

# A NOTE ON SCRIPTURE AND THE CLAIM OF UNIVERSAL COMMON ANCESTRY

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I am acquainted with many people who have faith in Jesus Christ and agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God but who insist the Bible is compatible with universal common ancestry (UCA), the notion that all species that have ever lived were the modified biological descendants of an original single species, which is generally understood to have been a single-cell organism. This reading of Scripture allows one to baptize the secular evolution story, including the alleged descent of humans and apes from a common ancestor, by claiming it was the means by which God created. On this view, life unfolded as the scientific establishment assures us, by incremental modifications of descendants over eons and red in tooth and claw, the difference being that God was behind the process in some unspecified way instead of it being driven by the blind, nonteleological forces of modern evolutionary theory.

I do not think Scripture leaves room for God to have created this way. I realize these are fighting words to Bible believers who are convinced UCA is true and that Scripture therefore *must* allow it if it also is true, but in my judgment, forcing Scripture into the procrustean bed of UCA strains the texts beyond the breaking point. That requires one to accept the following assertions, which I consider highly dubious for reasons given in the links below (see also, [A Reply to Bruce Gordon's Biblical Critique of Young-Earth Creationism](#)).

(a) Scripture is compatible with God beginning to create billions of years ago. See, e.g.,

[The biblical minimum and maximum age of the earth](#)

[Do the Genesis Genealogies Contain Gaps?](#)

[A Semantic Reevaluation of William Henry Green's Chronological Gaps](#)

[Reasons for Understanding the Genealogies of Gen. 5 and 11 as Gapless](#)

[The genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 and their significance for chronology](#) (must request)

[The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11](#)

[Primeval Chronology Restored: Genesis 5 and 11](#)

[The case for the Septuagint's chronology in Genesis 5 and 11](#)

[Setting the Record Straight on the Primeval Chronology of the LXX](#)

[The Pattern of Western Chronography 100-800 CE](#)

[The Early Church & the Age of the Earth](#) (source of table below)

**Table 3.4: Specific Statements Made by the Early Church Writers  
Concerning the Age of the Earth**

Writer	Date	Date of Creation of Adam (BC)	Reference
Clement of Alexandria	c. 150- c. 215	5 592	<i>Miscellanies</i> 1.21
Julius Africanus	c.160-240	5 500	<i>Chronology</i> , Fragment 1

Hippolytus of Rome	170-236	5 500	<i>Daniel</i> , 4
Origen	185-253	< 10 000	<i>Celsus</i> , 1.20
Eusebius of Caesarea	263-339	5 228	<i>Chronicle</i>
Augustine of Hippo	354-430	< 5 600	<i>City</i> 12.11

(b) Scripture is compatible with a Creation Week spanning billions of years. See, e.g.,

[A Defense of Literal Days in the Creation Week](#)  
[The 'Days' of Creation in Genesis 1](#)  
[Days of Genesis 1: Literal or Nonliteral?](#)  
[Selected Lexical and Grammatical Studies in Genesis 1](#)  
[The meaning of yôm in Genesis 1:1–2:4](#)  
[778 As an Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1:5](#)  
[Views of Westminster Divines on Creation Days](#)

(c) Scripture is compatible with such things as the creation of sea creatures before land plants, land animals before trees, reptiles before birds, and land mammals before marine mammals. See, e.g.,

[Evolution vs. Creation: The Order of Events Matters!](#)  
[Evolution/long ages contradicts Genesis order of Creation](#)

(d) A good and loving God would create by means of predation, death, and suffering and pronounce the result of that morbid process "very good." See, e.g.,

[Why Does God's Creation Include Death and Suffering?](#)  
[Death Is Not Good!](#)

(e) Predation, death, and suffering prior to Adam and Eve sinning are consistent with the biblical evidence about the Edenic state and the consequences of Adam and Eve's sinning. See, e.g.,

[The Fall and the Problem of Millions of Years of Natural Evil](#)  
[Did Death of Any Kind Exist Before the Fall?](#)  
[Creation, Suffering, and the Problem of Evil](#)  
[The Carnivorous Nature and Suffering of Animals](#)  
[Cosmic and universal death from Adam's fall: an exegesis of \*Romans 8:19–23a\*](#)

The claim of universal common ancestry also faces the lesser known challenges I note briefly below, in no particular order. If nothing else, perhaps something here or above will help those who approach Scripture insisting that it be compatible with common ancestry to appreciate better why many Bible believers cannot in good conscience follow them down that road. It troubles me that many who acknowledge the Bible as the word of God are so certain of the inferences they have drawn from the data of nature that they not only reject the historical understanding of creation but dismiss it as unworthy of serious consideration, some even labeling it "an embarrassment." However atheists may judge the matter, can anyone who accepts

Scripture as divine revelation embrace common ancestry with such alacrity given the texts? Dissent if you must, but please do not sniff at an understanding that for millennia was taken as obvious.

### **1. The means of creation employed by God in the beginning cannot be the means of biological diversification that is ongoing today.**

Scripture reveals that when God completed his creation work in the beginning he ceased from that specific creative labor (Gen. 2:1-3) and that this cessation has continued from that time (Heb. 4:3-11). Since descent with modification is an ongoing process of biological diversification, it cannot be the means by which God created in the beginning. That would mean he had not ceased from that specific labor. If one asserts that God was active in the descent with modification that occurred up until the creation of humankind in a way in which he is no longer active, that break needs to be acknowledged with an affirmation that post-human descent with modification is in principle incapable of achieving what occurred before the rise of humans because God was involved in the latter in a unique way. The fact I never hear this break acknowledged makes me think it is not recognized.

### **2. Creation by evolution is inconsistent with God's interest in the distinctiveness and integrity of the created kinds.**

God ordered the "formlessness and emptiness" by separating its differing elements and by creating distinct forms of life ("kinds"). As Allen Ross notes regarding God's creation in kinds, "God continually makes boundaries that the law will employ in teaching the principles of holiness and cleanness." Gordon Wenham writes:

There runs through this chapter a concern with definitions and divisions. God has created different types of plants and given them the power to reproduce: "seed bearing, fruit bearing." There is a givenness about time and space which God has ordered by his own decree. The different species of plant and animal life again bear testimony to God's creative plan. The implication, though not stated, is clear: what God has distinguished and created distinct, man ought not to confuse (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9-11). Order, not chaos, is the hallmark of God's activity.

Part of the creation boundaries is that the created kinds reproduce according to their kind – members of a kind generate other members of that kind. Kenneth Mathews remarks:

The vegetation, like the waters, is given prescribed boundaries: they reproduce "according to their various kinds." "Kind" (*min*) is used for broad categories of animals, birds, and fish (e.g., 1:21, 24-25; 6:20; 7:14). . . . Just as "separations" are integral to creation, so are distinctions among living beings as indicated by their "kinds." Creation and procreation according to "kind" indicates that God has established parameters for creation.

So Scripture indicates that God cares about the distinctiveness and generational integrity of the various kinds of living things he created. But if universal common ancestry is true, then

one kind of creature necessarily and regularly gave birth to another kind. That requires one to believe that God created in a way that was inconsistent with his interest in the distinctiveness and integrity of the kinds, a way that blurred the distinctiveness and violated the integrity. If God created the multitude of kinds by modified descent from a common ancestor, he would not portray that work in a way that so clearly indicates the contrary.

### **3. Birds (flying creatures) descended from neither sea nor land creatures.**

The various kinds of sea creatures and birds (flying creatures) were created on Day 5, before creation of the various kinds of land creatures on Day 6. So birds are revealed to have come into existence before there were any land animals from which to descend. The only potential ancestors of birds according to the text would be some kind of sea creature, but that possibility is eliminated by the fact birds are described as having been formed "out of the ground" (Gen. 2:19). Sea creatures are not said to have been formed out of the ground and would not be thought to have been formed that way because sea and land are separate domains or spheres. So descending from a sea creature would not be described as being formed out of the ground. Thus the text indicates quite clearly that birds descended from neither sea nor land creatures, which means they were created directly and separately by God. An ancient reader of the text would not conclude otherwise.

### **4. Adam was formed before he became a living being and thus was not born to animal parents.**

According to Gen. 2:7, Adam was formed *before* he became a living being. The body was first formed, which is confirmed by the reference to nostrils, and then the breath of life was breathed into it. Only then did the lifeless or inanimate body become a living being. Thus, Gordon Wenham writes, "By blowing on an inanimate body made from the earth, God made man come alive." Gerhard von Rad says, "God 'forms' him from the ground; . . . This man, however, formed from the earth, becomes a living creature only when inspired with the divine breath of life." Victor Hamilton says the creation of man is "a work that includes both formation and animation" and says "dust was the raw material out of which man was created, as 'rib' was the corresponding raw material for the woman." Paul refers to this event in 1 Cor. 15:47, "The first man was of the dust of the earth."

If Adam was born to animal parents, he would have been formed *as* a living being. It would not be accurate to say, at the text does, that he was formed *before* he became a living being.

### **5. If Adam descended from an animal his creation would not be described as his being formed from the ground.**

Scripture says that Adam was formed from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7) and taken from the ground (Gen. 3:19), and yet Eve's creation from Adam's body is *not* described as her being formed or taken from the ground. Rather, she is said to have been made *from Adam* (Gen. 2:22-23). So if Adam was made (descended) from the body of an animal, a reader certainly would not expect his creation to be described as his having been formed and taken from the

ground. He would expect the description to parallel that of Eve's creation, to say that he was made *from the animal*. In saying he was made from the ground, the inspired writer thus reveals that he was not made from an animal.

**6. The honor and respect the Bible insists are due to one's parents make it unthinkable that Adam's parents would be replaced in the account of his creation by repeated references to dirt.**

The Bible places considerable significance on ancestry. All descendants are viewed as being in the body of the ancestor (Heb. 7:9-10) and parents are to be honored and remembered (e.g., Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16, 27:16; Prov. 30:17; Jer. 35:5-19; Mat. 15:4; Eph. 6:2). If the one who gave birth to the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) is called blessed by all generations (Lk. 1:48), one would expect at least some mention of the one who gave birth to the first Adam. One certainly would not expect the mother in whose body Adam was formed and who nursed him in infancy to be replaced by repeated references to an inanimate substance (the ground) as the source of Adam's body.

**7. Descendants of a common ancestor would not qualify as separate kinds from a biblical perspective.**

As F. F. Bruce noted years ago, "an ancestor is regarded in biblical thought as containing within himself all his descendants." This is evident in Heb. 7:9-10 regarding Abraham and Levi. It is also the idea behind the statement that Jacob and Esau were two nations, two peoples, in Rebekah's womb (Gen. 25:23). This unity of ancestors and descendants means that any description of living things being created as separate or distinct kinds would imply to an ancient audience that those kinds did not descend from the same ancestor.

**8. Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 11:7-9 will not work if Adam descended from an animal.**

Paul writes in 1 Cor. 11:7-9: "For a man ought not to cover [his] head, being the image and glory of God; the woman, on the other hand, is the glory of man. For man is not from woman but woman from man; for neither was the man created on account of the woman but the woman on account of the man." In v. 7 Paul draws a contrast between men and women in terms of the object of their glorification. He says the woman's existence glorifies man (meaning in addition to God), whereas man's existence glorifies *only* God. This difference has implications for who is a suitable candidate for wearing the head covering (however one understands that covering). Verse 8 says that the reason for this difference in objects of glorification is that man did not come from woman but woman from man. In other words, woman's existence glorifies man because Adam's body was used in the process of bringing Eve into existence. Since man is, in that sense, woman's progenitor, her existence redounds to his glory. Man's existence, on the other hand, glorifies God exclusively because no other being was involved in man's creation. If Adam descended from an animal, Paul could not make that argument.