

Creation or Evolution: Yes, We Have to Choose. A review of *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* by Dr. Denis Alexander

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Dr. Denis Alexander's recently published new book, *Creation or evolution: Do we have to choose?* is likely to be an important benchmark of theistic evolutionary theology in evangelicalism. Dr. Alexander is a prominent member of one of England's largest evangelical churches, and the list of commendations for the book reads like a who's who of British evangelicalism, including complimentary comments from the Bishop of Oxford, a lecturer from the London School of Theology; Ernest Lucas from Bristol Baptist College; Julian Hardyman from Eden Baptist Church; Melvin Tinker, a prominent Anglican evangelical; John Risbridger from Above Bar Church, Southampton; and, probably the best known name, Professor J.I. Packer, author of such important tomes as *Knowing God*, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, and *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. With such distinguished company, who am I to pour cold waters on the efforts of a distinguished scientist and Christian like Dr Alexander?

Failure to Start from the Primacy of Scripture

The trouble is that this apologetic for evolutionism fails to start from the primacy of Scripture, even though the first two chapters ostensibly tackle scriptural issues. However, they do so by using the classic arguments to "explain away" problems of harmonising evolution with Scripture, rather than face up to the incompatibility of the two philosophies.

For example, in chapter two, Alexander repeats the tired old bromide that "the biblical understanding of creation is not primarily concerned with how things began, but why they exist." Yet, a plain reading of Genesis 1 gives no reason why God made the world. It simply tells us how He did it! The reasons why God made the world can indeed be reasoned from the rest of Scripture, but the thrust of Alexander's assertion is incorrect.

The reason for his assertion is so that he can place evolution on a higher plane than Scripture, while seeming to do the opposite. If this seems harsh, then we need to examine how Alexander uses issues out of context to suit this purpose. It is noteworthy that he starts the book with the comment "I . . . make no attempt in this book to defend the role of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God, but simply assume that this is the starting point for all Christians" (p. 11).

It should indeed be our starting point, but biblical truth should not be just a starting point—our whole philosophy and worldview should be submitted to the acid test of biblical authority. That includes our interpretation of scientific data. His inability to submit his ideas to Scripture have led to his adoption of non-biblical misunderstandings.

For example, he asserts that "Adam was brought by God in Genesis 2:19–20 to name all the animals" (p. 103). In fact, the verses do not say this. Adam was to name only a small number of *kinds* of animals brought to him by God. Alexander asserts that this must mean Adam needed to name about 20 million species; whereas, the Bible speaks of kinds not species. And he asserts that we have not yet fulfilled that command, whereas the Bible suggests that the activity in question was closed when God fashioned Eve from Adam's side.

Straw-Man Arguments

Many of Alexander's assertions are of a similar type. His opposition to biblical creationism, outlined in chapter six, "Objections to Evolution," employs many familiar straw-man arguments. In this chapter, he repeats his assertion that "virtually no biologist in the research community actually doubts evolution." He has made this assertion before in both TV and radio debates with both Professor Andy McIntosh¹ and me, and we have both corrected him on this point. Continuing to repeat this comment, he could be accused of disingenuousness.

He then goes on to repeat the claim that creationists ought to publish refutations of evolution in peer-reviewed

scientific journals, as if such journals were neutral. We have explained why this cannot happen many times, and recent news events have underlined this difficulty, such as the hounding from his Royal Society post of the evolutionist Michael Reiss, who merely suggested that maybe school children with creationist views should be treated with a little respect by their teachers.²

The “scientific” sections of Alexander’s book are problematic. They contain a strange juxtaposition of actual science that no one would disagree with (such as the development of species by natural selection) with a number of bald statements, which Alexander gives as “facts,” without any justification. Examples of the latter are numerous. On page 134, he suggests that “there are good reasons why the eye evolved not once but many times during the process of evolution,” but doesn’t give any of the reasons. On page 135, he says “the physical properties of the universe were defined in the very first few femtoseconds after the Big Bang,” even though he must know that there are significant numbers of non-Christian scientists who do not accept the big bang.

Cavalier Use of Scripture

Alexander’s use of Scripture is, to say the least, cavalier. For example, in chapter four, he offers a number of old bromides as supposed evidence for “evolution in action”—namely, peppered moths,³ sickle cell anaemia,⁴ and superbugs.⁵ All these supposed examples have been answered on this website. But what really “takes the biscuit” is that Alexander then claims scriptural evidence for this type of “evolution” by quoting Matthew 13, saying “Jesus himself used the same idea in his famous parable of the sower who needs to scatter far more seed than will ever germinate and lead to a good crop.” This is merely an artificial way of introducing Jesus into a godless argument.

Yet Alexander misses a more honest place to introduce Jesus. Later in the same chapter, he describes the well-known scale model of the supposed 4.6 billion year history of the earth crammed into 24 hours. When he states “Just two minutes before midnight hominids start to appear and a mere three seconds before midnight anatomically modern humans make their entry,” he fails to engage with how this fits with Jesus’ description of Adam being “at the beginning” (Matthew 19:4).

What about Genesis?

Alexander includes a chapter, entitled “What about Genesis?” The purpose of this chapter is to attempt to claim that conservative evangelicalism is in accord with a belief in evolution.

He claims that “Genesis is a book about families” (p.152). Perhaps so, but it is primarily a book about beginnings. He states that “The figurative use of the term ‘day’ in Genesis 1 is made clear ... from the original context” (p.155), when, in fact, the context suggests a 24-hour day.⁶ He also claims that when Jesus said “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working” (John 5:17) that this means “Jesus is interpreting the seventh day figuratively as referring to the whole extended work of God in creation.” This is completely out of context. Jesus was talking about the Sabbath, historically and today, not about the supposed continuance of the Creation Week.

In beginning a structural analysis of Genesis, Alexander rightly points to the possible division of Genesis by *toledoth*. This division represents the use of the Hebrew phrase *’elleh toledot*, often translated as “the generations of.” The late Henry Morris suggests the same divisions in his book *The Genesis Record*.⁷ However, Alexander suggests that all such *toledoths* are introductions to the following sections, whereas Morris suggests they are back announcements.

Alexander states: “The formula is clearly used as an introduction in the rest of Genesis, so it seems safest to take it that way in Genesis 2:4.” (p.152) Note Alexander’s use of the word *clearly*, analysed below. Genesis 5:1 refers to the *toledoth* of Adam. We then read about the dates of Adam’s death. It is unlikely, therefore, that Genesis 5 was contributed by Adam. It is more likely to be part of the *toledoth* of Noah, in which case, we can see Genesis 6:9 as the back announcement of the *toledoth* of Noah. It would appear that at least some of the *toledoth* announcements are back announcements rather than introductions—though some are introductions—notably the parenthetical genealogy of Ishmael in Genesis 25:12–18.

Alexander is rather loose with his use of the word *clearly* in making statements that are by no means clear—presumably this is in the hope that many readers will simply accept the authority of his statement. For example, he says of Genesis 1, “Since this chapter is clearly unique and distinctive from any other passage in the Bible, trying to force it into a generalised literary genre is perhaps not that helpful” (p.153).

Actually, comparison of Genesis 1 with the rest of Genesis and the rest of Scripture is very helpful. Genesis 1 is written in the same style as the rest of Genesis—as a statement of history. Moreover, the same literary structure used in Genesis 1 is observed in Numbers 7. In the latter passage, the leaders of the twelve tribes bring their gifts for the dedication of the tabernacle on successive days: Judah on the first day (Numbers 7:12),

Issachar on the second day (Numbers 7:18), etc. Presumably, if he were consistent, Alexander would suppose that these twelve tribes brought their gifts over twelve long, indeterminate periods of time because he insists that the word *day* is figurative in Genesis 1. Note, once again, the use of the word *clearly*, as quoted above.

Relationship of Genesis to Other Traditions

Some of Alexander's analysis of Genesis undermines the truthfulness of Genesis and, therefore, negates his claim to a belief in the inerrancy of Scripture. One would have thought that, even if he denies the literal interpretation of Genesis, a conservative evangelical view would have compelled him to acknowledge the originality of Genesis. However, Alexander maintains that material in Genesis is either borrowed from or responding to the traditions of ancient Babylon and Sumeria.

On page 160 he says, "Genesis 1:1–2:3 may be read as a polemical and sometimes satirical attack on the Babylonian and Sumerian creation stories that were widespread in the Near East during the period 500–2000 BC." Thus, Alexander is maintaining that the Babylonian and Sumerian traditions pre-date Genesis. Whatever Alexander thinks, this position immediately undermines the truthfulness of Scripture. Genesis 1 becomes an account, not of historical accuracy, but merely to oppose an alternative creation myth. The Bible, in contrast, claims that Babylon and Sumeria developed after the Flood, whereas the creation account pre-dates the Flood.

Unoriginal

There is little new in Alexander's book. It consists of the usual diatribes against those who hold to biblical truth, while he tries to maintain that his is the biblical position. That is why his attitude toward biblical creationists comes out as so judgmental, yet he has himself undermined the very Bible he claims to uphold. Indeed, he has little time for those who disagree with him. "One of the deep mysteries of life ... is why people spend their time going round churches telling people that they don't believe evolutionary theory." (p. 131). "Christians who make it their mission to attack evolution ... are embarrassing and bring the gospel into disrepute." (p. 352).

Since Alexander has made the accusation, perhaps I should point out that his treatment of the Fall (the reason we need the gospel!) is extraordinarily weak. He holds to the classic framework hypothesis, whereby the literature of Genesis is supposed to explain the theological fact of sin, while the science happened in a different way entirely. This is not good enough, nor is it a defensible position. His chapter on the Fall is needlessly convoluted and complex. The Bible is simple on the matter. Sin is disobedience of God's Law. The penalty for sin is death. If Adam's death was just figurative or "spiritual," then why did Jesus have to die a real death? Jesus died a real death because there was a real Adam in a real Garden who committed a real sin against a real God. This sin is now imputed to you and me (and we continue to sin on our own), so we need a real Saviour to die a real death on a real cross.

It is sad that this book has received so many endorsements from leading British evangelicals. Perhaps that is indicative of the current parlous state of U.K. evangelicalism. It also underlines the importance of the ministry of Answers in Genesis in the pagan culture of 21st century, particularly in Britain.

Footnotes

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