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There is no such thing as a neutral search for truth.

Leonard R. Brand

The search for truth goes all the way back to Adam and Eve, who sought to understand the world that God had prepared for them. They may not have used the word *epistemology*, but they learned some painful lessons about potential pitfalls in the search for truth. For scholars and teachers, the issue of epistemology, of how human beings acquire and evaluate knowledge, and how to determine what is true, is a vital topic. Intuitively, it seems straightforward: We carefully find the facts, and then we know what is true. Unfortunately, it isn't always that simple. How can human beings determine what is trustworthy knowledge?

Evaluating Purported Knowledge

Several important steps or processes are important in determining what ideas one can trust as truth. Following are steps using simple examples from paleontology and biology, but the principles will apply to any discipline.

In reading a discussion about how different types of animals came to exist, and seeing statements claiming that (1) fish evolved from relatives of starfish; after which (2) some fish evolved into amphibians; then (3) amphibians evolved into reptiles; and (4) from them came birds and mammals, what is one to think? How reliable are these conclusions (theories)? The first task in evaluating this claim is to determine what is fact and what is interpretation or explanation. (In this discussion, *fact* and *data* will be used as synonymous.)

Conclusions in science always combine data (specific observations, measurements) and *interpretation* of the data (possible explanations of the

Only a deep personal knowledge of God can give us the wisdom to make a truly informed choice of what standard we will use to recognize true and trustworthy knowledge—the Word of God or contemporary scientific interpretations.



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facts). Consider this account of origins:

Fact: Among invertebrate groups, there are two basic types of symmetry in how their early stages (larvae) develop. Larvae of starfish and their relatives have the same type of symmetry (bilateral) as fish and other vertebrates. These are observations, or data. Now, what do these data tell us? This involves the arena of interpretation. The data collected say that the symmetry in vertebrates is of the same type as that in starfish larvae, but different from the symmetry of other invertebrates. Most scientists have concluded that these data suggest that vertebrates evolved from relatives of starfish. If a common ancestor had that type of symmetry, this would explain why it appears in both fish and starfish larvae—they inherited it from their common ancestor.

That may seem to be the end of the investigation, but it isn't, because it suggests another question: Are there other ways to explain how they could acquire the same symmetry? Did the symmetry evolve from a common ancestor, or did God create them that way? Since there is more than one possible interpretation of the data, any one explanation of how they came to have that type of symmetry is an interpretation, a hypothesis, not a scientific fact.

Many more questions and hypotheses could occur, but the point is simply to emphasize the difference between facts (or data) and interpretations. Conclusions in science and other disciplines generally begin with data, but they always include interpretations as well. Data almost never suggest directly how to interpret them. Scientists have to think of ways the facts could be explained and devise hypotheses to explain them.

Hypotheses are interesting to explore and discuss, but what people really would like to know is this: Which hypothesis is true? How can this be decided? This is done by gathering more data, by conducting experiments, or by making observations to test the hypotheses. In some cases, scientific experiments can accomplish this with considerable certainty.

For example, if I want to know what will happen to a book when I drop it, I can do simple experiments—drop the book many times and record whether it descends or rises. It doesn't take long to conclude that it always falls downward. This process involves basic laws of physics that are reliable and can be tested repeatedly.

Can the same procedure determine with the same confidence why vertebrates and starfish larvae have the same type of symmetry? Many observations and experiments could be conducted on fish and starfish that would explore their larvae, embryos, and behavior. However, these would not include the one absolutely necessary observation, the first starfish or the first fish, to see where starfish and fish came from.

Consequently, hypotheses about the origin of fish and starfish remain interpretations, not facts. Similarly, many other ideas in geology, paleontology, and evolutionary biology will always be only hypotheses because there is no going back in time to see what actually happened. More observations may reduce the number of viable hypotheses, but without actually being there for the original event, critical data remain beyond human reach.

In science, the level of certainty achieved in the study of history of the Earth and of life can never approach that of the study of gravity or physiological processes occurring today that can be experimentally and repeatedly analyzed.

Since this is true, why do so many scientists speak with such assurance about the origin of rock layers, fossils, and evolution? Has research in recent decades produced new evidence that clinches the case for evolution of all life over eons of geological time? The purpose here is not to answer questions about evolution, but to understand the epistemology or process used to evaluate data. How do scientists who write about evolution claim to achieve such a high level of certainty?

Worldviews

This question can be answered only by considering worldviews and how they influence the search for truth. A worldview is a set of assumptions that influences how people interpret the world and how they answer the important questions of life, such as where did we come from, how should we live, and where are we going? Everyone has a worldview, and how people interpret evidence and data is influenced by that worldview. A person's worldview influences whether he or she is optimistic or pessimistic.

More importantly, at least some of the assumptions behind *any* worldview must be taken on faith, and they can influence just about everything. One worldview is based on the assumption that God is real, that He has communicated through the Bible, and that His communication can be trusted to convey truth. Another worldview assumes that there have never been any supernatural, miraculous events in the history of the universe and that everything must be explained by known or discernible natural laws.

This oversimplifies somewhat the role of assumptions and faith. There is evidence for the Christian worldview; it is not based on blind faith. Yet it cannot be proved. There is always a definite element of faith. Scientists and others who embrace the naturalistic worldview marshal a lot of evidence to support their view. But how do they know there has never been any supernatural intervention? That is an assumption based on faith. Each worldview uses evidence, or data, but the interpretations of that data (the explanations) always depend on one or more significant assumptions.

How Are Worldviews Used to Create Interpretations?

Why are so many scientists convinced that the evolution of all life is a fact? What sort of intellectual processes produce such unanimity of thought on this issue? Scientists present massive amounts of evidence to prove evolution. But to understand that evidence, requires a return to the discussion of data and interpretation and how they relate to worldviews.

The interpretation of animal symmetry illustrates the influence of a worldview. If there is at least a willingness to consider the existence of a Creator, then it can be asked: Does the similarity in symmetry between starfish larvae and fish mean they evolved from a common ancestor, or did God create each group that way? A naturalistic worldview obviates asking that question because that worldview by definition absolutely rejects the possibility of a Creator. It doesn't rule out this idea because of data. The assumptions of the naturalistic worldview preclude consideration of any type of intelligent creator. To actively ponder whether starfish and fish were created would require a change of worldview.

Scientists do not choose evolution as the only scientifically correct

explanation because of overwhelming evidence. Rather, the choice is heavily influenced by worldview. In a naturalistic worldview, the origin of all biological features must always be explained by evolution, no matter what the evidence.

Don't misunderstand this statement.

A huge and growing amount of data is being marshaled to support the evolution of all life forms from a common ancestor. This can indeed look overwhelming. The evidence and associated conclusions, however, are almost never discussed in a way that openly examines the relationship between data and interpretation, or how assumptions and worldviews affect the conclusions. It takes careful examination of the logic involved to recognize how certain ideas depend on a naturalistic worldview.

Evaluating Truth Claims

So how should truth claims be evaluated? Study the assertions to separate data from interpretation. Then seek to understand the assumptions on which the interpretations depend. These steps are often difficult, but are essential to evaluate the reliability of the conclusions. When reading a book or article, it is often necessary to know the worldview of the author to understand fully what the material is saying.

For example, a recent book states that "all of us—you, me, the elephant, and the potted cactus—share some fundamental traits. Among these are the biochemical pathways that we use to produce energy, our standard four letter DNA code, and how that code is read and translated into proteins. This tells us that every species goes back to a single common ancestor."¹ This book is written by a person who is committed to the naturalistic worldview. His view of science is not postmodern; by "true," he means it is a fact, just like the fact that gravity will pull a dropped book downward, not upward. The author's data are: All organisms have the same basic biochemistry in their cells, including the same DNA code. His interpretation is: All creatures acquired that biochemistry by evolution from a common ancestor. The data don't naturally lead to that conclusion; the conclusion requires the assumption that the origin of all creatures comes through evolution, not by creation.

Later in the book, he writes: "The most commonly suggested alternative takes us into the realm of the supernatural." He rejects this alternative because his worldview does not allow it. If we understand how all these elements—data, interpretation, assumption, and worldview—are involved in his thinking process, we can understand what he is really saying and why. Then we can evaluate the strength of his argument and whether we wish to follow him to the same conclusion. In a theistic worldview, it is perfectly logical (and not contradictory to valid scientific evidence) to conclude that an intelligent Designer invented biochemistry and used it to make you, me, the elephant, and the potted plant. The difference between these conclusions of the theist and the evolutionist is not in the data; the difference is in the worldview.

In some cases, it can be complicated to assess the argument because a person needs advanced knowledge of the topic to make such an analysis. However, the process of understanding the relationship between data and worldview is the same. Some arguments can sound very convincing until one expends considerable mental effort, combined with in depth knowledge of the

topic, to analyze them carefully. As a result, the author's conclusion may fall apart if his or her worldview and assumptions are not true.

In the previously mentioned book, the author argues that some complex parts of organisms, like the flagellum, a complicated structure for locomotion of bacteria, evolved by combining ("co-opting") proteins from other, simpler structures. This purports to explain why it wouldn't be too difficult to evolve a complex flagellum. Co-opting is a common evolutionary argument for various biological structures or systems. Theists ask, How do we know that proteins were co-opted to help make a flagellum? What are the data to demonstrate this process? This is how scientists who rule out the supernatural reach this conclusion: There are similar proteins in flagella and in some other structures (data). Their evolutionary worldview requires that flagella evolved, rather than being created (assumption, worldview). So a naturalistic explanation for the evolution of flagella is needed. Part of the explanation includes the idea that proteins were co-opted (interpretation).

This is just a hypothesis, a story suggesting one way for the process to occur. There is no hard evidence that such a complicated co-option process actually occurred, but the theory requires something like this; and consequently, the idea has become widely accepted. It is simply an untested hypothesis, but is often described as if it were a fact. The logic was this: Commitment to a worldview generates a problem; since data are lacking, an unsupported hypothesis suggests a solution to the problem.

Creationists also look for hypotheses to explain some puzzles that they lack adequate evidence to solve. The point is that it is important to recognize the relationship between worldviews, assumptions, and interpretations, and to investigate the process used to analyze the relationships between these elements.

There are actually many serious lines of evidence with which secular, evolutionary science has great trouble. You will not normally read about those areas in publications written by scientists who reject biblical creation. That isn't because they are consciously trying to hide something. If a well-entrenched scientific theory claims something cannot exist, however, it will be difficult for many to see it, even if it does, or could, exist.

Every area of study, be it science or theology, involves evidence and assumptions, and all produce questions that are difficult to answer. It is a much better position to understand how to seek truth if there is an awareness of how data, interpretations, and worldviews influence thinking.

Worldviews and the Search for Confidence

Some may say that interpretations being dependent on worldview is too strong a statement. However, a scientist who accepts naturalism would likely respond, "No, you are the one who doesn't understand. Science cannot accept miracles. An evolutionary explanation is the only valid intellectual one if you want to be a scientist." One hears and reads this strong sentiment many times from scientists. Philosophical naturalism says there is no God; methodological naturalism does not reject the possibility that God exists but denies Him the possibility of intervening in any natural events or processes.

The primary origin of the confidence that evolution can explain everything

in biological origins arises from this commitment to a secular, naturalistic worldview. It will only allow an evolutionary explanation. But if one cannot, by definition, consider any other possible explanations for the evidence, can this still be an objective search for truth?

To look at both sides of this argument, it must be acknowledged that a Christian worldview can also close minds, preventing an open, objective examination of alternative ideas. There are Christians who don't believe dinosaurs ever existed, and they think their view is based on the Bible. But what are the data to support that interpretation? Either of these worldviews can limit the possible explanations.

Then how to resolve this dilemma? In reality it is no dilemma at all. I am a believer in a trustworthy Bible, with its description of a literal, recent Creation week, global flood catastrophe, and Jesus as our Redeemer. I am also active as a publishing research paleontologist. I will not give up my biblical worldview, but to be effective in science, I must know and understand what my naturalist colleagues believe and publish. In other words, while a worldview can limit one's ability to evaluate all the options, we don't have to let it do that. Since I hold a minority worldview, I am continuously pondering the options for interpreting the data, and for resolving the seeming contradictions that creationists face in explaining some geological data in a short Earth history.

One observation in particular, however, helps to know how to relate to this. Most anti-creationist lectures and books reveal that the authors and speakers are unaware of how scientifically educated creationists think. They seem to have no interest in seeking to understand the thinking of persons who hold a creationist worldview, or to comprehend the basic questions that divide the two groups. Unfortunately, some creationists are like that also. However, there are a number of creationists whose confidence in Scripture makes them unafraid to study the contrasting opinions and worldviews and to seek out the most challenging questions to answer. Faith does not depend on resolving in this lifetime the difficult questions raised by science, but it is fascinating to look for answers, and my confidence in God's Word leads me to predict that we will eventually find the answers. There is no need to fear where the evidence may lead.

Most advocates of the naturalistic worldview, on the other hand, have little incentive to seek an understanding of the Christian worldview, to know why creationists think differently from scientists who reject the supernatural. Although the evidence also raises many questions that are unanswered in a naturalistic worldview, those who accept that philosophy are generally unaware that those questions exist.

The real issue is not whether a particular worldview can narrow a person's perspective. All worldviews can do that. The issue is whether people cling to their worldviews from habit, or because they understand what they believe and why. How strong is their understanding of the important questions and issues that separate creationist and evolutionary worldviews? Do they know the God behind the Christian perspective? Or do they hold that view because their parents transmitted it to them?

Current Trends Among Christians

An increasingly popular trend in Christendom is the mixing of Christianity

with the theory that all life has evolved. To blend these philosophies, some things in each worldview have to be given up. The result is theistic evolution or evolutionary creation. According to this worldview, God created life forms through the process of evolution over millions of years.

In its attempt to meld scientific research and biblical statements about the creation of the world, theistic evolution actually establishes a dichotomy between science and religion by relegating each to a separate sphere. While theistic evolutionists believe that religion can provide spiritual guidance, they hold that only through science can human beings produce reliable explanations of the natural world. That is, they believe that religion gives subjective, prejudiced views, while a secular approach provides theories and explanations that are unbiased and neutral, unaffected by religious assumptions. In other words, they assert that secular science has facts while religion has assumptions. This has led to a two level understanding of "truth":

Religion—personal, subjective values, emotions (heart)

Science—public, objective, reliable facts (mind)

But there is no such thing as a neutral search for truth. Both secular science and religious views are based on a worldview, a set of assumptions that influences everything. A Christian worldview regards the Bible as a trustworthy basis for an integrated view of the world, a "biblically informed perspective on all reality"² that does not divorce religion from the rest of experience and knowledge. In contrast, a naturalistic worldview requires that separation.

Secularism introduces its own biases into the search for understanding, and is no more neutral than religion. A worldview based on either philosophy can provide a foundation for the search for truth, but they will lead in very different directions. The traditional Christian worldview begins with a belief in the truth of the central events of biblical history: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration (the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan). Commitment to this set of truths forms the foundation for an integration of all knowledge, not merely religious knowledge.

In reality, theistic evolution has essentially abandoned any attempt to make this integration. It interjects a few "religious" concepts into a secular view of the universe. This worldview accepts as fact the interpretation that all life resulted from evolution. But does the evidence warrant this? Have the advocates of theistic evolution carefully considered which Christian concepts must be rejected in order to accept their worldview? Do they recognize that the evolutionary theory they accept as fact is based on the assumption that, throughout history, no supernatural intervention could ever have occurred? Is it good epistemology to try to blend two worldviews based on directly contradictory assumptions and incompatible epistemological principles?

Advocates of theistic evolution or evolutionary creation who candidly address the topic recognize that their worldview leads to a god who created by the process of mutation, death, and survival of the fittest through ages of pain and suffering. This "creation" process requires death and natural evil (hurricanes, volcanoes, floods, earthquakes). Their deity must not interfere with all these destructive processes, so that the creation will not be unduly forced,

but will be “free.” Is such a god worthy of our worship? Is this evil ridden world truly free, or merely dysfunctional?

Wisdom

There is one more step in the search for truth, as described by King Solomon: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov. 9:10).³ Knowledge is important, especially when it is combined with wisdom. God and His Word are the ultimate source of wisdom, no matter what area is studied. In many fields of scholarly research, the Bible doesn’t provide a lot of specific information. It does give the most important basic concepts, and it is a reliable source of wisdom.

Solomon writes not only about the wisdom of salvation. He also develops the theme of wisdom throughout the first nine chapters of Proverbs, applying it to morals and ethics in real life situations. It even addresses the subject of origins: “By wisdom the Lord laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew” (3:19, 20). Although Solomon is using poetic language, he clearly regards God as the Earth’s designer and creator.

How should one decide which epistemology to use, which worldview to adopt? There is much evidence to consider, but above all is the need for wisdom. When God responded to Job, He didn’t provide answers to the difficult questions. Instead, He challenged Job—and us—to remember how little human beings know in comparison to the God who created all and is Master and Redeemer of all. Were we here when the Earth was created? Where were we when the rocks and fossils were formed?

In the end, the choice of a worldview should be adopted on the basis of wisdom. “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you” (4:7, 8).

Solomon revealed elsewhere in Proverbs where wisdom comes from: “the fear of the Lord” (1:7). Do we know the divine mind and supreme being behind the Bible? Does our relationship with Jesus give us assurance that we can have confidence in His communication to us? These may seem like rather subjective questions, not relevant to a scholarly discussion of epistemology. They are, however, the most important questions.

What is the primary difference between the worldviews here discussed? The difference is in the nature of God and how He interfaces with humanity and with nature. How could we, with our human limitations, know what God is like unless He tells us? Does God obey the humanly invented rule that He cannot involve Himself in the physical processes in the universe?

Only a deep personal knowledge of God can give us the wisdom to make a truly informed choice of what standard we will use to recognize true and trustworthy knowledge—the Word of God or contemporary scientific interpretations. If the Bible is what it claims to be, it is not merely a book, but the revelation and reflection of the divine Being behind the Bible. This will give confidence in choosing a worldview.

Biblically Motivated Scientific Discovery

Is there a way that a biblically based worldview can directly make

scholarly contributions? Many critics of the Bible claim this is not possible. By contrast, if the Bible presents a true history of the Earth and of biological origins, scientists who are informed by Bible history gain an advantage in generating successful scientific hypotheses. This will sound preposterous to many, but some have been doing just this for many years, and publishing the results in highly esteemed, peer reviewed scientific journals. Other scholars use their worldview to suggest research ideas, so a theist can do likewise!

The Bible presents the basic elements of a worldview that includes a literal creation, global flood, and short time for life on Earth. That framework has implications for processes in both geology and paleontology. Based on these implications, hypotheses can be proposed that can be tested with the same research protocols that any earth scientist uses.

Several factors are needed to implement such a research process. First, it requires independent thought, recognizing that some accepted scientific concepts must be wrong, if the biblical worldview is correct. Second, it requires solid knowledge of the scientific literature on the topic. Third, it is essential to remember that the Bible doesn't give many details, several hypotheses may have to be rejected before finding one that not only fits the Bible but also explains the evidence. There is a danger, illustrated in the work of some believers, of thinking that because they believe the Bible, any scientific idea they devise must be correct.

To understand how human beings acquire and evaluate knowledge and how to determine what is true involves consideration of the relationships between data, interpretations, assumptions, and worldviews. These all contribute to the scholarly search for truth, and none can be safely ignored. A very important element of wisdom is to begin with the "fear of the Lord." There will always be challenges in the search for truth, but to put a biblical worldview to practical use in suggesting concepts for study and research may even help to advance the scholarly understanding of our disciplines.

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2. Nancey Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity From Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005), p. 23.
3. All Scripture references in this article are quoted from the *New International Version* of the Bible.

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Sound spiritual and intellectual principles provide for a confident approach to the close study of Scripture.

Frank Hasel

Bible students throughout the centuries have accepted Holy Scripture as God’s written Word of truth. Critics of the Christian faith have perceived the Bible as a thoroughly human book and have challenged the truthfulness of Scripture, claiming that the Bible contains numerous mistakes.

How did Jesus and the apostles see Scripture? Committed Christians need to recognize the importance of asking how Christ and the apostles saw and treated Scripture. With regard to the Old Testament, Jesus believed that what Moses taught was the Word of God (Mark 7:10). What David wrote, he wrote under inspiration (Mark 12:36). For Jesus, the inspired writings of the Old Testament were inviolable (John 10:35). In a similar manner, the apostles affirmed that in the Old Testament, God spoke through the mouths of His prophets (Acts 3:21). What the Holy Scriptures say is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). What Scripture says—God says (Rom. 9:17). Hence, Christians accept Scripture as truth (Ps. 12:6). Paul declared that he served the God of his fathers, “believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14, NKJV).

The New Testament writers affirm that “no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21, NASB). The messages of the apostles were regarded as given by divine authority. Paul believed that the things he spoke were “not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:13, NASB). That is why the early church received the apostles’ message “not as the word of men,

The suggestion that the Bible contains mistakes can easily be misunderstood to mean that God makes mistakes or that He has a responsibility for them, but this is not the case.



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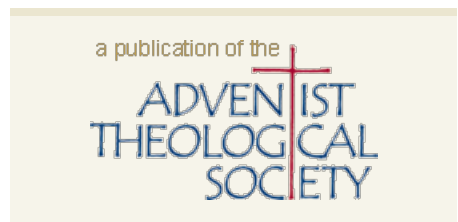
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but *for* what it really is, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13, NASB). Clearly the words of Scripture were "regarded as trustworthy, accurately representing the divine message."¹

Paul also acknowledged the inspiration of other parts of the New Testament. In 1 Timothy 5:18, he quoted from both Testaments as Scripture, "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain' [Deut. 25:4, ESV] and, 'The laborer deserves his wages' [Luke 10:7, ESV]." Similarly, Peter refers to the writings of Paul as Scripture (2 Peter 3:16).

The divine origin of Scripture is clearly attested; yet the writers of the biblical books were not simply God's pens but His penmen; that is, they wrote in their own characteristic styles, languages, and thoughts under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Some books, such as Kings, Chronicles, and the Gospel of Luke provide evidence of careful historical research. In all this, "the Holy Spirit's guidance did not overrule the thinking and the writing process of biblical writers but supervised the process of writing in order to maximize clarity of the ideas and to prevent, if necessary, the distortion of revelation, or changing divine truth into a lie."²

Nevertheless, biblical writers acknowledge that there "are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16, NASB).

Sometimes this human dimension of Scripture is charged with being responsible for mistakes in the Bible. After all, to err is human, as the saying goes. But even sinful human beings are capable of telling the truth and do so regularly. How much more should the biblical God of truth help His chosen instruments to communicate His truth faithfully! Being human does not necessarily entail falsehood or error.

Of course, all human language is limited, and the Bible was not written in a flawless heavenly Esperanto. Rather, the Bible writers used nontechnical, ordinary, everyday language to describe things that are subject to ordinary, not technical, standards of truth. They spoke of sunrise (Num. 2:3) and sunset (Deut. 11:30), using language of description rather than scientific precision. The need for technical precision varies according to the situation in which a statement is made. Imprecision cannot be equated with untruthfulness. The Bible is characterized by the simple beauty of the language, and it has the appeal of truthfulness. In recognizing this, Scripture is not deified. God alone is infallible. But with the biblical writers, His Word is true and reliable.

Many biblical passages reflect ancient customs, knowledge of which can be helpful in shedding light on some problems of interpretation while studying the Bible. For example, in ancient times it was common to give the same person different names (Edom/Esau; Gideon/Jerubbaal), and different methods were used to count the reign of kings. Care must be taken not to apply current understanding of things to the Bible and come to hasty and wrong conclusions about its truthfulness.

Furthermore, so-called obvious mistakes would have easily been detected by the original audience, who were much more familiar with the biblical text than many today. There is no indication that Paul or other biblical writers were charged with making any such obvious mistakes. Perhaps the smaller discrepancies pose a greater challenge to the serious scholar than so-called obvious mistakes.

The issue at hand also touches on the question of the transmission of the biblical autographs. Certainly, as a fact, original manuscripts have been lost. Although the Jews were very careful in faithfully copying biblical manuscripts, some minor mistakes have crept in while transmitting and copying them.

These may be due to copyists' mistakes or human frailties. While some such mistakes have occurred in the process of transmission and translation, they are so insignificant that not one honest soul needs to stumble over them. How God has preserved the Bible in its present shape is amazing. Indeed, the Bible is the best-transmitted and best-preserved document of antiquity.

But what can be done about discrepancies and apparent mistakes in the Bible? For example, there are a number of numerical discrepancies, referring to the same events or items in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

- In 2 Samuel 8:4, David is said to have taken 700 horsemen from Hadadezer; in 1 Chronicles 18:3, 4, the figure is given as 7,000.³

- According to 1 Kings 4:26, Solomon had 40,000 stalls for horses; in 2 Chronicles 9:25, he had only 4,000 stalls.

- In Matthew 27:54, the centurion says, "Truly this was the Son of God" (NKJV); in Luke 23:47, however, the author quotes the centurion as saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man" (NKJV).⁴

- Matthew associates a quotation from Zechariah with the prophet Jeremiah. Was he suffering from a slip of the mind?⁵

- In Hebrews 9:3, 4, the writer of Hebrews seems to locate the altar of incense in the Most Holy Place, whereas it is a well-known fact that it stood in the Holy Place. Was he mistaken?⁶

- Can the Old Testament cosmology be reconciled with modern scientific cosmology?⁷

Did the biblical writers err or suffer from a loss of memory? Were they only children of their times and culture and thus mistaken in what they wrote? While the books of the Bible were written in a particular time and culture, the Bible is not historically conditioned by immanent cause-and-effect relations and, thereby, rendered relative and divinely conditioned and historically constituted. The trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible and the truthfulness of the biblical message surpasses the limitations of human culture.

The Historical Reliability of Scripture

The presence of some discrepancies in the Bible does not give license to call into question the historicity of the biblical account. The Christian faith is a historical faith in the sense that it essentially depends upon what did, in fact, happen. Truth and historical reality belong together and cannot be separated from their theological content. "To remove the historical from the concerns of Scripture is to remove what demonstrates the faithfulness of God"⁸ because God acts in history. In the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles accepted as true the historical events recorded in the Old Testament (Matt. 19:4, 5; Rom. 15:4) because historical events, such as Creation, the Flood, and the Exodus, are part of the salvation history revealed in Scripture.

Though the New Testament writers were familiar with translations of the Old Testament, it is interesting that neither Jesus nor the apostles pointed out actual mistakes or errors in Scripture and never questioned the historicity of Old Testament reports. There is no evidence that they criticized Scripture for being

wrong or point out specific mistakes. Instead, they demonstrated unwavering faith in its trustworthiness and divine authority. In dealing with Scripture, readers are not called to disseminate doubts by questioning the truthfulness of the Bible, but are invited to follow the example of Jesus and the apostles.

How to Deal With Difficult Texts

The challenges of difficult passages in the Bible have been recognized by serious students throughout history. Although many discrepancies and contradictions disappear under open-minded scrutiny, some problems remain. To admit frankly those difficulties as unanswered questions is something quite different, however, from claiming that Scripture has definitely erred. The latter is a value judgment on Scripture, while the former shows an awareness of the limitations of human understanding and acknowledges that humans are not omniscient but dependent upon further information and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in understanding spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:12-14).

In dealing with difficulties in Scripture, many so-called mistakes are not derived from God's revelation but from human misinterpretation and the interpreter's prejudice. What, then, should be done in encountering apparent mistakes in the Bible?

Approach with integrity. In dealing with a difficult passage in Scripture, approach it in perfect honesty. God is "pleased with integrity" (1 Chron. 29:17, NIV). This implies, first of all, acknowledgement of a difficulty and not an attempt to obscure or evade it. An honest person has an open mindset that is receptive toward the message and content of that being studied. Furthermore, honesty includes the willingness to use proper methods of investigation. Explaining and understanding the Word of God correctly precludes methods with naturalistic presuppositions based on atheistic premises that run counter to God's Word.

Prayerfully deal with difficulties. Prayer is no substitute for hard work and thorough study. Prayer, however, includes confession of dependence upon God to understand His Word. The Bible writers express a humility that acknowledges that God and His Word are greater than human reason. Prayer provides the opportunity to ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit to gain a new insight to the biblical text that is unavailable if readers place themselves above the Word of God.

Explain Scripture with Scripture. With God as the ultimate Author of Scripture, a fundamental unity among its various parts may be assumed. That is to say, when in dealing with challenging aspects of Scripture, all difficulties should be dealt with scripturally. The best solution to Bible difficulties is still found in the Bible itself. There is no better explanation than explaining Scripture with Scripture. This means that taking into consideration the biblical context and carefully moving from the clear statements of the Bible to those that are less clear.

Be patient. For some questions, there are no easy answers. Patient determination is sometimes necessary to finding a solution. And if some problems persistently defy even the most difficult efforts to solve them, avoid discouragement. Part of perseverance is to be able to live with open questions, yet to be faithful to God's Word, for God's Word has proved time and again to

be reliable and trustworthy.

Are There Mistakes?

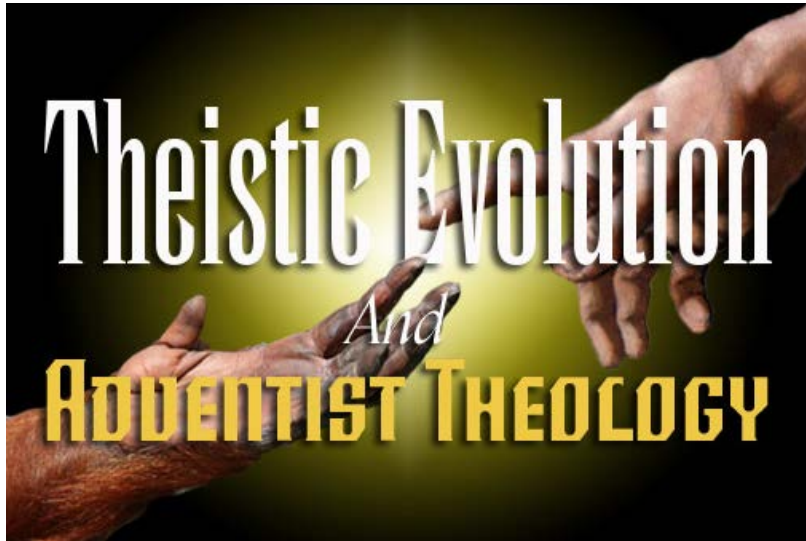
If *mistake* means that Scripture teaches error or is fallible and historically unreliable, the answer is No. The Bible is God's infallible revelation of His will. The suggestion that the Bible contains mistakes can easily be misunderstood to mean that God makes mistakes or that He has a responsibility for them, but this is not the case. The discrepancies and imperfections in Scripture are the result of human frailties. But none of these discrepancies negatively affects the teaching or historical reliability of Scripture. The Bible remains trustworthy and true and makes every willing man and woman wise unto salvation.

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Did God create the Earth and all that is in it over a period of time spanning millions of years?

E. Edward Zinke

Evolution has certainly changed the way our society looks at things—not only origins, but also many different aspects of contemporary life. Our moral values: Did God give them, or are they somehow the result of evolution? What about our concept of the nature of the world, the reason for our existence, the future, and God’s role in our life today? Evolution affects the answers to these and many more questions.

The mixing of evolution and theology sometimes results in a theory called *theistic evolution*. This theory posits that through the process of evolution, God gradually developed life forms until finally they became human beings.

The biblical concept of the creation of life stands in sharp contrast to that of theistic evolution. God created life on the Earth in six literal 24-hour consecutive contiguous creative days and then rested on the seventh day, which is attested to not only in Genesis 1 but also in Exodus 20 and 31. Christ confirmed a literal interpretation of Genesis when He referred to Adam and to the Flood.

Even a liberal 20th-century theologian such as Rudolf Bultmann affirmed that the biblical writers, whoever they were, had a literal interpretation in mind in writing about creation. Bultmann did not accept something as prominent in Scripture as the resurrection of Christ, or a literal visible Second Coming, or even the authority of Scripture. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the writers of the Bible believed in and meant to describe a six-day creation. This does not mean that Bultmann accepted the six-day creation. He argued that we live in a

We do not worship a god who dragged us through a long process of evolution. ”



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contemporary modern society and therefore we know better than the Bible writers in areas such as science and history and psychology and sociology. However, Bultmann recognized that the Bible writers referred to a six-day creation even though he himself opted for theistic evolution.

How would the acceptance of theistic evolution affect Adventist theology? Does it matter whether the creation of life happened millions of years ago or only a few thousand years ago as indicated by the Bible? Is the biblical concept of creation important to Adventist theology? How would the rejection of the biblical doctrine of creation affect the rest of our beliefs as a church?

The Nature of the Bible

The result of accepting theistic evolution instead of the biblical concept of the six-day creation could lead to any one of several conclusions:

First, it could mean that the Bible simply expresses opinions that we must verify or reject by a human discipline such as science, history, sociology, psychology, or by human experience.

Second, it might mean that the Bible is authoritative only in some realm such as the spiritual, but not in areas that have to do with human disciplines.

Third, it might be argued that the Bible has a canon within the canon. Only certain parts of the Bible are authoritative. Genesis 1 and 2 are not part of the authoritative portion of the Bible.

Closely associated with the question of biblical authority is the question of biblical interpretation. Some theistic evolutionists claim that the writers of Genesis did not intend to convey history. They were speaking poetically or allegorically. Thus they did not expect us to accept such forms of speech literally. Furthermore, it would be argued that we should not take seriously, as truth for today, the affirmations of Christ and others in the rest of the Bible to the literalness of Genesis 1 and 2.

The Origin of the Bible

The concept of theistic evolution alters the concept of how Scripture came to be. The Bible claims to be the Word of God given by the Holy Spirit through prophets, who communicated that word to the people in their own thought forms and language. The result was not the work of human beings, but the inspired Word of God.

The concept of theistic evolution also implies an evolutionary origin for the Bible. The Bible is not the Word of God—it is the evolving spiritual literature of certain ancient Near Eastern societies. During many generations and in many different social contexts various editors and schools of thought brought the pieces of literature together in the form that we now find in the Bible. In this view, the theologian who discerns and delivers the leading edge of spiritual evolution today carries on the role of the prophet.

Scripture and Nature

The concepts of theistic evolution affect our understanding of the relationship between the Bible and the natural world in two possible ways. First, the Bible may be made subservient to the insights gained from study of the natural world. The Bible would then be interpreted from the standpoint of contemporary humanistic disciplines.

Second, the Bible might be placed on the same level as science, history, tradition, church councils, revered texts from other faiths, philosophy, or reason. These may be regarded as equally transmitting God's revelation. Therefore, the task of the theologian is to interpret them rightly and synthesize the results into a coherent whole. This second approach has usually resulted in conclusions similar to the first.

In contrast to the previous approaches, the Reformation asserted that the Bible is not subservient to human reason and that Scripture is the sole authority (*sola scriptura*) by which we must measure all other authorities. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has based its beliefs on this perspective. While theistic evolution attempts to find a synthesis between the Bible and science, the principle of *sola scriptura* clearly rules out such an approach.

The Power of the Bible

Theistic evolution transforms the notion of the power of the Word of God. The Bible declares that creation took place by the word of God, and Scripture claims to be the Word of God. Therefore, the Reformation taught that when we read the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it makes God's power available to those receptive to it. It is the same creative power that brought the world into existence, that brought healing to the deaf, sight to the blind—the power of conversion, the power of transformation.

But theistic evolution denies such a power. It views the power of creation at best as a guiding spirit gradually manipulating matter and life during a period of millions of years to bring about change. Theistic evolution does not regard Christianity as a divinely revealed religion, because religion itself is considered to be in the process of evolving. Christianity may be the evolutionary peak for the present, but something else will supersede it.

Theistic evolution attempts to ground its theory of origins in the power of science. In contrast, the Bible states that we accept creation by faith (Heb. 11:3), a gift of God (Eph. 2:8) that comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17) under the power of God (1 Corinthians 1; 2).

The Nature of Matter and Humanity

The Bible asserts that God spoke, and worlds came into existence (Gen. 1:1–25; Ps. 33:6). Questioning this teaching, theistic evolution wonders whether God created matter in the same way that He made humanity—by the process of evolution during millions of years. Is matter self-existent apart from God? If so, is there a duality in the universe? On the other hand, if God spoke and brought matter into existence, then why did He not do the same for humanity?

Some views of theistic evolution affect the concept of the nature of humanity. Seventh-day Adventists believe that human beings are a unity—that God breathed into Adam's nostrils, and He became a living soul. At death, the breath or spirit of God returns to God and the soul ceases to exist until the resurrection.

Some versions of theistic evolution do not regard human beings as created living souls. Many hold that at some point in the process of evolution, human beings received a soul. The soul is simply a fixture added on to human life. Thus a human being is not a unity, because the soul was originally separate from the body. Separating the soul from the rest of the human being allows for the

concept of the natural immortality of the soul and its pre-existence.

The concept of humanity in the type of theistic evolution noted above seems to be self-contradictory. First, it questions whether God steps into history and whether miracles actually take place. But is not the infusion of a soul at some point in time a historical and miraculous event? If so, why not simply accept the biblical account? Second, theistic evolution questions the idea of human resurrection. If God either cannot or does not create by fiat creation, why should He do so in a resurrection? And if He does it in the resurrection, why not in the beginning?

More important, this form of theistic evolution contradicts Scripture. If, as the story states, God created humanity in His image, at what point, and how, in the evolutionary process did it take place? Further, the Bible states that humanity fell from the image of God at the entrance of sin. Theistic evolution raises doubt about sin by suggesting that humanity is actually in a process of improvement over time.

The Nature of God

Theistic evolution challenges Adventist theology's understanding of the nature of God.

First, it questions His intelligence, power, and love. If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, is He truly a God of love? Would a God of love drag His creation through such a long process of evolution—of survival of the fittest finally to bring forth humanity? If God is indeed a God of love, the divine method of creation propounded by theistic evolution would appear to call either God's intelligence or power into question. Either He is intelligent, but not very powerful, or powerful, but not very intelligent—otherwise He would have created in a more loving manner. It does not seem possible to accept theistic evolution and at the same time also to uphold all three of the classic properties of God's nature: God's infinite love, intelligence, and power. Unfortunately, only some combination of two of the three qualities can coincide with theistic evolution.

Second, theistic evolution doubts God's personal nature. Is God personal, or is He just a pervasive influence or spirit, or perhaps even an impersonal energy that does not relate to us at all? If indeed God created us for relationship, at what point did human beings become suited for a relationship with God, and why did it take Him so long to bring it about? By contrast, the Bible asserts that God created humankind for personal relationship with Him and that the plan of salvation seeks to restore that original relationship.

Third, theistic evolution questions whether God communicates with us. Theistic evolution asserts that humanity existed for millions or billions of years without any direct contact from God. If the theistic evolutionist then wishes also to accept the Bible as God's communication, it would be necessary to say that after millions and billions of years, God suddenly came on the scene to speak to humanity.

Fourth, theistic evolution downplays the nature of God's action in history. Does God act directly in history, or is He simply some kind of backdrop to it, never actually become personally involved in events Himself. With the latter view of God, it is understandable that the theistic evolutionists reject or reinterpret the biblical concept of creation. God simply doesn't or can't act the

way the Bible depicts. Modern humanity knows better.

Fifth, if God does not directly involve Himself in history, then how does this affect the existence of Jesus Christ? Is He indeed God come to live incarnate, or was He simply a man in the process of evolution, albeit at its highest peak for His time? Or was He the embodiment of the spirit or force that has been driving creation since the beginning of time?

Sixth, if theistic evolutionists have problems with the miracle of creation, they will likely experience difficulties with other miracles recorded in the Bible: the Flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, the resurrections in both testaments, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself, and the future miracle of the literal, visible Second Coming and re-creation of the earth.

Seventh, theistic evolution struggles with God's relationship to the laws of the universe. Is God in control of the processes of evolution, or is He Himself subject to them and therefore evolving Himself? Similarly, is God the creator and grantor of freedom, or is He Himself bound by the laws of freedom? If God is controlled by the laws of the universe, so that He must operate in harmony with them, is He still God? Would not the laws that restrict Him then be above Him?

Eighth, theistic evolution questions the Bible as the foundation of knowledge. Theistic evolution derives its knowledge of origins, and possibly of the nature of the universe, by observation, by natural means alone. The biblical viewpoint is that the One who spoke worlds into existence, the One who created the nature of the universe, also revealed Himself and the nature and origin of the universe that He created. Thus we depend upon God's revelation if we are to properly carry out our human intellectual disciplines. In the biblical approach, God is the creator and grantor of knowledge, while in the evolutionary approach, human beings control knowledge. If human beings are in control of knowledge, do they in their autonomy—independence from God—finally put themselves in the place of God?

Ninth, in the process of evolution, is God Himself simply an entity among countless others and therefore Himself caught in the flow of history? Are human beings themselves creators and, though to a lesser extent, nonetheless similar to God? The biblical doctrine of creation safeguards the distinction between God and humanity. God is the Creator; we are the created. He is the sustainer, while we are the sustained. Such a distinction helps us avoid the temptation to make ourselves God.

Sin and Salvation

The themes of the Great Controversy and the plan of salvation are vital to Seventh-day Adventist theology. Theistic evolutionists would reinterpret them drastically. They would see the Great Controversy played out in the process of evolution rather than between Christ and Satan. The plan of salvation would work itself out as an evolutionary progress rather than as God's communication, presence, incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, sanctuary ministry, second coming, re-creation of the Earth, and so on.

If theistic evolution accepts the biblical concept of sin, then it seems that it must also assert that the process of evolution created humanity in a sinful condition. What would be the implications for a God who would create sinful human beings?

Theistic evolution threatens the biblical concept of the substitutionary death of Christ. If humanity is in the process of progressive evolution, then there was no sin event, and if there was no event of sin, there is no need for a Savior from sin. Jesus might play the role of visionary leader or moral influence, a catalyst to speed up the process of progressive evolution, but He is not humanity's substitute, for there is no need for one.

From the perspective of theistic evolution, the church cannot teach an everlasting gospel: Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come, and worship Him, the Creator. Rather, the church must present a social gospel. It would be a moral club, a facilitator of ongoing evolution.

The Law and Christian Institutions

Theistic evolution undermines the concept of God's law. If God either cannot or will not enter human history in creation, etc., then surely He made no divine proclamation from Sinai. He did not divinely reveal the Ten Commandment law. Law itself is in evolutionary development. Human beings determine their own laws by externally observing the laws of nature, and by internally observing the laws of human personality. There exists no divine absolute.

The absence of divine absolutes will affect other doctrines related to the law of God, such as marriage and the Sabbath. Both institutions, authorized in the divine law, originated at creation. However, theistic evolution would deny that marriage is a divine institution. Marriage would be binding only to the extent that culture made it so. It would be the result of evolutionary social customs rather than the creation and gift of God. Similarly, the Sabbath would not be a divine institution and a mark of distinction of God's people but merely the evolutionary development of folk religion, and therefore classed along with other religious responses to the divine.

Christ's Ministry

Theistic evolution nullifies Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, in His church, and in the new earth. First, if God does not create by fiat creation, if He does not communicate directly to humanity, if He does not become incarnate, if there is no fall from the image of God and therefore no need for a substitute to bring about reconciliation, then surely God does not do such things as minister on humankind's behalf in a heavenly sanctuary.

Second, theistic evolution would undermine the spiritual gifts that Christ sends to His church from heaven. Consider, for example, the role of the gift of prophecy. Ellen G. White stood strongly behind the biblical concept of a six-day creation by the word of the Lord. If her strong emphasis was misguided at this point, in what else can we accept her authority?

Third, theistic evolution would find it necessary to reinterpret Seventh-day Adventist eschatology. If God does not break into history in creation, then surely He will not do so in a literal, visible Second Coming. Since He does not create by the word of His mouth, will He re-create in the resurrection? And if He did not originally create the Garden of Eden, will He re-create the new earth? Eschatology is not the decisive entrance of God into history. It is the continuing process of evolution for a better life, something that humanity accelerates by

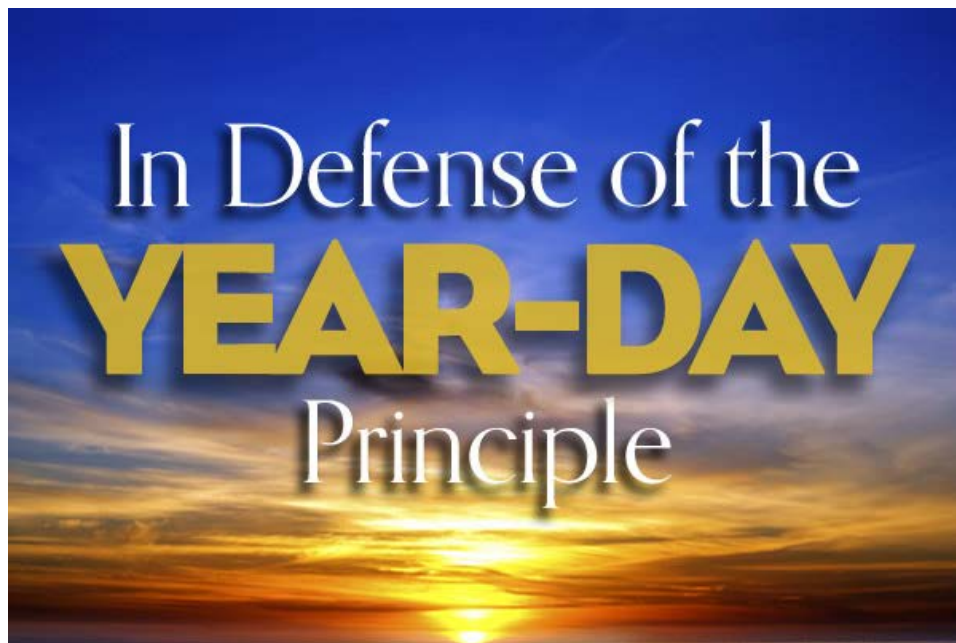
bringing about a moral and just society through revolt, rebellion, redistribution of wealth, education, and other means.

Conclusion

The Adventist faith will not be itself if it accepts theistic evolution. The active God who created by the word of His mouth, who communicated through the prophets, who lived among us, died in our place, was resurrected and ascended to minister for us, who will return the second time to gather us to Himself, who will resurrect the dead and re-create the new earth, and who will finally destroy sin, cannot be worshiped if He does not exist. We do not worship a god who dragged us through a long process of evolution. Rather, we worship the God of creation, a personal God who desires to fellowship with us and to dwell among us. God is to be worshiped because He is the Creator. That is what distinguishes Him from other gods.

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The historicist method of interpretation is not, in fact, a late arrival on the theological scene.

Gerhard Pfandl

Until the 19th century, most students of the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation used the historicist method to interpret the prophecies in them. One of the main pillars of the historicist method is the year-day principle, which says that a day in apocalyptic time prophecies represents a year. During the 19th century, the historicist method was slowly replaced by the preterist and futurist systems of interpretation, both of which deny the year-day principle. Preterists place most of the prophecies into the past up to the time of the Roman Empire; futurists place most of them into the future, specifically into the last seven years between the secret rapture and the Second Advent.

Kai Arasola

In 1990, Kai Arasola, a Finnish Seventh-day Adventist scholar, published his dissertation, "The End of Historicism," which he had written at the University of Uppsala in Sweden. Contrary to the claims of Desmond Ford, Arasola did not say that "the scholarly world of biblical interpreters gave up the year-day principle at the time of the Millerite debacle—the disappointment of 1844."¹ What Arasola does say is that when the Millerite movement came to an end, "historicism gradually ceased to be the only popular method of interpretation. It was largely replaced by futurism and preterism. Yet one must acknowledge that in fact historicism did not die with Miller. It still lives in a modified form and

Seventh-day Adventists continue to use the historicist method of interpretation because they believe that the year-day principle is not a paradigm imposed on the text, but that it is found in Scripture itself. ”

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partly renewed form within the groups that have some roots in Millerism."²

Arasola refers to Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses; others are the Advent Christian Church, which also came out of the Millerite movement, and the various Church of God congregations. Apart from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, however, very few Daniel or Revelation commentaries have been written by these smaller churches.

Historicism did not die with the demise of the Millerite Movement. In fact, many historicist commentaries appeared after 1844, among them the well-known commentaries on the books of Daniel and Revelation by Albert Barnes. Even in the first half of the 20th century, a number of scholarly volumes were written by historicists, but by the end of the 20th century, with few exceptions, historicism was no longer used in the interpretation of Daniel and Revelation outside of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Seventh-day Adventists

Seventh-day Adventists continue to use the historicist method of interpretation because they believe that the year-day principle is not a paradigm imposed on the text, but that it is found in Scripture itself. In Daniel 7 and 8, for example, the interpreting angel uses the historicist method to explain the various symbols as empires in history, one following the other.

It is ironic that one of the best summaries of the year-day principle is found in Desmond Ford's first commentary on Daniel. In his second commentary on Daniel, 18 years later, he no longer used it because he then believed that the year-day principle could not be justified biblically. Contrary to this position, most Seventh-day Adventist interpreters believe that the year-day principle is based on Scripture.

Biblical Evidence for the Year-Day Principle

An inquiry into the biblical foundation of the year-day principle produces a number of arguments for the application of the principle to the prophecies of the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation.

1. Symbolism

Since the visions in Daniel 7 and 8 are largely symbolic, with a number of different beasts representing important historical empires (7:37; 8:3-5, 20, 21), the time periods (7:25; 8:14) should also be seen as symbolic.

Daniel 7:3-7

Lion	Babylon (626-539 B.C.)
Bear	Medo-Persia (539-331 B.C.)
Leopard	Greece (331-168 B.C.)
Beast	Rome (168 B.C.-476 A.D.)

The vision concludes with the Second Coming, when the saints shall receive the kingdom: ""Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him"" (Dan. 7:27).³

The time element of three-and-a-half times or years in verse 25, during which the saints are given into the hands of the little horn, must, therefore, cover more than three-and-a-half literal years. ""He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and

shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time"" (vs. 25).

In Daniel 8, again empires last for hundreds of years:

Daniel 8:3-5, 20, 21

Ram	Medo-Persia (539-331)
Goat	Greece (331-168)

The vision goes to the "time of the end" (vs. 17). The time element of "two thousand three hundred days" (vs. 14), therefore, should also be a longer time period than six years and three months.

2. Long Time Periods

The fact that the visions deal with the rise and fall of known empires in history that existed for hundreds of years indicates that the prophetic time periods also cover long time periods.

Babylon (626-539 B.C.)
Medo-Persia (539-331 B.C.)
Greece (331-168 B.C.)
Rome (168 B.C.-476 A.D.)

In Revelation 12-14, we have the history of the Christian Church from the time of Jesus (12:5) to the Second Advent (14:14). The time elements of 1260 days, three-and-a-half times, and 42 months (12:6, 14; 13:5), all referring to the same time period, make sense only if they represent 1260 years. There is no three-and-a-half-year time period in church history that would fit the description given in these chapters.

3. Peculiar Expression

The peculiar way in which the time periods are expressed indicates that they should not be taken literally. If the "time and times and half a time" in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14 stands for three-and-a-half literal years, we would expect God to say "three years and six months" as He does in Luke 4:25 and James 5:17. In these texts, where three-and-a-half literal years are referred to, each time the phrase is "three years and six months." Similarly, Paul remained in Corinth "a year and six months" (Acts 18:11), and David reigned in Hebron "seven years and six months" (2 Sam. 2:11).

4. Salvation History

In Daniel 7, the four beasts that together account for a reign of at least 1,000 years are followed by the little horn power. It is the focus of the vision since it is most directly in opposition to God. (Seven out of 28 verses in Daniel 7 refer to the little horn.) Three and a half literal years for the struggle between the little horn and the Most High are out of proportion to the comprehensive scope of salvation history portrayed in this vision. The same applies to Revelation 12:6, 14 where the 1260 days or three-and-a-half times cover a large part of the history between the first and second advent.

5. Time Terminology

""He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time"" (Dan. 7:25). "He was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months" (Rev. 13:5). "Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that

they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (12:6).

According to the context, the expressions "time and times and half a time" (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14), "forty-two months" (Rev. 11:2; 13:5), and "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (Rev. 11:3; 12:6) all apply to the same time period, but the natural expression "three years and six months" is not used once.

The Holy Spirit seems, in a manner, to exhaust all the phrases by which the interval could be expressed, excluding always that one form which would be used of course in ordinary writing, and is used invariably in Scripture on other occasions, to denote the literal period. This variation is most significant if we accept the year-day system, but quite inexplicable on the other view.

The only commonly used measure of time not used in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation is the year. Days, weeks, and months are referred to, but not the time unit "year." The most obvious explanation is that the "year" is the unit symbolized throughout these prophecies.

6. Time of the End

"At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through" (Dan. 11:40). "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (12:2).

The prophecies in Daniel 7-8, and 10-12 lead up to the "time of the end" (8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9), which is followed by the resurrection (12:2) and the setting up of God's everlasting kingdom (7:27).

In the sweep of history described in these prophecies that extend from the prophet in the sixth century B.C. to our time and beyond, literal time periods of only three-and-a-half to six-and-a-half years are not capable of reaching anywhere near this final end time. Therefore, these prophetic time periods should be seen as symbolic and standing for considerably longer periods of actual time, extending to the end of time.

7. Old Testament Examples

In Numbers 14:34, God deliberately used the day-for-a-year principle as a teaching device: "According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection."

And in an acted-out parable, the prophet Ezekiel was told to lie 390 days on his left side and 40 days on his right side, "I have laid on you a day for each year" (Eze. 4:6).

However, Numbers 14 and Ezekiel 4 are not apocalyptic texts. God, therefore, spells it out: One day stands for one year. In apocalyptic texts this is never stated, it is an underlying principle.

Characteristics of apocalyptic texts are:

- Visions and revelations
- Symbolism and imagery
- Cosmic dualism (apocalyptic writings present two opposing personified forces in the universe, God and Satan.)
- Contrast (there are two distinct and separate ages; the present evil age under the control of Satan, and the perfect future age which God will establish

after his victory over Satan)

- Resurrection and judgment is presented as the goal of history
- Appearance of a Messiah
- Angelic interpreters

Daniel 7 is a classic apocalyptic chapter, in which all these characteristics are present. Daniel 4, on the other hand, is not an apocalyptic, but a historical chapter. The "seven times" in verse 16, therefore, are not to be interpreted with the year-day principle. The seven times are seven literal years in the life of Nebuchadnezzar, not 2520 prophetic years. (The lunar year has only 360 days, therefore 3½ times are 1260 days or 42 months, and 360 x 7 is 2520).

8. Daniel 9:24-27

In Daniel 9:24-27 the 70-week time prophecy met its fulfillment at the exact time, if the year-day principle is used to interpret it. Many interpreters, who in other apocalyptic texts do not use the year-day principle, recognize that the 70 weeks are in fact "weeks of years," reaching from the Persian period to the time of Christ. Thus the pragmatic test in Daniel 9 confirms the validity of the year-day principle.

Desmond Ford and others, including the revised *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, have argued that the year-day principle is not involved in Daniel 9. Ford says concerning the term "seventy weeks" in Daniel 9:24: "The word translated 'weeks' in the King James Version and some other versions is literally 'sevens' and, like the words 'dozen' or 'score,' can apply to a variety of things. The Hebrew word there used is never used for a seven-day period, although the singular term can be so used. In ninety out of ninety-four cases in which the OT uses the word *shabua* in the sense of seven days, there are added the explanatory and additional words 'of days,' for *shabua* on its own merely means a *heptad* (a group of series of seven). Here in Daniel 9:24, the Hebrew is masculine, whereas the plural form elsewhere is always feminine."⁴

This sounds pretty convincing but it really isn't. The Hebrew word for "weeks" is the masculine plural form of "week." It is derived from the word for "seven" "as a specialized term to be applied only to the unit of time consisting of seven days, that is, the 'week.'"⁵

Shabua occurs 20 (not 94) times in the Old Testament. An investigation of the 20 texts yields the following results:

- Three times it occurs as a singular noun meaning "one week" (Gen. 29:27, 28; Dan. 9:27). ""Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years"" (Gen. 29:27).
- Once it appears as a dual for "two weeks": ""If she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks"" (Lev. 12:5).
- Eight times it is found as a feminine plural. In five of these texts it appears with the word for "feast" and refers to the Feast of Weeks (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:10, 16; 2 Chron. 8:13; Eze. 45:21). ""You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end"" (Ex. 34:22).
- In Numbers 28:26, most versions translate the feminine plural "Feast of Weeks," although the word "feast" does not appear in the text. Nevertheless, the context seems to indicate it. "Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you present a new grain offering to the Lord in your Feast of Weeks, you shall have

a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work” (Num. 28:26, NASB).

- In Deuteronomy 16:9, in which the feminine plural is used, it refers to the seven weeks between Passover and the Feast of Weeks: “You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from *the time* you begin *to put* the sickle to the grain” (Deut. 16:9).

- In Jeremiah 5:24, the last text where the feminine plural is used, it refers to “the appointed weeks of the harvest” (Jer. 5:24).

- Four times it appears as a masculine plural (Dan. 9:24, 25 [2x], 26; 10:2, 3). The fact that in Daniel it is masculine and not feminine as in other places is irrelevant because it is one of many Hebrew nouns with dual gender. Daniel consistently uses the masculine plural, and most versions translate the word as “weeks.”

In every text outside of the Book of Daniel the meaning of *shabua* is always “week” or “weeks.” To claim that the word literally means “sevens” and “can apply to a variety of things”⁶ is simply not true. It always applies to a week or in plural to weeks.

Neither is it true that “The Hebrew word there used is never used for a seven-day period.”⁷ In Daniel 10:2, 3 the same masculine plural is used twice for “three weeks.” “In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.” The NIV translates the word in Daniel 9:24 as “Seventy ‘sevens,’” but in Daniel 10:2, 3 as “three weeks.”

Desmond Ford’s argument that only when the word for “week” is followed by the word for “days,” as in Daniel 10:2, 3, does it indicate that a week is not valid. He is misinterpreting a Hebrew idiom. As Bill Shea has explained, “When a time unit such as a week, month, or year is followed by the word for ‘days’ in the plural, the idiom is to be understood to signify ‘full’ or ‘complete’ units.”⁸

For example:

- “Then Laban said to him, ‘You are my own flesh and blood.’ After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month” (Gen. 29:14, NIV).

- “You shall eat [quails], not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the Lord who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, ‘Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?’” (Num. 11:19, 20).

- “Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river” (Gen. 41:1).

- “Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, but did not see the king’s face” (2 Sam. 14:28).

Therefore, Daniel 10:2, 3 means “three full weeks” (NKJV) or “three entire weeks” (NASB).

Unfortunately, because most Daniel interpreters no longer use the year-day principle of prophetic interpretation, they argue, like Ford, that Daniel 10:2, 3 indicates “weeks of days” and Daniel 9:24 are “seventy weeks of years.” Stephen Miller, for example, writes: “Gabriel declared that the time involved was ‘seventy sevens.’ . . . ‘Sevens’ (traditionally ‘weeks’) is a literal translation of the Hebrew and refers to periods of seven without specifying what the units are. These may be sevens of years, days, months, or indefinite periods of time.”⁹

He then opts for 70 weeks of years, otherwise the prophecy would not fit the appearance of the Messiah 490 years later. However, as we have shown the word in the Old Testament always refers to the week. Therefore, the claim that it "refers to periods of seven without specifying what the units are" is not supported by Scripture.

The Year-Day Principle in History

The earliest evidence for the year-day principle, though not by that name, can be found in The Book of Jubilees, a Jewish work from the intertestamental period. The Book of Jubilees, dated to the second century B.C., uses the word *week* to refer to seven years. As O. S. Wintermute explains, "Each period of seven years is referred to as a 'week of years' or simply as a 'week.' Each period of seven weeks of years, i.e., forty-nine years, is designated a jubilee."¹⁰ Thus Noah's age in Jubilee 10:16 is given in these words: "Nine hundred and fifty years he completed in his life, nineteen jubilees and two weeks and five years."¹¹

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 19 \text{ jubilees} & = & 19 \times 49 \text{ years} = 931 \text{ years} \\
 2 \text{ weeks} & = & 2 \times 7 \text{ years} = 14 \text{ years} \\
 5 \text{ years} & = & 1 \times 5 = \underline{5 \text{ years}} \\
 & & 950 \text{ years}
 \end{array}$$

According to Rabbi Hersh Goldwurm, "and all the commentators . . . interpret the expression ['seventy weeks' in Daniel 9:24] to mean 490 years: seventy weeks of years."¹² They count 70 years from the destruction of the first temple to the restoration of the temple under Darius (Haggai 1:1-8) and another 420 years to the destruction of the second temple. This adds up to 490 years, although these figures do not harmonize with the actual dates in history (586 B.C. to 70 A.D.).

In the New Testament, the Book of Daniel does not play a major role. In view of the statement in Daniel 12:4 "seal the book until the time of the end," this is no surprise. Those church fathers who wrote a commentary on the book interpreted Daniel along historicist lines with Rome as the fourth power in Daniel 2 and 7. The 70 weeks in Daniel 9:24 were seen as 490 years, but the time prophecies in Daniel 7, 8, and 12 were placed as literal days either in the past in the time of the Roman emperors, or in the future in the time of the final antichrist.

L. E. Froom notes: "We shall find in this period the seventy weeks of Daniel interpreted as 490 years, but there was no application of the year-day principle to the longer time periods by any Christian writer of this early era."¹³

And this is quite understandable. As Irenaeus (died circa. 195) already noted, "For every prophecy, before its fulfillment, is to men [full of] enigmas and ambiguities. But when the time has arrived, and the prediction has come to pass, then the prophecies have a clear and certain exposition."¹⁴

The year-day principle, therefore, did not play an important role in the early centuries of Christianity, though it was not unknown. Julius Africanus in speaking about the 2300 evenings and mornings in Daniel 8:14 says, "If we take the day as a month, just as elsewhere in prophecy days are taken as years . . . we shall find the period fully made out to the 20th year of the reign of Artaxerxes, from the capture of Jerusalem."¹⁵

The first Christian interpreter to apply the year-day principle outside of the

70 weeks, it seems, was Tichonius (late fourth century). "He interpreted the three and a half days of the slaying of the witnesses (Revelation 11:11) to be three and a half years."¹⁶

Following Tichonius, throughout church history a number of Jewish and Christian interpreters used the year-day principle. But particularly toward the end of the 1260-, 1290-, 1335-, and 2300-day prophecies, and following their fulfillment, the number of interpreters who used the year-day principle increased enormously.

The historicist method of interpretation is not, in fact, a late arrival on the theological scene; rather, it rests on a solid biblical and historical foundation. It was used by the angel interpreter in the Book of Daniel, during the intertestamental period, and by Jewish and Christian writers throughout church history. Until the 19th century it was used by most interpreters of the Bible. And in spite of what some may claim, it is not an outdated method belonging to the past, but a valid principle of interpreting apocalyptic prophecies today.

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