

Introduction

It is easy to see now that the views I had once held were contradictory, and that this contradiction is pervasive in our society. There is the Bible and there is science. The former quenches our spiritual hunger, the latter satisfies our curiosity about the universe around us. Though the two may sometimes intertwine, most of us have built a mental barrier between them.

That which is recorded in the Bible cannot be questioned, for they are the very words of God. Through its books we learn the lessons of life, and of the glory and judgment of God. Its messages and promises guide us through our most joyful moments and our greatest tribulations. It gives purpose to those who would otherwise stumble through a meaningless existence. And, like the proverbial distant beacon of light on a dark and stormy night, it is a treasure chest of hope and opportunity for all that reach out to embrace its sacred words.

Then there is science – our enduring quest to explain and control our world, and our remedy for the question whose answer remains an enigma. It charts the heavens, maps the ocean floor, improves agricultural production, mines the earth for wealth, heals the sick, improves the quality of life, and postulates solutions to the enduring mysteries of the ages. Yet, science embodies so much more.

We have arrived at a period in our culture where the advancements made in science are now far removed from the comprehension of the average man. We are capable of learning to use the personal computer, but few of us could actually build one from its individual components. We do not understand how computer circuitry achieves its tasks. Yet, we are confident in the results it produces.

Whether it is the cockpit of the Stealth fighter, immunology, monetary transactions with a credit card, hi-definition television, laser technology, cloning, or quantum physics, advancements in science have been increasingly accomplished by people of scientific specialization. Most of us no longer attempt to understand how these advancements were achieved. Instead, we have grown to accept them and to expect more of them in the future.

We have grown accustomed then to science. It has produced a wealth of knowledge that quenches our curiosity and satisfies our needs. Our growing approval and confidence in science has allowed us to become comfortable seeking its solutions for answers to our problems. We ask it to solve some of our most enduring social dilemmas (birth control, addictions, unacceptable behavior), and produce solutions for a future

that appears bleak (global warming, extinction of species, malnutrition, starvation, pestilence, and famine).

Since they were first written, the first eleven chapters of Genesis have stirred both the imagination and apprehension of civilizations. From the indomitable power that God manifests in the creation of the heavens and the Earth, Adam and Eve's fall from Paradise, the rebellion of man at Babel, through the iniquity of mankind that warranted the Great Flood, these chapters of the Bible are inundated with tales of morality, man's sinful nature, God's powers to create and destroy, and His patient love for all of humanity. It is in this beginning where poets, painters, writers, philosophers, Western culture, and the basis for our governments have their primary roots. But, while the stories of the first eleven chapters have had a demonstrable impact on our society, their validity has often come into question.

Science has "emancipated" mankind from such gods as the sun, the moon, the stars, and the forces of nature. It has explained away the mysteries of those false gods, whose apparent powers are now understood in natural terms rather than supernatural. With the advancement of science and technology, and man's increasing knowledge, it was inevitable that the Bible would come under closer scientific scrutiny.

Our modern, technical, science-dependent societies now turn to the Bible with skepticism. Are these truly the words of God? Or are they myths, passed down from cultures that are thousands of years old? Can the Holy Bible withstand the scrutiny of modern science? And if science finds the Bible in error, what place is left then for a collection of cherished books that scholars and readers have claimed for centuries to be the inerrant word of God?

This returns us to the contradiction that I had once held. When contemplating the Bible, I have always maintained a steadfast belief in its inerrancy. The Creation Story that is revealed to us in Genesis 1:1-2:4 tells of a creation event that occurred a meager few thousand years ago. Biblical scholars, whose opinions I have always respected, date God's creation of the heavens and the Earth from 6,000 years ago to no more than 50,000 years ago (the latter is an extreme scenario). Most are firmly committed to the younger age.

The Creation Story tells us that in six days God created the heavens and the Earth, made the Earth habitable, populated the world with countless species of animals, and finally created man. On the Seventh Day, God rested from His work. How long were the Creation Days? There is strong conviction in the Fundamentalist religious community that

they were the traditional twenty-four hours.

Science has revealed to us its own creation account. From the Big Bang (ten to twenty billion years ago), through the formation of our Earth (4.5 billion years ago), through the Cambrian Explosion of life (540 million years ago), through the extinction of the dinosaurs (65 million years ago), science has uncovered a creation story that appears to contradict the Bible. Using the scientific method, we have learned that the universe is much older than 6,000 years, and that the vast majority of plant and animal species flourished and went extinct long before 6,000 years ago. Some species survived millions of years before extinction – the dinosaurs, for example, ruled our planet for about 150 million years. By contrast, man appeared very late on the time-clock of planet Earth. Science has dated our oldest known distinctive ancestor to only four million years ago.

Man – the pinnacle of the Biblical Creation Story – has been relegated to a status only marginally above the animals. Science claims that we owe our very existence to natural processes that did not require a Creator. In contrast, the Bible claims that we hold a special place in God's plans, and that the entire Earth has been created for us.

We are thus left in a curious and contradictory position – a different type of "science-versus-religion" conflict. When many of us are discussing science, we accept the age of the Earth to be 4.5 billion years old. We acknowledge that at the end of the Mesozoic Era, some sixty-five million years ago, the dinosaurs and most species of life on Earth went extinct. When we are discussing religion, we then speak of a creation event of a few thousand years ago, and we are comfortable in our declaration that man appeared on Earth just five days after that creation event. The contradiction then is cemented in our minds and in our culture. Many people seem to accept both the scientific and the Biblical accounts of creation, despite the fact that they are hopelessly in disagreement.

Or are they?

When I first began to study the Biblical Creation Story, I searched for related materials that exhibited the following properties:

1. A sound translation of the ancient Hebrew texts.
2. Consistency in reasoning and logic, and fair and honest deductions.
3. An explanation of the creation events without bias – more specifically, a telling of the story without attempting to prove or disprove other related or unrelated theories.

Most attempts at explaining the Biblical Creation event failed to embrace all three of these basic principals. It appeared that many

authors were decidedly using the story to disprove some current scientific belief. Others would “retranslate” parts of the story while ignoring the most common and obvious mistranslations – primarily, to advance some bold new theory of their own. Then there were those whose theories and explanations should best be relegated to collect dust in some forgotten section of a public library.

Frustrated by these misguided attempts, I decided to seek the truth of the Creation Story, using the three rules I set above as my guide. With no ax to grind and no bold new theory to offer, I began my research, uncertain whether the Bible could survive the scrutiny of science. If it could not survive such a careful analysis, then I had a moral obligation to concede defeat.

As I perused Genesis 1, I realized that what was written was a simple chronology. A point that no Biblical scholar could deny was that the events of the First Day preceded that of the Second Day, and that the events of the Second Day preceded that of the Third Day – a pattern that continued through the Seventh Day. Using this as my guide, the most important test would be to determine whether the events listed in the Bible were authenticated by science, and in the same order that is recognized by science. Only such an agreement could demonstrate the scientific validity of the Bible.

I suppose that a harmonious agreement between the Bible and science is important for the faith of many believers. In this modern, technical culture, where we often turn first to science rather than God to solve so many of our problems, such an agreement is reassuring. Others require no such evidence to sustain their unwavering faith. The Bible has, and will always be, their source of strength and their guide to salvation. Science may make its claims, but to these people, it is the Bible that possesses the ultimate truth on any given topic. Then there are those who simply desire to satisfy their curiosity. Can the Biblical account of creation be reconciled with current scientific beliefs? It is an interesting question that many feel needs to be answered.

Whatever guides your thoughts as you read these forthcoming chapters, always remember that divergent beliefs among God’s people are to be expected. For all those whose journey leads to salvation, no two paths that guide them there are ever alike.