

The Hebrew Corner

Perhaps the most hotly debated topic in science today concerns the origin of life. In particular, the question is whether Charles Darwin's tree of life, in which all life evolved from a common ancestor like branches on a spreading tree, represents the true picture of how the diversity of living forms came into existence. Can we turn to the Tanach for help on this issue? Well, yes and no. The book of Genesis does not go into a lot of detail on the actual creation of various plants and animals, in fact only the first chapter of Genesis deals with the Creation at all, whereas 46 chapters (5-50) trace the origin of the twelve tribes of Israel. The term Genesis, then, could aptly describe the genesis of Israel, not so much the genesis of the earth or of living organisms.

Does Genesis have anything to tell us concerning the truth or fiction of the evolutionary account of the origin of the various living forms. Yes it does, as indicated by the following passage (Genesis 1:21):

“And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind, and God saw that it was good.”

The word kind in Hebrew is meen (מִיֵּן, MEEN), which may also be translated species. This indicates that animals were

created of distinctly different kinds. This is confirmed in a subsequent passage (Genesis 1:24-25):

“And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.”

These passages indicate, although in very general terms, that each of the individual kinds of animals were created directly from the earth, and were constructed with all their differences, and all given the ability to reproduce their own kind. This would contradict the Darwinian tree-of-life model that indicates that only the simplest organisms came from the earth, and then evolved and diversified in a tree-like branching pattern throughout the history of the earth.

In fact, a recent book on the subject of the evolution debate, “Darwin's Doubt,” by author Stephen Meyer, points out that on a geologic time scale, a rapid appearance of widely divergent marine life forms appeared during a brief period of time, referred to by evolution biologists as the Cambrian explosion. This sudden appearance of new animal forms in the fossil records make it doubtful that evolution had sufficient time to progress, and thus favors the Genesis account. Indeed, the more scientists look at the capabilities of the various

forms of life, with the intricate machineries and control systems required to sustain the living organism, the more astonishing the feat of creating one of these becomes.

However, another part of Darwin's theory, that of natural selection, has at least some biblical basis. Consider Genesis 30:31-43, in which Jacob negotiates with Laban, his father-in-law to give him, in repayment for his labor, all his speckled and spotted goats, and brown sheep. Jacob uses a method that allowed him to selectively breed speckled and spotted animals. This method involved both natural breeding and supernatural. He was apparently told by an angel in a dream to put white stripes on rods cut from trees, and allow the farm animals to conceive before the rods, and they would bring forth spotted and speckled offspring. Jacob did this, and then separated the spotted and speckled animals away from Laban's. Then Laban used a form of selective breeding described in the following passage (Genesis 30:41-42):

“And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the cattle in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods. But when the cattle were feeble, he put them not in: so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's.”

The Hebrew word translated as stronger is a form of the verb qashar (קָשַׁר, kah-SHAHR) that means to bind. This form alternately means vigorous. The corresponding word translated as feeble is a form of the verb ataf (אָטַף, ah-

TAHF) that means to be feeble. This “survival of the fittest” method that Jacob used to get the best flocks has similarities to the natural selection concept proposed by Darwin.

Genesis records that when God created the animals he saw this to be good (see previous passage Genesis 1:24-25), represented by the Hebrew word tov (טוב, TOHV). Yet when he created people, it is recorded that he made them in his own image (Genesis 1:27):

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

So we received the best that God could have given us, to be made in his own image. If we were made in God's own image, shouldn't we treat each other accordingly? Be blessed and have a good month.