humans or animals. Yet Genesis only teaches that the original creation is "good", not "perfect." Some verses in Genesis 1–2 suggest that God's creation was not safe or pain-free…God charged humanity to "subdue" (Genesis 1:28), a word that implies danger. Also, Genesis 2 places Adam and Eve in a garden; in the ancient near east, this was a walled enclosure, protecting the inhabitants from the wilderness and dangerous animals beyond (BioLogos 2012).

John Lennox also suggests that "From the biblical text one does not get the impression that the entire world was like Eden" (Lennox 2011, p. 81). Asking:

> Was there…a difference between the behavior of animals outside the Garden of Eden and that of those in the idyllic situation inside? (Lennox 2011, p. 82)

Unfortunately, BioLogos errs on their reading of Genesis. The Bible says that the finished creation was not just "good" but "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

The phrase "very good" is God's declaration at the culmination of all of His creation work after He already called things "good" six times and did not just apply it to Eden but to the whole of creation.

In English we may think of perfection as "beyond improvement" or "without flaws." However, the Hebrew word for perfect *tam* תָּם has a range of meanings such as: completeness (Job 4:6), innocence (2 Samuel 15:11), integrity (Genesis 20:5–6), wholesome (Genesis 25:27) and morally innocent (Job 1:8; 2:3) (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 2006, pp. 1070–1071). None of these meanings, however, indicate flawlessness. For example, Job is described as being perfect (Job 1:1, 8) indicating his personal moral integrity, not sinless perfection.

Also, Genesis 2 makes no mention of the Garden of Eden being protection from dangerous animals outside. Genesis 1:29–20 has already stated that man and animals were to eat green plants (Genesis 1:29–30).

While the word "subdue" (Hebrew: *kabash*) can imply "danger," this is implied by the context and not by the word itself. For example, in Micah 7:19 God subdues our sins which is a sign of God's compassion. In the context of Genesis there is no danger implied because God's creation was "very good." Moreover, man was told to rule, *radah*, over the animals, which some say implies danger, again the context determines the meaning of *radah* which can reflect a benevolent, peaceful rule which fits with the context in Genesis 1 (Leviticus 25:43, 46, 53).

In Genesis 1:31 God's appreciation formula (good—Genesis 1:4, 12, 18, 21, 25) is modified in order to show that His creation is not just good but very good. Verse 31 states "all that He had made" instead of just individual items such as light (v. 4). When good, *tov* טוֹב, is accompanied by very, *me'od* מְאֹד, it is an absolute superlative implying much more than a beautiful creation. In their commentary on Genesis, the respected nineteenth century Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitzsch, experts on biblical Hebrew, commented on Genesis 1:31:

> By the application of the term "good" to everything God made, and the repetition of the word with the emphasis "very" at the close of the whole creation, the existence of anything evil is absolutely denied… (Keil and Delitzsch 1886, p. 67)

The very good world which God had made is not simply a reference to morals, as Genesis 1:29–30 makes clear that there was no "kill or be killed" or survival of the fittest in God's very good creation.

The goodness of God's completed creation comes from His nature as goodness belongs to Him alone (1 Chronicles 16:34; Psalm 34:8; 106:1). This is reflected in the character and work of the Creator as it is He alone who is good (Luke 18:19).

In the New Testament we read that the Creator and Saviour of the world became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1–3, 14). In Acts 10:38 we are told that Jesus, our Creator "went about doing good." Some of the good things Jesus did were, for example, feeding the hungry (Mark 6:33–44), healing diseases (Matthew 8–9), giving sight to the blind (John 9:1–8), stopping natural disasters (Mark 4:39) and raising the dead (John 11:43–44). The healing ministry of Jesus was a confrontation of evil, suffering, and death. His good work of healing ministry was one that served and benefited humanity. However, the problem here for those that believed God used evolution is that all of these things that Jesus did are integral parts of evolution. Why then would Jesus have healed all those people if as Creator he knew them to be part of the "very good" creation which he created?

The fact that God declared his creation to be "very good" rules out any possibility of there being death of any kind before the Fall. The question for those who believe God used evolution is: what kind of a "god" would deliberately use a process of death, disease, famine, and struggle to make the world, and then declare it to be very good?

Genesis 2

After being introduced to the creation of the world in the first chapter, the author now focuses on the creation of man and women. Genesis 2:4

> …connects 2:4–25 with 1:1–2:3. First, while v. 4 looks back to 1:1–2:3, its main purpose is to shift attention to the creation of man and his placement in the garden (McCabe 2006, p. 73).

Genesis 2:4–14 is focusing on man in the Garden of Eden, on Day 6, and is not another separate contradictory account of creation. This is the commencement and history of the human race.

The focus of the argument regarding the origin of physical death in Genesis 2 is on verse 17. The question that has to be asked is what does "In the day you eat of it you will surely die" mean?

Since Adam didn't drop dead the moment he disobeyed God, because he lived to be 930 and then he died (Genesis 5:5), does this mean that God got it wrong? James Barr argues that Genesis 2:17 speaks of a speedy punishment and since this did not happen he concludes that it was the serpent who got it right (Barr 1992, pp. 8, 10). He writes, "The person who comes out of this story with a slightly shaky moral record is, of course, God" (Barr 1992, p. 14). Beattie also writes:

> …it is clear that the snake spoke the truth and God did not… For myself, I do not pretend to know whether or not God is capable of lying… (Beattie 1980, p. 8)

In Genesis 3 the serpent calls into question the truthfulness of God's word leaving Eve to make her own mind up. God throughout Genesis 2:4–3:24

is referred to as the "LORD God" but the serpent drops the covenant name "LORD" calling him only God (Genesis 3:1, 5). This may have diverted Eve's attention as the term LORD is used when entering into a covenantal relationship.

Beattie and Barr, however, should have evaluated their reading of the Genesis text in the context of the rest of Scripture. A single statement or passage in one book cannot be allowed to set aside a doctrine which is clearly established by other passages. There are numerous passages stating that God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18) and the apostolic interpretation of the serpent's act is that of deception (2 Corinthians 11:3). This should leave no doubt it was the serpent that lied and that God told the truth. We do not need to go to the extremes of questioning the truthfulness of God as these scholars do. Rather we can assume that what happens to Adam as a result of his disobedience will help to identify the meaning of "die."

Like Barr and Beattie, C.J. Collins believes that those who read Genesis 2:17 as speaking of physical death "…must say that the snake was in some sense right (see Gen. 3:4)…" (Collins 2006, p. 117). However, he goes on to say that:

> …if they draw back from such a conclusion, it is in the direction of taking the threat along one of the following lines: (1) Adam and Eve will become mortal or come under a death sentence; or else (2) they will physically die immediately, but then in God's grace the threat was not carried out (of which grace the snake would of course not have been a apart). But need we go to these explanatory lengths or draw the unwanted conclusion that the snake was right and God was wrong? (Collins 2006, p. 117)

Collins rightly understands that the narrator requires us to assume that the "Lord God is a 'reliable character' and the snake is not" (Collins 2006, p. 117). He believes the right method, however, for understanding what death is, is:

> (a) to consider the semantic range of the Hebrew word "die" (Hebrew root *m-w-t*)
>
> (b) to use the context to ascertain which part of that range is present in our text (Collins 2006, p. 117).

Collins notes that *m-w-t* most common referent is physical death (for example, Genesis 5:5), but that it can also "…refer to what we may call 'spiritual death,' that is, estrangement from a life-giving relationship with God" giving Proverbs 12:28 as an example of *m-w-t* referring to spiritual death (Collins 2006, p. 117).

Collins believes that because Genesis 2:17 is speaking of a sentence that is firm and not likely to be revoked that it "…makes it harder to argue for an interpretation like 'you will surely become mortal' or 'you will surely die' (but I will revoke the sentence)…" (Collins 2006, p. 118). Having established the semantic range of the word and syntax of the expression Collins realizes that he can go no "…further in applying the contextual information until we have studied Genesis 3…" (Collins 2006, pp. 118–119) (See Genesis 3 for refutation of Collins arguments).

Are we wrong to assume then that Genesis 2:17 is not speaking of physical death but is rather speaking of spiritual death, which is why Adam did not drop dead the moment he disobeyed? Many believe that this verse speaks only of spiritual death—alienation from God. Although the phrase "spiritual death" does not appear in Scripture, this does not invalidate the concept any more than does the absence from Scripture of a word such as "trinity."

Spiritual death is the conclusion C.J. Collins eventually makes stating: "…the part of the semantic range of 'death' that is present here [Genesis 2:17] is spiritual death, estrangement from God" (Collins 2006, p. 175). Dennis Alexander, a leading theistic evolutionist, also believes that Genesis 2:17 is speaking of spiritual death. In an article in an English newspaper, *The Guardian*, in which he admitted that belief in evolution is incompatible with the doctrine of original sin, he states:

> On the day that Adam and Eve sin…[they are] alienated from friendship with God, causing spiritual death. Nowhere does the Bible teach that physical death originates with the sin of Adam, nor that sin is inherited from Adam (Alexander 2011).

Spiritual death, alienation from God, was an outcome of Adam and Eve's disobedience; this is seen in their knowing that they were naked, which prior to their disobedience they were unconcerned with (Genesis 2:25), and their vain attempt to hide from God (Genesis 3:7–8). Hiding themselves from God reveals their alienation from Him. God had previously enjoyed an intimate and cordial fellowship with them (Genesis 3:8) as he walks among his people if they are obedient (Leviticus 26:12).

However, in order for Alexander to argue this way he has overlooked the plain meaning of Genesis 3:17–19, which is also part of the fulfillment of the threat of Genesis 2:17 and which began to take effect immediately after Adam's disobedience. Also, the apostolic interpretation of this event is that both physical and spiritual death was brought about through this act of disobedience (Romans 5:12–14; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45). Alexander and others who accept evolution have to view Genesis 2:17 as referring to spiritual death because if it does refer to physical death it contradicts the theory of evolution.

We have to ask, however, does Genesis 2:17 speak of the physical death of humans? Westermann summarizes,

> Was the punishment imposed when the command was transgressed or not? To answer this question it is

important to understand the phrase בְּיוֹם (Westermann 1984, p. 224).

Vawter writes that a "too literal translation of the final part of vs. 17 could cause an unintended difficulty" (Vawter 1977, p. 73). For Wenham, while בְּיוֹם can mean "when," in this passage it emphasizes promptness of action, especially when compared to a similar passage in 1 Kings 2:37, 42 (Wenham 1987, p. 68). However, the question that needs to be asked is whether the construction of בְּיוֹם together with מוֹת תָּמוּת in Genesis 2:17 requires the understanding that God's warning to Adam and Eve should be understood as an immediate death sentence or whether it can allow for a time lapse. The phrase "you shall surely die" (תָּמוּת מוֹת) can be literally translated in the Hebrew text as "dying you shall die." The Hebrew phrase uses the "… infinitive absolute with an imperfect" (Collins 2006, p. 118) and the presence of the infinitive absolute intensifies the meaning of the imperfect verb. This is quite common in the Hebrew Bible and Waltke and O'Connor provide many examples of this saying that "the precise nuance of intensification must be discovered from the broader context" (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, pp. 584–588).

In the context of Genesis 3:7–9 it is clear that Adam and Eve were instantly separated from God (which is spiritual death). Nevertheless, from an understanding of the Curse God placed on man in Genesis 3:17–19 and from Romans 5:12–14 and 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45 it is clear that physical death is in view also.

The words "you will surely die" comprise a phrase that indicates the assurance of death to come. This grammatical construction is very similar to the way Mosaic law threatened capital punishment— "he will surely die," or "they will surely die" (Exodus 21:12; Leviticus 20:9–16). These were formulaic ways of declaring a death sentence. God was not saying Adam and Eve would die immediately but that death would certainly follow disobedience.

Thus, when the meaning of בְּיוֹם and מוֹת תָּמוּת are considered further in light of other relevant biblical texts, we can conclude that the process of physical death of humans commenced as a result of man's disobedience to God's command with the completion of that process being, in the case of Adam, 930 years later. This can be seen in the Curse man received from God in Genesis 3:19. There was no reason for Adam to die before the words "For you are dust, and to dust you shall return" as this is a judicial sentence upon them because of their disobedience. If we try to argue that man would have naturally died before this, then the sentence given to them by God loses all meaning. Therefore, the idea that death was a natural part of creation should be rejected, since Genesis 3:19 is part of the Curse. According to Vos, for the words of Genesis 3:19 to say that death was part of the original creation they

> …would have to be wrenched from its context.…If they expressed a mere declaration of the natural working out of man's destiny, as created mortal, there would be nothing of a curse in them (Vos 1975, p. 37).

However we do not have to separate physical death from spiritual death in our understanding of Genesis 2:17. It is a false dilemma to say that it had to be either or. Rather we can accept that both spiritual death (Genesis 3:7–8) and physical death (Genesis 3:17–19) came about as a result of Adam's disobedience.

Another argument, concerning Genesis 2, is that "death as such is part of God's created order. If this were not the case, the tree of life would have been irrelevant" (Birch et al. 1999, p. 52). This assumes, however, that man had to eat from the tree of life in order to live and it also fails to recognize the fact that the tree of life is also a part of the new heavens and earth (Revelation 22:14). By the same reasoning death would have to be a part of the new heaven and earth but we are told that it will not be there and that there will be no longer any curse, pronounced by God in Genesis 3 (Revelation 21:4; 22:3).[4] Some argue that the tree of life in Genesis 2 was there to keep Adam from dying (assuming he ate from it). Did Adam and Eve need to eat from the tree of life in order to avoid death? This would imply that there was something in the nature of the fruit to keep them alive. The consequence of this reasoning, however, if followed through is that there was something in the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This would raise a significant problem. If it was not Adam's act of disobedience that brought evil into the world but Adam's act of eating the fruit that brought about good and evil then God must have created the evil. This goes against the character of God.

Others believe that the Creation account is ambiguous concerning death as Genesis 2:17 suggests its absence whereas the need to eat from the tree of life (Genesis 3:22) implies immortality. The latter view is preferred because the death sentence of Genesis 2:17 is evidently not carried out immediately (Johnston 2000, p. 443). Some see immortality as the trait of deity alone, as 1 Timothy 6:16 teaches (Mathews 1996, p. 212). Obviously, if it was never intended for Adam to live forever, then he would have died, meaning that death could have occurred before the Fall.

Unfortunately these arguments fail because of

[4] Isaiah 65:25–26 (which surely will apply to the new heavens and earth), Acts 3:21; Romans 8:19–23 and Revelation 22:3 rule out there being any animal death before the Fall.

the assumptions they make based on the texts used to support them. Genesis 2:17 does not necessitate immediate action but allows for a time lapse. Genesis 3:22 is in the context of Adam's judgment for his disobedience and is talking about Adam living forever in his sinful condition and not about the need to take from the tree to become immortal before his act of disobedience.

1 Timothy 6:16 states that God alone possesses (Greek ἔχω, *echō*) everlasting undyingness (Greek ἀθανασία, *athanasia*). So in God's case, immortality is part of His essence, while creaturely immortality is based on God's moment-by-moment sustaining power (Colossians 1:16–17). This passage has nothing to do with teaching that Adam would have died, even if he had not sinned (Sarfati 2004, pp. 202–203).

Furthermore, if men were mortal from the beginning and would have died whether they had sinned or not, then this removes the biblical teaching of God placing the Curse on a disobedient humanity. If unfallen man had died without sinning, then the threat of God for disobedience is nonsense. Paul in Romans 5:12 states:

> Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—…

Christ died a physical death (as Paul makes clear in Romans 5:8–11) because it was physical death that was part of the Curse. According to the Bible, death is not a biological necessity but a wage for sin (Romans 6:23). The principle throughout Scripture is that if you sin, you will die (Ezekiel 18:4). Another crucial point that is often overlooked in the Adam–Christ parallel is that Jesus' death was voluntary (John 10:18). He did not die because of His sin, as the Scripture teaches He was without sin (1 Peter 1:19). This indicates that if you do not sin, you will not die. Thus it can be argued that if Adam had not sinned, then he would not have died.

Sarna raises a further argument for animal death. He believes it must have existed or the threat of Genesis 2:17 would have been unintelligible to Adam, who would not have been able to understand what death was, if he had not seen it (Sarna 1989, p. 21). However, the medieval Jewish scholar Ibn Ezra notes that "…Adam was an intelligent being, for God would not direct commands to one who was unintelligent" (Ezra 1988, p. 59). He reasons that Adam's naming of the animals (Genesis 2:19–20) reveals his intelligence or God would not have brought the animals to him to name them. By this same reasoning we can conclude that Adam, as an intelligent being, would have understood what death was without seeing it (Ezra 1988, p. 59).

When God created Adam with the ability to speak, He also obviously built into his mind an understanding of the meaning of the words in his vocabulary. After all, God commanded him to cultivate the Garden and name the animals and he had never seen either action before. Additionally, if a father says to his young child, "Hold daddy's hand as we cross the street otherwise you might get hit by a car and die," the child can understand that death is not a desirable experience, even though he has never seen someone (or perhaps even an animal) get hit by a moving car and die. Furthermore, as an intelligent being, when God explained to Adam that if he disobeys the commandment he will die, Adam didn't respond by saying "What do you mean God, what's death?" Nothing in the text is recorded about an objection or a question on Adam's part. It seems reasonable therefore to say that Adam sufficiently understood the penalty for breaking this commandment expressed to him by God directly.

Finally, some try to argue that because there is no mention of the word "sin" in Genesis 2–3 it is not a passage that deals with disobedience (Barr 1992, p. 6). The implication here is that death is a natural part of our existence and not the result of sin. However, not only does this overlook the fact that a concept or idea can be conveyed without using certain vocabulary, this objection also fails to recognize that the authors of Hosea 6:7; Romans 5:12–19 and 1 Timothy 2:14 used words such as "sin," disobedience," and "transgression" when referring to Genesis 2–3 (Collins 2006, p. 155). Genesis 3:11, 17, however, is a good description of disobedience.

Genesis 3

The orthodox belief in church history is that the Fall brought about the death and suffering of both humans and animals. However, the post-enlightenment emphasis on rationalism, together with the rise of biblical criticism and evolutionary theory, has led to a complete rejection of the Genesis account of the Fall as an historical event. Today even many evangelicals question whether the Fall in Genesis 3 brought about physical death of humans and animals as well as natural disasters into creation.

What were the effects of the Fall and did it bring about death in nature? Chris Wright asks,

> whether God's curse on the earth is ontological (i.e. affecting the very nature of the planet as it is now in itself) or functional (i.e. affecting only the human relationship with the earth) (Wright 2004, p. 130).

One of the main reasons for rejecting the orthodox view is due to a particular understanding of earth history. Wright argues that natural phenomena such as earthquakes have "been part of 'the way things were' on the planet, long before humans existed, let alone sinned" on the basis of geological and palaeontological evidence (Wright 2004, p. 130).

Robert Culver also answers that "The existence

of fossils deep in the earth's crust, as many writers have noted, suggests a negative answer." He goes on to say:

> It is regretted that this has become a matter of severe difference among some evangelical writers. Over the past 100 years most learned evangelical authors who treat the subject accept as true the verdict of geology that the earth has been here for a very long time (Culver 2006, p. 324).

Culver goes on to say "It is by no means certain that the death of living forms in nature is evil in any pronounced sense" (Culver 2006, p. 324).

Prominent evangelical Old Testament scholar C. John Collins also challenges the assumption that Genesis 3:17–19 speaks of a change in the way the natural world works—that is, a fallen creation. He states that

> many have taken these verses as implying changes to the creation: the ground is cursed (v. 17) and will yield thorns and thistles (v. 18) which, it is assumed did not exist before (Collins 2006, pp. 163–164).

According to Collins, the text:

> …does not imply that the pain results from changes in the inner workings of the creation. To begin with,… cursed is the ground…only speaks of the ground, not the whole of creation; that makes sense, because the ground is what the man will work (Gen. 3:23) (Collins 2006, p. 164).

Collins understands Genesis 2:5–7 to speak of the conditions of the "land" when God formed the first man on the Day 6 of Genesis 1. So when the man sinned, God banished him from the garden:

> to work the ground from which he was taken—a place that naturally produces thorns and thistles. The account never implies that the ground did not produce thorns and thistles prior to this point… (Collins 2006, p. 164)

For Collins, this did not result in a

> …change in the properties of the ground but to the change in humanity and to God's providential purposes of chastisement (Collins 2006, p. 164).

Collins goes on to argue that nothing in Genesis 3:14–19 says that animals were never carnivorous until man fell. Collins believes that Genesis 1:29–30 says that man and animals were given plants to eat, but this does not mean that they ate nothing else. He reasons that even if we take it as prescribing a vegetarian diet for these animals, it only applies to creatures that live on the land. Collin's believes

> …it says nothing about anything that lives in the water, many of which are carnivorous (for example, jellyfish, starfish, crabs, trout, sea snakes, penguins, otters, seals, and orcas) (Collins 2006, p. 165).

Collins uses Psalm 104 to say that it celebrates the proper function of creation including (in verse 21) an appreciation for the large carnivores (Collins 2006, p. 165). Consequently, Collins concludes

> …Genesis does say that changes have come into human nature as a result of the fall—…but it does not follow that nonhuman nature is affected in the same way (Collins 2006, p. 166).

Collins recognizes that the most important text offered in reply to this position is Romans 8:18–25 (Collins 2006, p. 166) (See Romans 8 for a refutation of Collins's position).

In relation to Genesis 2:17 Collins comments on Genesis 3:19 writing that, "Most have taken this to imply that death is a new feature of Adam's existence, a punishment for his fall. Were they right in doing so" (Collins 2006, p. 161).

Collins says that we can only answer this if we first answer two other questions:

- What was the "death" threatened in Genesis 2:17;
- What was the nature of the test for Adam? (Collins 2006, p. 161)

He argues further that "…if we assume that Genesis 2:17 speaks simply of physical death—as so many have done—we are guilty of jumping to conclusions" (Collins 2006, p. 161). However, he acknowledges "It does seem that Genesis 3:19 portrays physical death as a consequence of this fall…" he goes on to say however "…although one might reply that its focus is on hard toil for the man until he dies, in place of pleasant labor in the garden until a good death" (Collins 2006, p. 161). He admits that if

> …the passage [Genesis 3:19] views physical death as following from the fall, then we may conclude that the first humans were not created mortal (Collins 2006, p. 161).

Furthermore, there has been an attempt by William Dembski to have millions of years of natural evil before Adam disobeyed God and yet still say that it is the result of Adam's sin. In his book *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* Dembski states:

> An omniscient and omnipotent God, by anticipating human actions, can respond in advance to humanity's Fall (Dembski 2009, p. 138).

Dembski goes on to say:

> In focusing on divine anticipation as God's way of controlling the Fall's damage, I have stressed the active role God played in bringing about natural evil prior to the Fall (Dembski 2009, p. 175).

Dembski's reasons, however, of "God's anticipating human actions" and the "creation of a fallen world" are not the same thing. One comes from biblical exegesis and the other has to be read into the text.[5]

Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether

[5] See Mortenson 2009.

these arguments are supported by the biblical text and whether they reflect the character of a good God? Does the Bible allow for earthquakes, natural disasters, and carnivorous activity before the Fall or are they a result of the Fall?

Wright and Culver, as well as many other Christians, have been influenced in their interpretation of Scripture by uniformitarian geology, which is why they must come to the conclusion that there was natural evil before the fall. For old earth creationists it seems that all that the Fall did was to make bad things worse. It is important to remember that the so called "geological and palaeontological evidence" is an interpretation of the evidence based upon anti-biblical philosophical presuppositions, such as the present is the key to the past.

Is the death of living forms in nature evil, contra Culver, suggestion that it is not? If the death of living forms in nature, such as animals, is not evil then why does God call us to show kindness to animals (Exodus 23:12; Proverbs 12:10; Jonah 4:11)? If animals were suffering and dying in God's "very good" world, then this would not reflect well on His character.

What is more, Culver commits the common fallacy of reification—attributing a concrete characteristic to something that is abstract, in his charge that "the verdict of geology that the earth has been here for a very long time." The verdict of geology says no such thing. It is the verdict of uniformitarian geologists that suggest the world is very old. Culver is also guilty of using biased language when he says that "most learned evangelical authors" accept the "evidence of geology" as to say that evangelicals who reject an old earth are not learned. It is an arbitrary claim which can easily be reversed to say that no learned evangelical scholar believes the Bible allows for an old earth.

C.J. Collins' arguments are more influenced by evolutionary thinking than from the biblical text itself.

Does Genesis 2:5–7 imply that the ground produced thorns before the Fall? Genesis 2:5–6 is best related to the judgment oracles of Genesis 3:8–24 indicating what the world was like before sin. The Hebrew word *erets* occurs twice in verse 5. *Erets* has more than one meaning and can refer to

(1), the whole earth (Genesis 1:1)
(2) land = country (Genesis 10:10)
(3) ground, surface of the ground (Genesis 1:26, 30), and
(4) people of the land (Genesis 23:7, 12, 13) (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 2006, pp. 75–76).

The context must determine the meaning on each occasion where *erets* is used. The context of Genesis 2 is man in the specific place of the Garden of Eden. Therefore it is best to understand *erets* as "land" since it is the habit of the first man that is in view. "Ground" (Genesis 2:5) often has to do with the soil, which is cultivated by human enterprise (Genesis 2:9; 3:17, 23; 4:2; 5:29; 8:21) and it is the same substance from which man is made (Genesis 2:7, 19). There is also a play on words in verse 5 "ground" and "man," indicating that the *adamah* (ground) needs *adam* (man) to produce a harvest from it.

When viewed this way, we find that the "shrub" and "plant" of Genesis 2:5 are not the same as the vegetation of Genesis 1:11–12. For example, "plants (*eseb*) of the field" describe the diet of man which he eats only after the sweat of his labor after sin (Genesis 3:18–19), whereas seed bearing plants found in the creation narrative were produced by God for human and animal consumption (Genesis 1:11–12, 29–30; 9:3). These plants produce themselves by seed alone, whereas "plant" in Genesis 2:5 requires human cultivation to produce the grain necessary for edible food. This cultivation is how fallen man will eat his food (Genesis 3:19). In Genesis 3:18–19, plants *eseb* and bread *le'chem* are the product of man's cultivating the ground. These did not exist before the Fall—weeds, thorns, and thistles came into existence after Adam sinned (Genesis 3:23). This means that man did not have to cultivate the ground before the Fall for food (Genesis 2:15—refers to Adam cultivating the Garden of Eden not the ground outside).

Therefore, it is best to view the punishment of Genesis 3:17–18 as revealing that man's sin is the cause for the Curse against the ground which results in the troublesome thorns and thistles and a change in the way in which the natural world works (Mathews 1996, pp. 193–194, 252–254). The ground that was cursed was not just the ground in the Garden of Eden but the whole earth outside of the Garden from which Adam was taken (before he was placed in the garden—Genesis 2:15; 3:23; 5:29). It is the same ground (*adamah*) that was destroyed in the days of Noah that God said He would not curse again (Genesis 8:21).

Collins's claim that "nothing in Genesis 3:14–19 says that animals were never carnivorous until man fell" is not a claim young earth creationist's would make. Genesis 3:14–19 is a curse against man and not animals. Land animals and birds were originally vegetarian, according to Genesis 1:29–30. Moreover,

> …Genesis tells us that man was not given permission to eat meat until after the Flood (Genesis 9:3). Given the connection between man and land creatures in 1:29–30, this would add further support to the idea that land creatures were vegetarian before the Fall (Mortenson 2012).

What about Collins's argument that Genesis 1: 29–30 does not explicitly mention sea creatures and therefore we cannot dogmatically say that no sea creatures were carnivores before the Fall. However,

we also cannot say with any confidence that this means that some sea creatures were carnivores. It is an argument from silence. What is more, the food sea creatures eat in today's world is not proof that they must have eaten it in a pre-Fallen world. It would seem a safe conclusion to draw from Genesis 1:29–30 that since man and land animals were not carnivorous then sea creatures also were not carnivorous. Mortenson also points out that:

> There seems to have been plenty of plant life in the oceans before the Flood, as evidenced by the fact that most oil apparently comes from marine algae, zooplankton and phytoplankton. Seaweed would also be plenteous…Based on how the Bible defines "living creatures" (Hebrew: *nephesh chayyah*), we would conclude that neither algae nor phytoplankton nor zooplankton are living creatures and therefore eating them would not constitute carnivorous behavior or death (Mortenson 2012).

Alongside many others who hold to an old earth, Collins uses Psalm 104 to say that it celebrates the proper function of creation including (in verse 21) an appreciation for the large carnivores. However, Psalm 104:21 is the psalmist's reflection on the world in which he lived and not the original creation.

Collins is right to admit that "it does seem that Genesis 3:19 portrays physical death as a consequence of this fall…" but his belief that its focus could just be on the hard toil for the man until he dies rather than physical death is unwarranted. While it does refer to man having to work the ground, we have already seen that the death threatened in Genesis 2:17 was both physical and spiritual and this is not a matter of jumping to conclusion but examining what Scripture says. Adam and Eve died spiritually (Genesis 3: 7–8) before God pronounced any judgment. The fact that Genesis 3:14–17 speaks of physical judgments against the serpent, animals, the woman, and the ground speaks against the idea that the text here is speaking of spiritual death. God's judgment here was not spiritual but physical. The ground is not just the arena where the Curse is lived out the physical ground is cursed.

The Hebrew words *adam* (man) and *adamah* (ground) are closely related and show the related consequences of Adam's disobedience on the ground from which he was taken (Genesis 2:7; 3:17).

The first death mentioned in the Bible comes in Genesis 3:21 after Adam and Eve had disobeyed God where God makes garments of skin. God Himself clothed Adam and Eve because they could now no longer walk before God in innocence (Genesis 3:8). Manmade coverings (Genesis 3:7) were by implication pronounced ineffective in dealing with sin.

The Hebrew words for "garments" *kĕthoneth* and "clothed" *labash* are used in the Torah's description of priestly garments (Exodus 28:4, 39–40; 28:41; 29:8). The priest had to be properly clothed before God in his service (Exodus 20:26; 28:42). God makes Adam and Eve's garment out of skin—*owr*—which is only ever used of human or animal skin (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 2006, p. 736).

Since Adam and Eve were the only humans at that point (Genesis 3:20; 1 Corinthians 15:45), the skin must be that of an animal. Although Genesis 3:21 does not explicitly say that the skins were animal, it is a fair implication, however, and one that would make sense to the original audience (Mosaic Community) where the skin of an animal was offered to make atonement for sin (Leviticus 7:8). Furthermore, in chapter four Abel now knows to bring an animal sacrifice before the LORD.

The biblical testimony is that death of any kind is not a biological necessity as in evolutionary thought and that it was not part of the completed creation in Genesis 1. It came about through the disobedience of Adam and affected the entire planet. God declared His creation to be "very good" and the biblical testimony screams that death, of any kind, is not good.

Acts 3:21

> whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

In Acts 3:21 Peter's sermon to the Jewish people comes after the healing of the blind beggar. Here the apostle Peter spoke of a future "restoration of all things," the genitive neuter construction panton ("of all things") indicates that Peter is referring to all of creation, not just people (Minton 2009, p. 349). Peter refers to the holy prophets who spoke about this restoration of "all things" (Isaiah 11:6–10; 35:1–10; 65:24–25; Ezekiel 34:23–31). Several passages indicate that the restoration will affect the animals, causing them to be no longer carnivorous and dangerous to man.

In the context of his second sermon, in Acts 3:11–26, Peter talks about the redemptive work of Christ. Peter is demonstrating that the Fall had a negative effect on all creation (man and animals) and is waiting to be restored when Jesus returns. Restoration—ἀποκατάστασις, from the same root as the verb "restore—*apo*" in Acts 1:6, speaks of "the restoration…of that more perfect state of (even physical) things which existed before the Fall" (Thayer 2007, p. 63). It implies that the future creation will resemble the pre-Fall creation, when man and animals were herbivores (Genesis 1:29–30). Bock comments on verse 21: "The anticipated end was seen as establishing again the original creation's pristine character" (Bock 2007, p. 117).

The plan of God in Scripture speaks about a

restoration of creation in the future because of the Curse brought on it through Adam's rebellion (Acts 3:21; Romans 8:19–25). This restoration and reconciliation of all things comes about because of Christ's work on the Cross (Colossians 1:15–20). Old earth creationists must be able to explain what creation will be restored to. Will it be restored to a state of death and suffering?

Colossians 1:15–20

In Colossians 1:15–20 Jesus is presented as the Creator of the entire universe which came into existence by His creative power. The phrase "all things" occurs four times (v. 16 twice, vv. 17, 20), and in v. 18, "in all things" is also found. "All things" lets us know that Paul sees redemption as being cosmic in scope. In the sentences before this statement (v. 20), Paul is specifically referring to the entire created order (vv. 15–16) and in v. 20 Paul refers to "things on earth or things in heaven." Christ's atoning work is as wide as creation itself and, therefore, he is restoring and reconciling all creation through the Cross.

Paul, in Romans 8, also talks about a time when God's very good creation will be restored (Romans 8:21) because the whole of creation "was subjected to futility" (Romans 8:20–22).

Redemption and reconciliation are linked by the atoning blood of Christ and it was necessary to atone with blood because reconciliation is achieved by an atoning sacrifice (Exodus 12:13). Reconciliation here is juxtaposed with blood, which connotes violence and death. However, this surely makes no sense in an evolutionary worldview where violence and death have been around from the beginning? To accept millions of years of human and animal death before the Creation and Fall of man undermines the teaching on the full redemptive work of Christ.

Romans 5:12–21

Much of the attention concerning the view that Adam brought death into the world is in relation to the traditional interpretation of Paul in Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–57.

> The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:12
>
> Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—

There are many interpretations of Paul's understanding of death and its relationship to Adam. For example, an article on BioLogos's website states that the death Paul is talking about in Romans 5 is not physical but spiritual death (BioLogos 2012); Hugh Ross does the same, citing Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21 as proof texts (Ross 1994, pp. 60–61). Walter Brueggemann believes that Paul is not concerned with the origin of death and a reasoned description of how the world is but with the proclamation of the good news. He writes "In Paul's work, Gen. 2–3 is not used for the presentation of a problem, but for the proclamation of the gospel" (Brueggemann 1982, p. 43). The influential neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth believed that Adam is not an historical figure who at the beginning of human history committed a particular sin which resulted in death affecting all members of the human race and in which they are all involved (Barth 1933, pp. 169–172).

Barth in his book *Christ and Adam* provides a challenging study of Romans 5 where he takes a Christological approach in his understanding of man's relationship to Adam. He writes:

> Man's essential and original nature is to be found . . . not in Adam but in Christ. In Adam we can only find it prefigured. Adam can therefore be interpreted only in the light of Christ and not the other way around (Barth 1956, p. 17).

Death for Barth "is not so much God's direct reaction against man's sin; it is rather God's abandoning of the men who have abandoned him" (Barth 1956, p. 29). Barth's approach to the biblical text led him to believe that Adam even before his disobedience ". . . was immediately the first sinner" (Barth 1956, p. 508).

While it is right to point out that Adam's transgression brought about spiritual death, it seems an unnecessary task to separate physical and spiritual death into an either/or category here. Moo rightly affirms that the text refers to both physical (v. 14) and spiritual (vv. 16, 18, 21) death as

> Paul frequently uses "death" and related words to designate a "physical-spiritual entity"—"total death," the penalty incurred for sin (Moo 1996, p. 320).

The point of Romans 5:12–21 is that because the actions of one man's sinful disobedience brought death so one sinless man's death brings life. Nevertheless, if God used the process of evolution then we have to ask, when was there ever one man? And when did physical death commence as a moral penalty? If death was already present in an already evolving universe then what did one more physical death (Jesus) achieve?

Brueggemann's objection is in line with his "postliberal, nonfoundational" approach to biblical texts which has it foundations in post-modernism (Brueggemann 1997, p. 86). Regarding Brueggemann's understanding of Paul, James Dunn shows that Paul in Romans 5 clearly has Genesis 2–3 in mind (Dunn 1988, p. 82) and that Paul

> . . . makes it clear that so far as he was concerned, death is not simply the natural consequence of the created state. It is the consequence of sin (Dunn 1988, p. 95).

Brueggemann is right to say that Paul is making a presentation of the gospel, but he is making it in

light of the fact that there is a problem, which Paul identifies as Adam's sin resulting in death, opening the way for the gospel presentation.

Barth's understanding of the relationship between Adam and Christ is slightly more complex. His approach is seeing man's original nature in Christ and not in Adam. However, it is hard to draw this conclusion from the biblical text as Scripture sees Christ as the last Adam. Even Barth's own understanding of 1 Corinthians 15:45–49 (Barth 1956, pp. 20–23) does not resolve the disagreement between himself and Paul.

Ultimately, Barth's approach fails in its lack of being grounded in the redemptive historical context set out for us in Scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul clearly establishes Adam as the first man in relationship of order to humanity. Other Pauline texts describe Christ in His incarnation as becoming like us and taking our humanity upon Himself (Philippians 2:7b; Romans 8:3) which seem to go against Barth's argument of man having Christ's original nature. It seems clear that the teaching of Paul in Romans 5:12–21 describes that by the action of one man we all became sinners, that death came through sin and that through the actions of the one man, Christ, we can become righteous.

Romans 8:19–22

A text that is very relevant to our understanding of Genesis 3 is Romans 8:19–23. C.J. Collins believes that it is often seen as Paul's version of the Curses of Genesis 3, describing a world fallen from its innocence. However, he sees a number of problems that should keep us from reading Paul this way:

- It may be that Paul had Genesis 3 in mind, though he is not explicitly alluding to it.
- The words of the passage here do not use the terms of Genesis 3:16–19 (Septuagint).
- Nor is there any mention of the Curse.
- The Creation is "subjected to futility" because it has sinful mankind in it, and thus it is the arena in which mankind expresses its sin and experiences God's judgments.
- The position I have argued, however, is more consistent with Paul's focus on human glorification and with the picture of Genesis, which does not view the created world as changed in its workings but as the arena in which God works out his purposes for mankind (Collins 2006, pp. 183–184).

Romans 8:18 sets up the context for verses 19–25 where Paul writes that the Christian's suffering of this present age is not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to come. The word κτίσις in verse 19 has been the subject of some debate but, as Dunn and Moo both argue, clearly refers to the non-human creation (Dunn 1988, p. 469; Moo 1996, p. 514). In verse 20 Paul explains why creation is anticipating the revealing of the sons of God. "The reason, Paul says, is that the subhuman creation itself is not what it should be, or what God intended it to be" (Moo 1996, p. 515). It is this way because God subjected it to frustration, He "…alone has the right and power to condemn all of creation to frustration because of human sin" (Moo 1996, p. 516). Schreiner believes Paul is probably drawing on the tradition found in Genesis 3:17–19, where creation is cursed due to Adam's sin. He points out that "futility" means that creation has not filled the purpose for which it was made (Schreiner 1998, p. 436). Dunn writes "…that ὑπετάγη is a divine passive (subjected by God) with reference particularly to Gen. 3:17–18" (Dunn 1988, p. 470).

Paul has already addressed the entrance of sin and death into the world through Adam's disobedience (Romans 5:12–21), a clear reference to Genesis 3. In Romans 8:19–22 Paul traces the consequences of Adam's disobedience in the futility to which the Creation has been unwillingly subjected which is now corrupted because of his disobedience. If Paul did not have Genesis 3 in mind then when did God subject the creation to futility? There is nothing in Genesis 1 that indicates that there was any kind of corruption in the original Creation (Genesis 1:29–31). Moreover, if the Creation was already in a state of futility, at its creation, then how could it be subjected to corruption, as it would already be in that state? God's subjecting the Creation is surely a reference to the Curse in Genesis 3:17. The words of Romans 8 may not match Genesis 3:16–19 in the Septuagint, however, the language of the passages clearly refers to the Creation account. Paul has already mentioned the Creation in Romans 1:20 and there Paul is clearly referring to Genesis 1 (compare Genesis 1:26 with Romans 1:23). Furthermore, Collins's objection that Romans 8 does not use the words of Genesis 3:16–19 or "curse" overlooks the fact that a concept or idea can be conveyed without using certain vocabulary.

Nevertheless, Collins believes the key term in verse 21 is "decay." He states that the

> …creation is "in the bondage to decay," not because of changes in the way it works but because of the "decay" of mankind, and in response to man's "decay" God brings decay to the earth to chastise man (Collins 2006, p. 184).

However, this overlooks the fact that:

> Paul makes a direct connection between man's need for liberation and creation's need for liberation. This entire connection between the glorification of believers and the liberation of the creation is lost if the creation has always been in a futile and corrupted state, completely unrelated to man's fallen condition

(Smith 2007, p. 79).

Paul describes the glory that awaits God's children, in terms of freedom and this freedom is associated with the state of glory to which God's children are destined. The creation itself will be set free from the bondage to decay and into the glory of the children of God.

It therefore makes more sense to view verse 21 as referring to the decay of non-human creation that has come about after the fall. It is interesting that Collins does not discuss the meaning of Romans 8:22. Moo points out that in verse 22 the:

> "with" idea in both verbs means not that creation is groaning and in birth pangs with believers, but that the various parts of the creation are groaning together, are in birth pangs together, uttering a "symphony of sighs" (Moo 1996, p. 518).

Paul's point in verse 22 is that the Creation, which again is non-human (Dunn 1988, p. 472), is groaning and suffering, not from natural disasters and suffering before the Fall, and not because it has sinful mankind in it—contra Collins, but from the Fall of Adam in Genesis 3 as the context in Romans 8:19–25 makes clear.

1 Corinthians 15

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is dealing with resurrection from the dead as some within the Corinthian congregation were questioning or doubting the future resurrection of believers (1 Corinthians 15:12). Paul begins the chapter by stating that the death and resurrection of Christ are the central events of the gospel (vv. 3–4), going on say that if Christ was not raised from the dead, our faith is in vain (vv. 13–14). In verse 21 He tells the Corinthians that death came through a man, namely Adam. He then uses the Adam–Christ typology to explain the reason for the resurrection. In verse 22 Paul points us to the mortality of the human race because of our relation to Adam. However, for those that are in Christ, they will be made alive.

Yet some believe that this is not a claim that "…requires a historical Adam as depicted in Genesis 1–3…" (Kirk 2010). However, how can a mythological figure affect the human race in such a negative way? Also, the claim that Adam was not historical also overlooks the fact that the parallel between Adam and Christ is too close for one to be historical and the other not.

The fact that death is called an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26) implies that it is not natural and therefore cannot have been part of the original state of creation in which God created humanity. In Romans 5:14 Paul says "death reigned from the time of Adam," while Romans 5:21 suggests that the dominion of death is tied to that of sin since "sin reigned in death." It was Adam's disobedience (Genesis 2:17) that brought death into the world, which is why Paul believes death to be an enemy that needs to be destroyed.

Jesus' resurrection was ultimately a victory over death, which is why we even see our Lord outraged over the physical death of his friend Lazarus (John 11:35). John 11:33 tells us that Jesus was "deeply moved" and the verb in Greek *embrimaomai* "…always speaks of deep seated anger and does not connote mere emotional upheaval" (Osborne 2007, p. 171). Why was Jesus angry? Because of the power of sin and death that was over the world. Christ came to overcome death and we need to live in the light of that fact.

Nonetheless, some choose to see 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 as speaking about spiritual death (Ross 1994, pp. 60–61). The focus throughout 1 Corinthians 15, however, is on Christ's resurrection from the dead, a physical resurrection, of course with spiritual implications. If Adam's death was only spiritual then why did Christ have to die physically?

Revelation 21–22

The last three chapters of Revelation present us with an eschatological end to death and the setting up of the new heaven and earth. The world is headed towards eternal separation from God, a second death (Revelation 20:14).

The judgment in Revelation 20:14 marks the end of death when it is thrown into the lake of fire. The last enemy now meets his end (1 Corinthians 15:26, 54–55; Isaiah 25:8) and is no longer a threat to the human race. Interestingly, BioLogos states that:

> The Bible is clear that the culmination of God's plan in the new creation is a place without tears, pain, or death (Revelation 21:4), but is less clear whether the first creation shared these traits (BioLogos 2012).

However, in Revelation 21:4 we see a reversal of the Curse that accompanied sin in Genesis 3 as death, sorrow; crying and pain are no longer. The Curse itself is removed in Revelation 22:3 and this can only be defined by a literal reference to the Curse in Genesis 3.

In Genesis the Curse came about through Adam's disobedience, separating man from God (Genesis 3:8–9). In the new heavens and earth with the Curse removed, man will no longer be separated from God. The tree of life will now heal the nations and the people of God will no longer be separated from their God but will see His face (Revelation 22:4).

There will be no more death in the new heaven and earth because they come to replace the old.

The good news offered to us in the New Testament is that Christ who did not need to die, because he was sinless, entered into death for us (1 Corinthians 5:7; Philippians 2:7; 1 Peter 3:18), dying for us (Mark

10:45; Romans. 5:6; Hebrews. 2:9) and conquering death and the devil (Hebrews 2:14). Christ in his death took upon himself the Curse that is inseparably linked with death. However, for those who have trusted in Christ, the Curse and its sting is removed. The Christian passes through the experience of death in Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:10; 5:14–15; Colossians 3:3).

Missiological Implications

It is important to think about the missiological implications of rejecting the Fall of man as this affects our understanding of sharing the gospel. Christians need to consider what Jesus' death achieved if Darwinian evolution is true and physical death and suffering were already present in an evolving world.

The gospel according to those who believe that God created a world which had animals and humans dying, destruction, and catastrophe before Adam's disobedience is faith in the Creator, Christ, who "creates" by using evolutionary processes, which is faith in a "god" who said He created all things "very good" when he really used aeons of death and struggle. How then can He be trusted to make a new and good creation as His definition of "good" may well mean an eternity of death and struggle?[6]

The consequences of these ideas are apparent. Once we reject the biblical revelation that God created his world "very good" and that death of both animals and humans never came about because of Adam's disobedience then there really is no need for the Cross, atonement or a new heaven and earth. As, biblically, all of these are needed because death and suffering entered into the Creation through Adam's disobedience towards God in Genesis 3.

The result of Adam's disobedience not only brought physical human death into creation but it also separated us from God spiritually. Creation now groans because of the result of sin and not because it was created this way. The Christian message to our fallen world that is filled with death and suffering is one of redemption and reconciliation. The gospel message offers our justification before God through our faith in Christ. Christ came to redeem and reconcile not only a fallen humanity but a fallen creation which awaits its restoration (Romans 8:21; Colossians 1:20). John Feinberg answers why he appeals to the race's fall into sin:

> Because in a fallen world people die as God said they would…Had not sin entered the world, I take it that biblical teaching implies that natural processes wouldn't function in ways that contribute to and cause death. What this means is that the ultimate reason for these unattached natural evils is that we live in a fallen world (Feinberg 2004, p. 195).

The Fall and its consequences and the redemption and reconciliation of all things lie at the heart of the gospel message. Because of man's disobedience towards his Creator, God brought death and suffering into the world. But it was by the suffering and death of His Son that we can gain our salvation so that we are not condemned to live forever in a fallen world.

Conclusion

Having considered the orthodox view of the significance of death in Genesis 1–3 and the criticisms of this view that have arisen over the past few centuries, it is apparent that the orthodox view still remains the strongest interpretation. Arguments against the orthodox interpretation contend that there was suffering and death in the world before the Fall. However, these interpretations have been demonstrated to be due, at least in part, to a reading of Scripture that has been influenced more or less by the evolutionary or old earth view of history.

Some scholars find themselves having to redefine the human understanding of natural disasters as bad in order to still see God's work as very good. Scholars also have to redefine Paul's interpretation of Adam and death in Romans 5 which alters Paul's understanding of the sin of Adam and the work of Christ.

By contrast, the orthodox view seeks to understand the author's intent in writing Scripture and it does not have to wrestle with the contradiction of God's "very good" creation being filled with death and suffering. It is also consistent with the New Testament teaching that death and suffering are the consequence of the Fall.

The issue of the origin of death whilst perhaps at first appearing to be an obscure and relatively unimportant issue is actually crucial in, first of all, understanding the character of God, and secondly understanding the full gospel message of redemption and reconciliation through Christ. More importantly, the view that death, of any kind, came as a result of sin is the only approach to Scripture that gives the gospel a coherent, logical and internally consistent theological foundation, and the only view that does justice to all the relevant biblical texts.

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[6] John Mackay pointed this out to one of the leading proponents of theistic evolution, Dr. John Polkinghorne, in their debate in 2005 at Liverpool Cathedral in England. Mackay makes this point in the twenty-ninth minute of the debate (Mackay 2005).

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