

Biblical Biology:

Questions of Life and Death

Apparent Contradictions

Creation Research is occasionally asked to clarify some confusion between the claim that there was no death in the original created good world and the observation that in order for present day man and animals to survive they must eat other living things, and therefore, there was death in the world when it was first created. Even if all animals were originally vegetarian there must still have been the death of plants.

Also, some animals and birds seem to be well designed to eat other animals, birds and invertebrates (worms, insects, etc.). Why would God make them that way if they were meant to eat plants?

Furthermore, how could Adam and Eve avoided squashing, and therefore killing, a few bugs during their normal activities in the Garden of Eden?

Indeed, it is hard to imagine how the original ecosystems could have function without death.

To answer these questions we need to first look at biology in the light of God's word.

Biblical Biology

Plants, animals and humans are all alive in the biological sense, i.e. they are all made of living cells that have information stored on DNA and use that to make, or regulate the use of, many other molecules. They all grow and reproduce. However, God makes clear distinctions between plants, animals and humans, and these are seen in their creation and in God's instructions about them, for the Bible shows there is more to life than just biological structure.

Plants

The creation of plants is described in Genesis 1:11-12.

And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Gen 1:11-12

These were fully functioning plants of all sizes, ready to grow and reproduce after their kind. They were created to provide food and habitat for animals and people, as set in God's instructions to the first humans.

And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

Genesis 1:29-30

The plants are described in Genesis as “green” as in fresh, growing or sprouting, as well as being the colour green, but they are not referred to as “living creatures” in the same way the animals and birds and people are. So what is the difference?

Living Creatures

On the fifth and sixth days God created sea creatures, flying creatures and land creatures as separate kinds, ready to reproduce after their kinds. These are all described as “living creatures.”

Then God said, “Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.” God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind”; and it was so. God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:24-25

The term “living creature” is derived from the Hebrew words *chay nephesh* meaning things that are alive with breath.

This term is used again when God told the first man and woman that they and the birds and animals were to eat plants.

Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so.

Genesis 1:29-30

The description of the birds and animals as “every thing that moves on the earth which has life” uses the Hebrew words *chay nephesh* for “life”. Many years later the animals that came to Noah to be kept alive on the ark are also described as having the “breath of life” in them. (Genesis 6:17-20, 7:14-15) Plants are never described as having *nephesh* or breath of life.

Human Beings

Human beings are different from both plants and animals. The first thing God said about human beings is that they were made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). This is not said about any other created thing. The creation of the first man is described in Genesis 2:7:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

The first man was made out of raw materials, not from a pre-existing animal. This is a flat contradiction to the theory of evolution, which claims that man is just another animal, derived from an already existing animal. The term “living soul” (in some translations “living being” or “living creature”) is the same combination of Hebrew words that was used to describe the

animals as “living creatures,” i.e. *chay nephesh*. However, the word for “breath” in the “breath of life” that God breathed into the man is *něshamah*, which refers to spirit. Thus, human beings are living creatures with spirit. Plants and animals are never described this way.

Lifblood

More information about the differences between plants, animals and people is given after Noah’s flood, when mankind was given permission to eat meat.

The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

Genesis 9:2-4

The word “life” here is also the Hebrew word *nephesh*, but this time it is connected with blood. This is the basis for the English word “lifblood,” and in some modern English translations of the Bible the last sentence of Genesis 9:4 is rendered as “you must not eat meat with the lifblood in it”.

The prohibition on eating blood was given to Noah, and therefore it applies to all people for all time. It was clearly and forcefully spelt out in the food laws God gave to the Jews (Leviticus 17 10-14, Deuteronomy 12: 16, 23-25 and 15:23). Gentile Christians were not bound by the Jewish food laws, but they were forbidden to eat blood. (Acts 15 29) Meat from animals killed in a modern day abattoir does have the blood drained out, and therefore conforms to God’s instructions. However, blood puddings and blood sausages do not.

If we put God’s instructions to Noah together with the description of animals in the creation account we see that “living creatures” are creatures with breath and blood. The connection between breath and blood is not as strange as it seems. One of the essential functions of blood is to deliver oxygen to the body tissues and take away carbon dioxide. Plants do have fluids flowing through them but they are never described as “blood”. Plant fluids do not contain living cells and proteins, nor carry oxygen and carbon dioxide for the plant tissues like the blood of animals and humans.

Lifblood and Sacrifices

The significance of “lifblood” is seen in God’s instructions about sacrifices. Between the Fall of Man and Christ’s death on the cross God’s people were told to make sacrifices for sin. These sacrifices were only foreshadows of the one true sacrifice for all made by Christ, but they served as a constant reminder that the penalty for sin was death, and that all people deserved to die. Suitable sacrifices for sin were clean animals and birds, e.g. lambs, goats, bulls, pigeons and doves. Animals could be a temporary substitute for the death of a human being because they have breath and blood like human beings. Plants don’t shed any blood or lose the breath of life, and therefore do not die in the same way as a human being dies. Plant derivatives such as grain and oil were part of fellowship and thanksgiving sacrifices that celebrated God’s provision for His people, but were not suitable as sacrifices for sin.

Human Reactions to Death

We also observe difference between plants and animals when we compare our reaction to dead animals and dead plants. A dried flower arrangement is made from dead plants but it can be aesthetically pleasing. Dead animals don't have any aesthetic appeal. In fact, they are a stark reminder of the dreadfulness of death.

Created Carnivores?

Over the few thousands of years since God gave permission for man to eat meat the environment has degenerated significantly, and many animals and birds have become carnivores because plant food has become scarcer and less nutritious. They were not created as carnivores.

The fact that an animal has features, e.g. sharp teeth and claws that enable it to be a carnivore does not mean it has to be a carnivore. Features such as sharp teeth and claws can be used to eat plants, if suitable nutritious plants are available. However, if nutritious plants are not available animals and birds will use whatever resources they have to find other sources of food. Let's consider an example. Creation Research recently received a question about woodpeckers, which appear to be specifically designed to eat insects and grubs.

Head Banging Birds

Woodpeckers are often used as an example of superb design. They have a particularly tough skull, a hard beak, a long tongue that is housed in a protective sheath when not in use, and their eyes and brains are so well packed into their skulls they can withstand repetitive head banging that would give any other creature a headache and do serious damage to their eyes and brain.

Genesis 1:30 clearly states that all birds were originally vegetarians. Even today there is a bird known as the Acorn Woodpecker that, as its name suggests, eats and stores acorns. It also eats flowers, fruit and tree sap, as well as insects. Other woodpeckers also have mixed diets of insects and plant materials. In Britain Greater Spotted Woodpeckers are frequent visitors to garden peanut feeders. In the original good world of abundant lush vegetation a diet of flowers, fruit, nuts and tree sap would have supplied the needs of birds, with no need to supplement it with insects, grubs or other small creatures.

The woodpecker's drilling ability helps it obtain tree sap and build nest holes. It also could be a form of communication. It is quite common for woodpeckers to drum on metal objects.

After Noah's Flood, the climate became harsher and food was scarcer. Birds are quite clever and innovative when it comes to finding food and nest spaces. Woodpeckers, like many animals, would need to scavenge for whatever they could get to eat, and make nest holes wherever they could. In the harsh post-Flood climate birds with the most robust beaks and heads, and persistent drilling behaviour would have a better chance of survival in the struggle for life, as these characteristic enabled them to augment their diet with protein-rich insects and grubs which other birds could not reach, and make deeper nest holes to protect their young from the weather. This was natural selection, but it was not evolution.

For more examples of animals that have become carnivores as a result of degeneration, rather than design or evolution browse through items on Diet from the Evidence Web [Fact File](#)

Invertebrate Question

Some commentators have attempted to solve the problem presented by woodpeckers and other insect eating creatures by suggesting that invertebrates were not included in the category of “living creatures,” and therefore could have been eaten in the original good world. This explanation would also remove the problem of how could small bugs avoid being accidentally killed by man and animals as they went about their normal activities? However, Creation Research does not believe this is true to the Biblical text or biological science.

Creeping Things

As we have said above, the Bible does make a distinction between the life of plants and animals, but there is no basis for classifying invertebrates with plants rather than animals, and therefore, not having the same life as animals.

Invertebrates are animals that don't have backbones and include worms, insects, crabs, spiders, centipedes, millipedes, woodlice, snails and slugs. A good catch-all description of these creatures would be “creepy-crawlies” and they fit into the description of living described Genesis 1:24-25, which tells us that God created livestock, beasts of the earth and creeping things or, in some translations, creatures that crawl on the ground. This is reinforced in Genesis 1:30 where God says: “And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” Invertebrates do breathe, even though it is in a different way to vertebrates.

The creeping things are also included in the land dwelling, air breathing animals that God sent to Noah to be kept alive on the ark, as described in Genesis 7.

... and every beast, according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life.

Genesis 7:14-15

After the Flood God gave mankind permission to eat all the “moving things that live,” i.e. birds, fish and animals, whereas before the flood people were only has permission to eat the green plants. This context here indicates the moving things that live are different from the green plants.

As well as moving and having breath, invertebrates also have blood i.e. fluid that is actively pumped around the body, carrying dissolved gases, nutrients and waste products, body defence cells (white blood cells) and proteins. Therefore, they are creatures with lifeblood, and are among the moving things that live.

Invertebrates are also referred to in God's instructions to the Israelites about clean and unclean animals. Amongst the animals that are described as being unclean are “winged insects,” (except for locusts, grasshoppers and crickets) and “any swarming thing that swarms on the ground” and “goes on its belly” and “whatever has many feet”. (Leviticus 11: 20-23, 41-43) Invertebrates fit these descriptions. In fact, only invertebrates “have many feet”. The context of this chapter puts them amongst “living things”.

Squashed Bugs?

Would it be impossible for Adam and Eve to have avoided squashing a few tiny creatures as they walked on the ground or worked in the garden? Think about what a “very good” world would be like. This was a world of lush vegetation and deep rich soils. Small bugs could quickly move to a place of safety in the soil, grass and vegetation when they were aware of Adam and Eve walking and working in the garden or picking fruit from the trees.

Furthermore, not all invertebrates were tiny in the original good world. We know from the fossil record that some were quite large, so there would be no had any trouble avoiding them.

In a good world all plants and animals lived in perfectly sustainable proportions and in perfect harmony with other creatures. Insects and other bugs would not have existed in the nuisance numbers they are now, and would not have attacked or annoyed people and animals, or ravaged the vegetation, so there was no temptation to swat them or kill them to get them out of the way.

A Biblical View of Life and Death

Plants, animals and human beings were created by God as separate types of life forms. Plants are alive physically, and were created to provide food, shelter and an aesthetically pleasing environment. Animals are living creatures with breath and lifeblood. Human beings are living creatures with breath, lifeblood and spirit. Animals die in a similar way to humans in that they lose breath and blood, whereas plants do not. Human beings are unique in being made in the image of God and were given a spirit of life. Therefore, when human beings die, their bodies cease to function and go on to decay, but their spirit returns to their Creator.

The belief that plants, animals and humans all live and die in the same way, and have behaved in the same way since they came into being is not a Biblical world view. It is actually based on the world view of Darwin and Lyell. Darwin taught that all living things are derived from an original living cell that came into being by chance chemical processes. Therefore, a fruit tree, an insect and a human being are all part of one biological continuum, and have all evolved as much as each other through natural selection and the struggle for life.

The belief that the living world has functioned the same way since life began, i.e. survival of the fittest and the struggle for life comes from Darwin, but he was inspired by another man, Charles Lyell, who persuaded people that all physical, chemical, geological and biological processes have always gone on as they have today.⁽¹⁾ This concept is called uniformitarianism, and is sometimes summarised as “the present is the key to the past.” This is a flat contradiction of the Biblical history of the world, which tells us that the present world is very different from the original world. God made the world to be very good, but the world has degenerated due to man’s rebellion against God and by God’s judgement. Therefore, to understand what we see in the world today we need to know what has happened in the past, i.e. Creation, the Fall of Man, Noah’s Flood. Another way of putting this would be “the past is the key to present”.

Ever since Darwin’s and Lyell’s world views have become dominant in the academic world and the popular media many Christians have tried to incorporate their teachings into the Bible. However, Darwin and Lyell were not interested in such compromise. Lyell deliberately set out to “free science from Moses” ⁽²⁾ and later Darwin observed “Lyell is most firmly convinced that he has shaken the faith in the Deluge etc far more efficiently by never having said a word against the Bible, than if he had acted otherwise”. (Darwin, Letter to his son George, 21 Oct 1873)

Rather than compromise with Darwin and Lyell, Christians should stand firm on the truth of the Scriptures, which tell us that death is not a natural part of life. Deep down most people know there is something intrinsically wrong about death and look for a way out. They won't find a solution until they come understand that death is God's judgement on sin, but Christ has paid the penalty for sins and offers eternal life to all those who turn to him in repentance and faith.

Footnotes

1. In 1844 Darwin wrote, in a letter to his friend Leonard Horner, about the influence of Lyell on his own ideas:

I always feel as if my books came half out of Lyell's brains & that I never acknowledge this sufficiently, nor do I know how I can, without saying so in so many words — for I have always thought that the great merit of the Principles [Principles of Geology] was that it altered the whole tone of one's mind & therefore that when seeing a thing never seen by Lyell, one yet saw it partially through his eyes.

Charles Darwin, Letter to Leonard Horner, 29 Aug 1844

2. Lyell set out his desire to undermine the authority of Scripture and the Church in a letter to a fellow uniformitarian, parliamentarian George Scrope:

I am sure you may get into Q.R. [Quarterly Review] what will free the science [of geology] from Moses, for if treated seriously, the [church] party are quite prepared for it. A bishop, Buckland ascertained (we suppose [Bishop] Sumner), gave Ure a dressing in the British Critic and Theological Review. They see at last the mischief and scandal brought on them by Mosaic systems. ...

I conceived the idea five or six years ago, that if ever the Mosaic geology could be set down [put aside] without giving offence, it would be in an historical sketch, and you must abstract mine, in order to have as little to say as possible yourself.

Charles Lyell: Letter to George Scrope, 14 June 1830