

PREDATORS AND PARADISE, ONE MORE TIME

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Abstract

Without question, God's intended diet for His perfect creation was vegetarian. A re-examination of man's moral failure, God's foreknowledge, and the chronology of Earth's sixth day may aid in understanding both the form and function of the predatory animals in the less-than-perfect world in which we live.

Introduction

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). When Paul wrote these words defining men's accountability to God, neither he nor those to whom he was writing had ever seen wolves living with lambs or lions eating straw like cattle (Isaiah 11:6, 7). Those animals we consider predators now were predators then as well (Acts 20:29). Even so, it was this fallen creation order which Paul said pointed men to God as their Creator. There may indeed seem to be a tension between the created order with its obviously vegetarian diet (Genesis 1:30) and the "real" world which we occupy, but it is certainly not without resolution.

Specializations for Predation

The power, speed, stealth, and beauty of predatory animals captivate many of us. The 250 ft/sec (76 meters/sec) stoop of the falcon, the virtually silent flight of owls (made possible by serrations on the leading edges of their primary flight feathers), insectivorous bats' echolocation, heat-sensing organs in some groups of snakes, and the webs of spiders are just a few of countless phenomena which have two things in common: We cannot imagine their belonging to inhabitants of a benign vegetarian paradise, devoid of disease, competition, and predation. Secondly, perhaps even more eloquently than the creatures possessing them, they proclaim DESIGN. It is no wonder Tyler (1996, p. 1) writes, "Today, the carnivorous animals seem to be such an important part of the food chain that we cannot imagine them to have lived in any other way." For all practical purposes, we do not need to do so.

"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good . . . Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array" (Genesis 1:31a, 2:1). "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). Sometimes I fear that we as creationists have become entangled in the food web and its implications in our desire to prolong unnecessarily that period of time during which God exacted a vegetarian diet from His created order. Some of the things He made had talons and

claws, fangs and hooked beaks, incredible visual and auditory acuity, along with a potential for stealth. To date, no one has better verbalized this concept than Stambaugh (1991, p. 136) who introduced "variability within structure." This view holds that the predators' arsenal was complete at the conclusion of Creation, but was not used for killing of prey until after the Fall of man.

The Transition

Assuming that we somewhat uniformly accept the fact of the Fall, it is vital for the point of this paper to attempt to establish its timing. Morris (1976, p. 116) and Stambaugh (1991, p. 133) both feel that man's tenure in Eden was brief, and there is certainly biblical evidence for such a view. Eve was not even named until after her disobedience (Genesis 4:1). There is no scriptural basis for their ever having spent a single night within the confines of the Garden.

Coupling these facts with human nature as we know it (Jeremiah 17:9) introduces the very real possibility that *man may have fallen on the same day as his (and the terrestrial animals') creation*. The biological ramifications of this proposed cascading of events are significant. Just as the countless symbiotic relationships all around us attest to a short creation interval, so an abbreviated time span between Creation and the Fall would allow animals physically and mentally equipped for a carnivorous lifestyle to capture and consume the prey with which they were matched in the food web without the necessity of starving, estivating, hibernating, mutating, or ingesting food for which their digestive tracts were simply never designed.

Obligate carnivores and herbivores exist at opposite ends of the food web, and the differences between them extend far beyond their dentition. Regarding birds, Snyder and Terry (1986, p. 190) write, "Beak, esophagus, proventriculus, ventriculus, and intestines show 'adaptations' that fit the feeding habits of the species." Monogastrism, a short tract, and a relatively simple normal flora (as found in snakes, all of which are obligate carnivores) must be contrasted with the ruminants, whose extensive (over 40m) tract relies on fermentation, supporting a dynamic and complex microbial population. Creationists, as advocates of limited variation, may be well advised to be as intellectually honest about the existence of a common diet in the past as we would have our evolutionist colleagues to be about their common ancestor.

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Accommodation to God's Plan

Could God have foreseen our disobedience and made biological allowances for our existence in a less-than-perfect world? Nowhere in Scripture do we find that God was ever surprised, nor are we to assume that our first parents' sin caught Him unawares (John 2:24-5). On the contrary, a Redeemer was present at Creation (John 1:1-4), as was also a sacrifice, foreshadowing Christ's sacrifice for us on Calvary (Genesis 3:21, Revelation 13:8). The world in which we live is actually, because of sin, God's second best, and is very much in need of that Redeemer. Through Him we regain our initial relationship with our Creator and view the death and disease of this world from God's perspective. Just as the geologic and fossil records bear witness to antediluvian depravity and God's judgment thereon, so predation, disease, and death daily bear witness to the enormity of man's rebellion in Eden.

A legitimate criticism of the foregoing could be based on how God could look at His creation at the close of Earth's sixth day and call it good if created kinds of recent introduction were stalking and killing others. God's greatest work, however, was not the food web, the immune system and tissue regeneration (neither one of which should have a use in Paradise), mitosis, or even the human brain, but REDEMPTION. Eddins and Young (1991, p. 561) write, "Redemption in Christ *completes creation* (emphasis mine), carrying out the purposes of God and making final, complete salvation possible."

Many years ago Kepler (Leith, 1975, p. 62-62) wrote,

Hence every deeply religious man will most carefully refrain from twisting God's word in the most obvious matters so that it denies God's handiwork in nature. When he has understood the most delicately harmonious coordination of the celestial motions, let him ask

himself whether sufficiently correct and sufficiently productive reasons have been discovered for the agreement between the word of God and the hand of God, or whether there is any advantage in rejecting this agreement and by means of censorship destroying this glorification of the boundless beauty of the divine handiwork.

This same principle must apply to our biological inquiries as well.

Conclusion

Because of Its Authorship, the Scripture has absolute integrity and requires no defense. What does demand defense is the relevance of our message to an ever more technical and cynical society. This paper is an attempt to preserve the unity of Scripture (six-day Creation, no death before the Fall) and the observable world of living things around us, God's handiwork.

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Book Announcement

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Lane P. Lester, Dennis L. Englin, and George F. Howe

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