Life and Legacy

One of the central reasons that the Galápagos Islands are well known today is because of a visit in 1835 by Charles Darwin, the father of biological evolution. While his visit to the Galápagos played a role in his development of evolutionary ideas, many other factors also contributed to his ideas. Darwin was raised in a minimally religious home. Although he studied medicine and prepared for the priesthood, he eventually became a naturalist. Darwin's theological views were greatly impacted by mentors and others throughout his education. These individuals wanted to radically change society because of their belief that God did not exist.

In 1831, Darwin was asked to be a naturalist on the *Beagle,* a ship that would survey and chart coasts all over the world. By this time, Darwin was already convinced that the history presented in the Old Testament was false and thus, the 6,000-year age of the earth inferred from Scripture could not be correct. On the ship Darwin brought with him Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology.* Lyell popularized the idea of uniformitarianism, that present-day geological processes were the same processes that shaped the earth in the past. He dismissed the biblical history of Noah's catastrophic Flood and was convinced that millions of years of slow processes had formed the earth. Dismissal of the Bible's history and the endorsement of millions of years of time provided an important foundation for Darwin's development of evolutionary ideas.

Many people think Darwin developed the idea of molecules-to-man evolution as a direct result of visiting the Galápagos Islands and studying the finches that later bore his name. Although this is incorrect, his trip to the islands and study of the animals there were very influential to his thinking about evolution. Reflecting on his visit to the islands, Darwin wrote,

> When I recollect the fact that [from] the form of the body, shape of the scales and general size, the Spaniards can at once pronounce from which island any tortoise may have been brought; when I see these islands in sight of each other and possessed of but a scanty stock of animals, tenanted by these birds, but slightly differing in structures and filling the same place in nature; I must suspect they are only varieties. [1]

Darwin is referring to the observation that specific "varieties" or species of tortoises, mockingbirds, etc. are associated with specific islands. This is an example of good observational science. Darwin concluded that the tortoises on the different islands were all part of the tortoise family with variation in traits, like shell shape, among the different islands. At this point he was merely proposing variation within an animal kind, not one kind of animal evolving into a different kind of animal (or molecules-to-man evolution).

However, Darwin then ventured into the realm of historical science when he wrote,

> Let a pair be introduced [to an area] and increase slowly, from many enemies, so as often to intermarry; who will dare say what the result. According to this view, animals on separate islands, ought to become different if kept long enough apart, with slightly differ[ent] circumstances.[2]

And as his biographers note, "thirty pages later in the notebook, he drew his historic branching diagram showing how different species might be linked to each other by common descent."[3] Darwin had dismissed the biblical time frame of 6,000 years for the age of the earth and now had millions of years (provided through Lyell's ideas) over which changes in animals could occur. The evolutionary model that he developed (historical science) was based on the belief that man's ideas about the past are correct and not God's Word. He believed the small differences he observed that led to variation within a kind (observational science) could eventually lead to large changes that would allow one kind of animal to evolve into a completely different kind of animal over millions of years (historical science). To put it simply, Darwin started with a false authority for his beliefs about the past, and that false assumption led him to develop false ideas about how animals change over time.

Darwin's beliefs about the existence of God and the truth of His Word were also impacted by his observation that nature was cruel and destructive. Darwin wrote,

> I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae [wasp]

1 Charles Darwin, quoted in Nora Barlow, editor, "Darwin's Ornithological Notes," *Bulletin of the British Museum (Natural History), Historical Series 2,* no. 7: 262. Online at http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?viewtype=text&itemID=F1577&pageseq=1.

2 Charles Darwin, "Notebook B: [Transmutation of Species (1837–1838)]," transcribed by Kees Rookmaaker, Darwin Online, http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?itemID=CUL-DAR121.-&viewtype=text&pageseq=1.

3 Gordon Chancellor and Randal Keynes, "Darwin's Field Notes on the Galápagos: 'A Little World within Itself,'" Darwin Online, http://darwin-online.org.uk/EditorialIntroductions/Chancellor_Keynes_Galapagos.html.

with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice.[4]

Darwin could not understand how there could be a loving God and death and suffering in the world at the same time. By not starting with the foundation of God's Word, Darwin failed to understand that death and suffering in the world are man's fault, not God's. Adam and Eve chose to sin (disobey God) and as a result there is death and suffering in this world (Genesis 3). Although evolutionists may see death as a hero in the upward progress of living creatures, they know in their heart of hearts (Romans 1:18) that death is instead a destructive intruder (Romans 8:22).

But are Darwin's evolutionary ideas his real legacy? Sadly, no. Darwin's evolutionary ideas eliminated the need for a God who is intimately involved with His creation because he proposed that all living things came to exist in their present form by natural processes. If humans are nothing more than animals, then morality is irrelevant. Just as we don't charge a cat with first-degree murder for killing a mouse, why should we say killing human babies in the womb is wrong? The moral relativism that pervades our culture today is, in part, founded upon the lie that the creature is the creator (evolution over millions of years) and not the eternal God (Romans 1:23–25). If a law-giving God does not exist, then there is no basis for right and wrong and man can do what is "right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Darwin's real legacy also impacts the gospel. If evolution is true, then the gospel is robbed of its power. According to Scripture, only mankind was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27), and because of that, we can have a relationship with God. That relationship was broken in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3) and restoration was made possible by the death and Resurrection of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, who as both God and sinless man (Hebrews 4:15) perfectly bore the image of God (Hebrews 1:3). Because of Adam's sin, all mankind sins and dies (Romans 5:12), but because of God's grace through Jesus's death on the Cross, eternal life is promised to all who believe (Romans 5:21). If humans are not unique, special creations of God created to bear His image but are simply evolved animals, then Jesus's death on the Cross is meaningless. The history in Genesis is foundational knowledge to the true power of the gospel that Jesus Christ died for sinful man (Romans 5:8), not animals.

Charles Darwin left a legacy that was bigger than himself and that has impacted millions of people — for the worse. How have you been impacted by his legacy?

4 Francis Darwin, editor, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin,* Vol. II (New York: Appleton, 1987), p. 105.

"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

—Matthew 6:26

Blue-footed boobies dive-bombing for food

CHARLES DARWIN IS well known for his biological theory of evolution by natural selection but it is important to understand the theological and geological influences that provided the foundation for his ideas. Though Charles never knew his paternal grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, Erasmus' theologically liberal and evolutionary ideas expressed in his two-volume *Zoönomia* (1794–96) significantly influenced him, so much so that Charles used the same title for his notebook of ideas about evolution that he started writing in 1837.[5] Charles' father, Robert, was even more of an unbeliever, bordering on atheism,[6] and his mother was a Unitarian.[7]

Robert Edmond Grant mentored Darwin while he was a medical student at Edinburgh University (1825–27). Grant was a rabid atheistic evolutionist "committed to a radical overhaul of science and society."[8] He was also much influenced by similar evolutionist and social radicals, some of a Unitarian bent, in the Plinian Society founded by the old-earth Professor of Natural History, Robert Jameson.[9]

But in the end Darwin couldn't stomach medicine, so his father insisted that he attend Cambridge in 1828 to prepare for the Anglican priesthood, which would provide Darwin with a nice living. Darwin tells us,

> I liked the thought of being a country clergyman . . . and as I did not then in the least doubt the strict and literal truth of every

5 Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin* (London: Michael Joseph, 1991), p. 229.

6 Ian Taylor, *In the Minds of Men: Darwin and the New World Order* (Foley, MN: TFE Publishing, 2008), p. 113–114.

7 Desmond and Moore, *Darwin,* p. 12–13.

8 Ibid, p. 34. Desmond and Moore describe Grant's influence as Darwin "coming under the wing of an uncompromising evolutionist." In Darwin's autobiography, he says that he didn't embrace Grant's and his grandfather's evolutionary ideas at the time, but then added, "Nevertheless it is probable that the hearing rather early in life such views maintained and praised may have favoured my upholding them under a different form in my *Origin of Species.*" See Nora Barlow, editor, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin, 1809–1882* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1958), p. 49.

9 Desmond and Moore, *Darwin,* p. 31–32.

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

—Psalm 1:3

Black Turtle Cove is a mangrove estuary on the northern shores of Santa Cruz Island. Many rays, sea turtles, pelicans, and other wildlife live among the mangroves.

> word of the Bible, I soon persuaded myself that our Creed must be fully accepted. It never struck me how illogical it was to say that I believed in what I could not understand and what is in fact unintelligible.[10]

Despite his claim to believe the Bible, from his family background and upbringing it is safe to say that he was certainly no orthodox Christian. His remarks about his thinking just a few years later confirm this conclusion:

> Whilst on board the *Beagle* I was quite orthodox, and I remember being heartily laughed at by several of the officers (though themselves orthodox) for quoting the Bible as an unanswerable authority on some point of morality. I suppose it was the novelty of the argument that amused them. But I had gradually come, by this time, to see that the Old Testament from its manifestly false history of the world, with the Tower of Babel, the rainbow as a sign, etc., etc., and from its attributing to God the feelings of a revengeful tyrant, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindus, or the beliefs of the barbarian.[11]

Of course Darwin's theological views greatly affected his scientific views especially as it pertained to the past. Most important to Darwin's geological thinking was Charles Lyell, who as a deist (or Unitarian) [12] sought to "free the science of geology from Moses."[13] Darwin informs us that on the Beagle:

10 Barlow, *Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, p. 56–57.

11 Barlow, *Autobiography of Charles Darwin,* p. 85.

12 John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), p. 251.

13 Charles Lyell, quoted in Katherine Lyell, *Life, Letters and Journals of Sir Charles Lyell, Bart.,* Vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1881), p. 268.

I had brought with me the first volume of Lyell's *Principles of Geology,* which I studied attentively; and this book was of the highest service to me in many ways.[14]

Darwin later commented,

He who can read Sir Charles Lyell's grand work on the *Principles of Geology,* which the future historian will recognize as having produced a revolution in natural science, yet does not admit how incomprehensibly vast have been the past periods of time, may at once close this volume.[15]

We can also see this influence of Lyell in Darwin's famous journal entry during his study of the Santa Cruz river valley in Argentina, just a few stops before he reached the Galápagos Islands. He wrote:

The river, though it has so little power in transporting even inconsiderable fragments, yet in the lapse of ages might produce by its gradual erosion an effect of which it is difficult to judge the amount.[16]

Before Darwin ever landed on the Galápagos Islands he had already rejected the truth about origins revealed in the Word of God and as a disciple of Lyell was well prepared to apply the uniformitarian principles of slow, gradual geological change over millions of years to the question of biological origins. He was not an unbiased pursuer of truth. Rather, the assumptions based in his anti-biblical, naturalistic worldview controlled his interpretations of what he saw in the world.[17]

Terry Mortenson

14 Barlow, *Autobiography of Charles Darwin,* p. 77.

15 Ibid, p. 293.

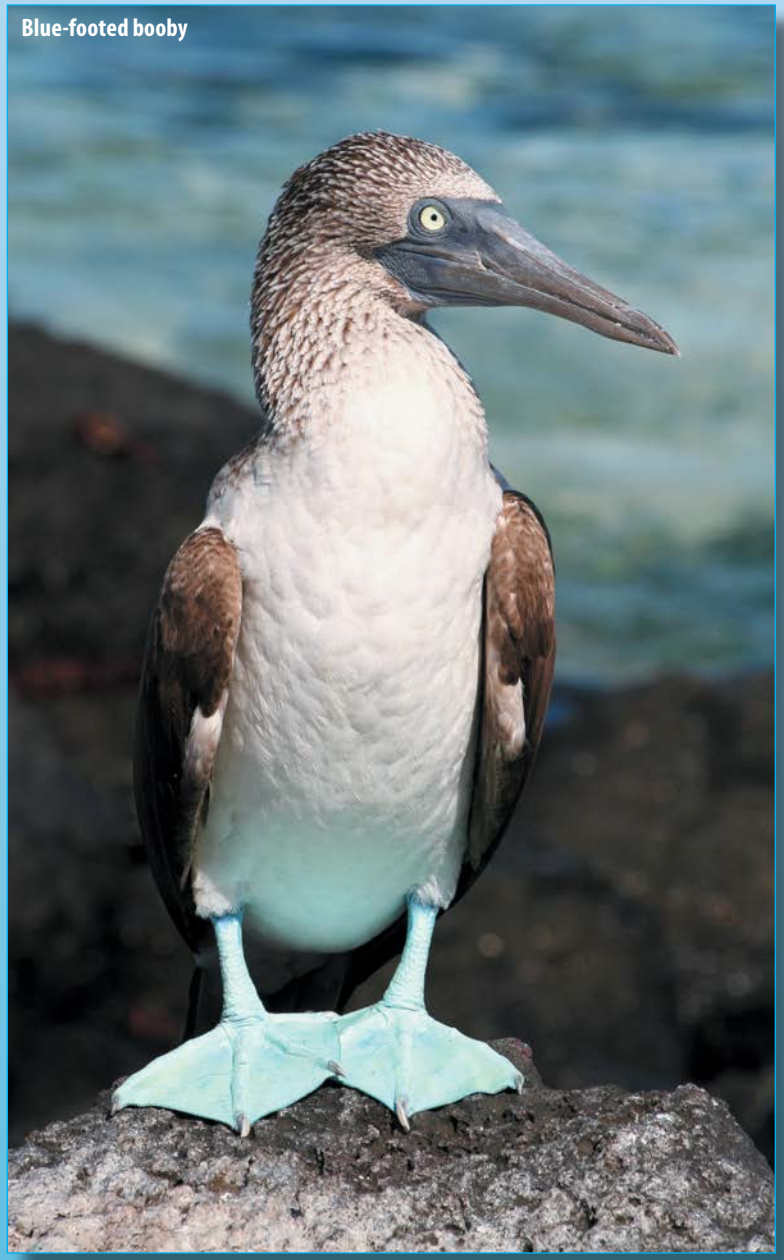
16 Charles R. Darwin, *Journal of researches into the natural history . . . during the voyage of H.M.S. Beagle* (London: John Murray, 1845), p. 181 (journal entry for 26 April 1834).

17 For a good understanding of the origin of the idea of millions of years of geological history, see Terry Mortenson, *The Great Turning Point: The Church's Catastrophic Mistake on Geology — Before Darwin* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004) and Terry Mortenson's DVD lecture "Millions of Years: Where Did the Idea Come From?"

CHARLES DARWIN GOT his first glimpse of the Galápagos Islands on September 15, 1835. Little did he know at the time that his name and these islands would be forever associated.

While the concept of biological evolution (molecules-to-man) is believed to be the result of Darwin's observations on these islands, his initial interest in the Galápagos concerned their geology. In fact, the majority of Darwin's notes throughout the entire voyage of the *Beagle* were geological in nature.

Based on their volcanic nature and their distance from the mainland, Darwin reasoned that the islands were never part of the continental landmass and must be relatively young from a geologic standpoint. He was anxious to study the islands and understand their origin.



Blue-footed booby

Red-footed booby

In addition to his geologic curiosities, Darwin did, indeed, want to understand the biology of the islands. He wanted to know how plants and animals colonized new islands, and where better to study this than the Galápagos?

As he explored Chatham (modern-day San Cristóbal Island) and several of the other islands, he encountered an amazing variety of animals. He found red and blue-footed boobies. He was fascinated by the iguanas and recorded their behavior and feeding habits. He watched the great tortoises.

It was on James Island (modern day Santiago Island) that he came upon the creature that more than any other is linked with him to this day: the finches. He had already taken a few specimens of birds from other islands, but on James he noted feeding patterns and the variety of beak shapes among these birds. He took many specimens to study on his return to England. Many today refer to these birds as "Darwin's finches."


Hood mockingbird

Contrary to popular mythology, Darwin did not have an epiphany while on the Galápagos. He did observe amazing creatures. He did note variety in beak shapes and tortoise shells. But it was not until a few years later, after his return to England, that he embarked on an extensive examination of the specimens he sent back home.

But is this really the issue? Were the specimens Darwin collected on the Galápagos the basis of what we now call evolution? The simple answer is no.

The primary issue is what Darwin believed prior to visiting the Galápagos. Darwin brought with him on board the *Beagle* the book *Principles of Geology* by Charles Lyell. Lyell set forth the idea that slow geologic changes over vast periods of time produced the earth as we see it today. In other words, Lyell promoted the idea that instead of an earth that was drastically re-shaped by the biblical, global Flood, small changes at a uniform rate over millions of years produced the geology we see today.

Darwin rejected the history in the Bible and accepted the secular concepts of millions of years. Ultimately, it was this belief that led to his conclusions about the samples and specimens he collected on his voyage. This was the framework within which he made his interpretations. It was not really about the evidence; it was about how Darwin interpreted the evidence.

Tommy Mitchell