

The John Ankerberg Show

A ministry of

The Ankerberg Theological Research Institute

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Mr. Dave Hunt
The Berean Call
PO Box 7019
Bend, OR 97708

Dear Dave:

Thank you for your kind letter and sincere apology. You know that I love you and your ministry. That will never change.

Five weeks ago I had open-heart surgery in which they did a surprising number of bypasses (five major arteries and five smaller arteries). So, while I would love to give you a more complete response, I will just respond to a few of the comments you made concerning Psalm 90 and Romans 5:12.

Psalm 90:4 in *Biblia Hebraica*, shows us that Moses used the same Hebrew word “YOM” day, as he does in the fifteen occurrences in Genesis 1 and 2. The NIV translates this verse, “For a **thousand years** in your sight are like **a day** that has just gone by,...like a watch in the night.” In the new American Standard you will see they reference verse 4 with 2 Peter 3:8. It seems that Peter based his words, “With the Lord **a day** is **like a thousand** years, and **a thousand years are like a day**,” on Psalm 90, the only psalm that Moses wrote. The Hebrew word “like” can also be translated “as.” In other words, “A day with the Lord is ‘as’ or ‘like’ a thousand years.” That’s why Kaiser said it could be a millennium; it could be more. Therefore, a literal translation of the word “YOM” in Psalm 90:4 is “an indefinite period of time.”

Kaiser’s point was that if Moses uses the word “YOM” three different ways in Genesis 1 and 2 (including Genesis 2:4 which must be an indefinite period of time), and again uses “YOM” in Psalm 90:4 to indicate an indefinite period of time, then we must be open to the possibility that other occurrences of “YOM” in chapter one have this same meaning.

Second, technically, the text of Genesis 1 does not say that a “day” was composed of “evening and morning” (thus allegedly making a 24-hour Jewish day); rather, it simply says, “And there was evening, and there was morning -- the first day (Gen. 1:5).” The words “morning” and “evening” may be figures of speech indicating a beginning and end to a definite period of time, just as we see in phrases like “the dawn of world history” or “the sunset years of one's life.”

Third, regarding God's original creation, He did pronounce that it was very good. But in that original "good" creation, and **before** Adam sinned, the Bible tells us that "Satan," as well as "the tree of good and evil" were present. So, "good" doesn't necessarily mean "perfect."

Concerning Romans 5:12, it does not say all animals died because of Adam's sin, but only that "**all men**" died as a consequence. Romans 8 does not say that animal death results from Adam's sin, but only that the "creation was subjected to frustration" as a result of it (verse 40). Scripture gives no reason why animals couldn't have died before Adam's sin. And nowhere does the Bible say that animals die as a consequence of human sin. The Bible does tell us that **human death** entered through **Adam's sin**, but says nothing specifically about animal or plant death.

Further, the context of Romans 5:12 is about **human sin** and Christ's death on the cross to provide the gift of eternal life **to men who have sinned, not for animals who have sinned**. The net Bible with 57,875 translator's notes translates this passage, "So then, just as sin entered the world through **one man** and death through sin, and **so death spread to all people** because all sin. ...But the gracious gift is not like the transgression. For if the many died through the transgression of the one-man, **how much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one-man, Jesus Christ, multiply to the many!** ...For if, by the transgression of the one-man, death reigned through the one, how much more will **those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness rein in life through the one, Jesus Christ!** Consequently, **just as condemnation for all people came through one transgression, so too through the one righteous act came righteousness leading to life for all people.** For just as through **the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one man many will be made righteous.** ...So that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

To interpret Romans 5:12 to mean that no death came to any creature before Adam's disobedience, and all death to plants and animals came as a result of Adam's sin, logically implies that the time between the creation of the first life forms and Adam's rebellion must have been brief enough to avoid any other cause of death among plants and animals. But as Ross has said, "Many species of life can't survive even three hours without food, and the mere ingestion of food by animals requires the death of at least plants or plant parts. Genesis 2 implies that before Adam and Eve sinned, animals moved about, and Adam and Eve also walked about and ate. Movement translates to metabolism, and metabolic processes require eating. Thus, the death of at least plants or plant parts must have occurred before Adam's sin. Insects also would have died. They would have been on leaves and fruit eaten by larger animals. Sea creatures would have consumed plankton. Elephants and other large animals lumbering about would likely have stepped on and crushed a few bugs, mites, and protozoa. Snow, hail, rain, heat, wind, and waves would likely have injured and killed at least a few of Earth's more fragile creatures."

The scriptural evidence that **plants** and **primitive animals** experience **death** can be found in Exodus 7:18, 21 where it says, "The fish in the Nile will **die**... the fish in the Nile **died**." Also Exodus 8:13, "The frogs **died** in the houses, in the courtyards, and in the fields." Exodus 10:17

records, "Pray to the Lord your God to take this deadly plague [literally, 'death,' in the Hebrew text, with reference to plant eating locusts] away from me." In Psalm 105:29 we read, "He turned their waters into blood, causing their fish to **die**." Ecclesiastes 10:1 says, "**Dead** flies give perfume a bad smell." And Isaiah 50:2 says, "Their fish **die** of thirst." The Hebrew words translated as "die," "died," and "death," in the following NIV passages are "mut" and "mawet." These are the same words that the Bible uses for **the death of humans**.

But this kind of thinking is not necessary as I Corinthians 15:21 teaches, when "death came through a man," it came to humans alone, not to humans *and* animals. 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 states, "As in Adam all died, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him." Since only humans possess spirits, only humans can be "made alive in Christ." Neither Romans 5 nor 1 Corinthians 15 (the only Bible passages that explicitly address the death brought by Adam's sin) gives any compelling reason to deny that physical death could have come to plants and animals prior to Adam's sin.

In addition, I do not believe there is any possible way that animals could have inherited Adam's sin nature. They are not connected to Adam's bloodline in any way whatsoever. Therefore, they cannot be included with us in our fallen state. This is probably why they could be used for the Old Testament sacrifices; they were innocent. The difference between Adam and the animals -- that he might not have died while they would have in any case -- was probably a result of Adam having been created in the image of God, while the animals were not.

Romans 5:12 does not say all death, including plants, animals, and men entered the world through sin, any more than Genesis teaches Eve gave birth to animals as well as to men since it states, "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother **of all the living**" (Genesis 3:20).

I believe the Gospel is simple enough to be understood by everyone across the centuries, in other words, God put the cookies on the bottom shelf. But, there are other things taught in Scripture that are not so easy to understand. Peter said of Paul's writings, "Some things in these letters are hard to understand." I think creation is another difficult topic where the cookies are not all on the bottom shelf.

Since God is the author of Scripture and the author of creation, then why should we not allow the evidence from creation to give input to our scriptural interpretation when the text is in doubt and has at least two literal ways it can be translated? I remember J.P. Moreland's answer to this question, "Should we allow science to influence our interpretation of Scripture?"

Now we know beyond reasonable doubt that the universe of space, time and matter had a beginning. It is now no longer reasonable to believe that the universe has always been here. That is now an irrational belief. Instead, we now know beyond reasonable doubt that the physical cosmos, of matter, and of space and of time, came into existence some time ago. At this point, it doesn't matter how long ago that was--some estimates are 15 to 20 billion years--that is not relevant to my concerns. What is relevant is that it is now beyond reasonable doubt that the universe came into existence a finite period of time ago.

To those who argue that if you take the days of Genesis as not being six days and take them as maybe longer periods of time, then isn't science influencing your interpretation of Scripture? Where do you draw the line? Why wouldn't that same kind of reasoning imply that we would eventually have to reinterpret the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus?

Let me give you a counter-example. I doubt, sir, that you or anybody else in the room takes the biblical passages that say that 'Jesus will call his angels from the four corners of the earth' to teach a flat Earth. I also doubt that anyone in here says that when the sun rises and sets it literally means an earth-centered universe.

But you must understand that...there were times when the church interpreted the text that taught that Christ will call his angels from the four corners of the world to teach very obviously that the world has four corners. The text says that. There is absolutely no evidence in that text that it means anything other than four corners. You can read it until you're blue in the face, and it says that the Earth has four corners.

Similarly, the Bible says the sun rises and sets. Now, that's what it says. You can dance around it all you want. That's what the text says. But there's nobody in here that believes that. No one in here believes the earth has four corners. And so, what we've done is taken that language and interpreted it metaphorically. Similarly, with the rising and the setting of the sun, we treat that...phenomenologically--we say that's the language of description; it is not meant to be taken literally.

So then, suppose that you believe that...those texts do not teach that there are four corners and that the sun rises and sets? Are you now going to deny the virgin birth? Are you going to give up the resurrection? No, of course not. So, the point is...that the general argument from adopting a certain view of one text, there's no way to block the slide to doing that to other texts, is an example in philosophy of what is called hasty generalization; it makes a generalization based upon a slim sampling of evidence.

The fact of the matter is that when you interpret biblical texts, you've got to take each one at its own merits and you've got to do the very best you can to handle that text by itself. And so from the fact that one particular text is handled in some way, it does not follow that other texts will need to be handled in any way whatsoever, unless you can show that there's a clear parallel in the way that the two texts are being handled.

Now, when it comes to the...flat earth and the rising and the setting of the sun: it was scientific evidence that caused people to say 'maybe we'd better re-look at those passages.' There was nothing exegetically or strictly in the Hebrew grammar and syntax. There was absolutely nothing about the literary genre of the passage or the historical-grammatical method of interpretation that could tell you anything at all about one way or the other--it was scientific evidence.

So now the question was raised by the church interpreters, 'Is there anything essential to this passage that's violated if we take the four corners of the earth to be metaphorical?' Now, their answer was, in that particular passage, 'no.' That text can allow for that without violating the teachings of the scriptures in that particular text. Now, is this procedure risky in other passages? You bet. But does it follow that it should never be applied? No, you've got to take texts--each text on its own. So, the devil is in the details, and you've got to be very, very careful.

Now, when it comes to the days of Genesis, I'm of the view on this that while we ought not allow science to dictate to us our exegesis of the Old Testament, nevertheless, if there is an

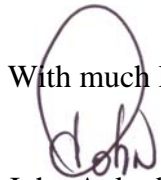
interpretation of the Old Testament that is exegetically permissible such as the old age interpretation; that is to say, if you can find conservative, inerrantist, evangelical Old Testament scholars that say that the interpretation of this text that treats the days of Genesis as unspecified periods of time, and that is a completely permissible thing to do on exegetical grounds alone, then my view is that that is a permissible option if it harmonizes the text with science because that option can be justified exegetically, independent of science.

Now, I'm not a Hebrew exegete. But I will tell you that two of the best-known exegetes of the Old Testament in the American evangelical community are Gleason Archer at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Walter Kaiser at Gordon Conwell. Walter Kaiser and Gleason Archer are respected in the entire United States as being faithful expositors of the Old Testament. Both of them know eight to ten Old Testament languages, and they both have spent their entire lives in Hebrew exegesis. Both of them believe the days of Genesis are vast, unspecified periods of time, and are in no way required to be literal twenty-four hour days.

Now...my view, then, is this: if all of the Old Testament scholars at our seminaries whom I trust, who love the Bible and whose credibility I respect were saying that it's required of us to believe these days are twenty-four hour days, I'd have a problem. But if there are enough of these men that I trust--I'm not talking about people who are trying to give up real estate here and are just belying up; I'm talking about men who the community recognizes to be trustworthy authorities of Hebrew exegesis -- are saying that this is an option, then I'm going to say in that case it's permissible. So this is my basic response.

Once again, Dave, thank you for your kind letter. You know that I love and respect you. Also, thank you for your willingness to let your readers know of the unintended error.

With much love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John". The signature is enclosed within a hand-drawn oval.

John Ankerberg