
ETERNAL LIFE FOR DUMMIES

TEST CASE: NOAH'S ARK

Handout #2

A. Question: If to be saved I must not reject anything the Bible teaches, is it the case that I must not reject the story of Noah's ark?

1. A test case.
2. I don't know. I don't have the answer. But here is how I think a disciple of Jesus must think about this.

B. What "picture" of creation lies behind the statement in Genesis 1:1?

1. Instantaneous creation:
an instantly "mature" and finished world in a condition very much like it is now?
OR
2. Creation through created processes:
a simple beginning point: the infinitely dense singularity that went "bang" and then proceeded to form the universe as we know it.

C. Creation Science position

1. Distinctive elements of this position (= Young Earth Creationists):
 - a. Creation was quick (six 24-hour days?).
 - b. Earth is only several thousand years old.
 - c. Noah's flood was a flood that covered the whole face of the globe and was instrumental in forming most of the globe's topography.
 - d. Interprets geological facts as consistent with the following:
 - an instantaneous creation;
 - a relatively young earth; and
 - a universal flood in time of Noah.
2. Difficulties between Young Earth Creationism and science:
 - a. What about the stars we see that are billions of light years away?
 - b. What about Carbon 14 dating, etc.?
 - c. What about the fossils in the rock strata?
 - d. The "look" of sedimentary rock.
 - e. Creation Science embraces unorthodox scientific theories.
 - This is why, in modern culture, they are scorned, held in contempt, and considered narrow and stupid.

3. Difficulties between Young Earth Creationism and the Bible:
 - a. Aren't the creation accounts poetry?
 - b. Isn't it debatable whether Noah's flood is a universal flood? Can you be unshakably confident about that?
 - c. **NOT** a difficulty: God would be involved in deception if he created the world with the appearance of age when it did not have it.

D. Christians and theists who reject Creation Science position

1. Distinctive elements of position (= Old Earth Theists):
 - a. Creation came about through created processes.
 - b. Earth is very, very old.
 - c. Noah's flood was a large regional flood; it did not cover the entire globe, nor did it kill every being on the entire planet.
 - d. Interprets geology in such a way that it requires all of the above.
2. Difficulties between Old Earth Theism and the Bible:
 - a. Doesn't the Bible clearly and inescapably teach a universal flood that destroyed life around the whole globe?
3. Difficulties between Old Earth Theism and science:
 - a. None really; not at the moment. That's why this is attractive to the proponents of this view.
 - This position avoids (to some degree) the scorn and contempt of modern culture and modern scientific orthodoxy.

E. What is going on here?

1. If my understanding of the Bible's authority (which I believe is Jesus' view of Scriptural authority) is correct, then three things follow:
 - a. I can assume that what the Bible actually teaches is true.
 - b. I can assume that the facts of physics, chemistry, astronomy, geology, and biology are true.
 - c. There will not and cannot be any conflict between the teaching of the Bible and the facts of science.
2. However, my interpretation of the Bible is *not* infallible.
 - a. I can be wrong with regard to what I think the Bible teaches and affirms.
3. And, science's interpretation of physical reality is *not* infallible.
 - a. The "facts" of science are not necessarily true.
4. Hence, how should a disciple of Jesus determine the truth in matters where science and the Bible speak to the same reality?

- a. I must enter into a dialectical process. I must move back and forth between my understanding of the Bible and my understanding of science and the physical universe, adjusting one or both as necessary.
- b. When what the Bible teaches is in conflict with what science teaches, then I will and must reconsider my interpretation of science's interpretation of and understanding of nature when I am confident that I understand the Bible rightly.
 - This is what Young Earth Creationism is doing.
 - > This is totally intelligent, intellectually responsible, and reasonable.
 - > There is nothing irrational or unscientific about the approach they have chosen.
 - > They might be wrong; but they are NOT idiots, nor charlatans, nor intellectually irresponsible, GIVEN their confidence in their interpretation of the Bible.

This is where I have a problem with Young Earth Creationism: I don't think their interpretation of Genesis is accurate.

- c. When what the Bible teaches is in conflict with what science teaches, I must reconsider my interpretation of the biblical text when I am confident that science's understanding of nature must be right.
 - This is what the Old Earth Theist is doing.
 - > This is not disrespectful of biblical authority at all.
 - > There is nothing unbelieving, secular, or godless about the approach they have chosen.
 - > They might be wrong; but they are NOT necessarily unbelieving rebels against God, GIVEN their confidence in the theories and conclusions of modern science.

This is where I have a problem with some of the Old Earth Theists: I think their confidence in science is naïve. They are too unguarded and are overly confident with respect to the views of modern science.

- d. When what the Bible teaches is in conflict with what science teaches, I may have to reconsider my belief in biblical authority and/or Jesus' messiahship. If I have reason for confidence that both my interpretation of the Bible and the teachings of science are right, then—if they are in irreconcilable conflict—then it cannot be true that the Bible points to the same truth as physical reality does.

F. Two Critical Questions:

1. Do Genesis 1 and/or 2 require an instantaneous creation?
 - a. If it does, then that is what I must not reject.
 - b. And, I must ask whether the "facts" of science cannot be understood differently.
2. Does the account of Noah's flood require that we understand the flood to be universal?
 - a. If it does, then that is what I must not reject.
 - b. And, I must ask whether the "facts" of science cannot be understood differently.

G. Answering the Two Critical Questions:

1. Genesis creation accounts do not require instantaneous creation.
 - a. Poetic account intended to explain WHO is behind the present state of our world and WHAT SORT of force he is.
 - Account is not intended to give us a blow-by-blow historical description of HOW God created the present state of the world.
2. The account of Noah's flood does not necessarily require a universal flood.
 - a. All the relevant statements and facts, interpreted in a certain way, could be understood to be compatible with a VERY large regional flood that affected the whole region surrounding what is the historical home of the Jews.
 - b. Even II Peter 3 would not have to understand Noah's flood to be universal.
 - However, it seems to me more probable that Peter is seeing an analogy between a destruction of the whole globe and everyone on it in the time of Noah and a destruction of the whole globe and everybody on it in the future judgment to come.
 - Because of II Peter 3, I lean toward Noah's flood being universal. But if I am not right about that, the fact that it was not a universal flood wouldn't ultimately undermine Peter's argument. We would just have to understand Peter's point a little differently in II Peter 3.