

# CREATION

Featuring downloadable clips  
from the film *Creation*,  
in cinemas 25<sup>th</sup> September 2009



## Housegroup

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## Creating Conflict

*Are science and religion friends or foes?*

### Introduction

*Creation* (certificate PG; in cinemas 25<sup>th</sup> September 2009) tells of Charles Darwin's struggle to write and publish *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. It's a fascinating and complex story focusing on events in Darwin's life prior to the completion of his great work. As Darwin's ideas about natural selection became firmer and clearer in his mind, so his own Christian faith became weaker and more muddled.

Charles was, by the standard of his day, an unusually devoted and attentive family man. When Annie, his oldest daughter, died in 1851 at the age of ten, the impact on Charles was enormous, snuffing out any remaining faith he had in a God who would allow such things to happen. His wife Emma, by contrast, remained a strongly committed Christian. All these factors combined to hold Charles back from publishing his radical new ideas.

Charles Darwin had arrived at the essentials of his theory by the early 1840s. When he studied medicine in Edinburgh, he had become a friend and student of Robert Grant, who was influenced by the evolutionary ideas of Lamarck and Charles Darwin's grandfather Erasmus Darwin. During the voyage of the Beagle, Darwin read and was much impressed by Charles Lyell's book, arguing that geological changes took place over extremely long timescales. It was during this time that the problem of violence and suffering in nature began to raise questions about why God would create such a world. Within a couple of years of returning from the Beagle expedition, Darwin was speculating more widely on the possibility of transmutation of one species into another. He was very aware that his ideas challenged not only the scientific establishment, but the political and theological establishments too. Given the radical nature of his theory of evolution by natural selection, he felt he needed solid evidence – lots of it. To this end he spent eight years minutely studying barnacles, keeping his ideas to himself and a few friends.

In this session we will focus on the area of controversy most closely associated with Darwin: the relationship between science and faith. We will look primarily at the opening chapters of the Bible, although we will also spend some time in other passages. Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 is an introduction to the whole of Genesis and to the whole Bible. It is hard to overstate its importance for understanding the nature of reality and humanity's place in the world, but it is also the focus of a great deal of controversy. This session does not assume any scientific expertise on the part of group members. Where it has been necessary to use technical terms, they are defined in the glossary that you will find on the handout sheet. We strongly recommend giving out copies of this at the start of the meeting. For more detailed preparation and scientific background, please see the suggestions of further resources which you can find after the leader's notes.



## Bible Briefing

With any passage of the Bible, we always want to see the relevance to our world. But first we must ask a more fundamental question: what was God communicating in the first place? What did this say to the first readers? One key thing to establish is the genre of a passage: what sort of writing is it? When it comes to Genesis 1, the crucial passage for thinking about creation, it's not easy to answer this question. In fact, it's harder to be sure about this passage than almost any other in the Bible.



Genesis 1 is clearly a kind of narrative, but it has some distinctive features. First, it is very stylized. Every phrase in Day 1 (vv. 3–5), for example, becomes a formula which is repeated with variations in Days 2–6. It's unclear whether the chapter is written in prose or poetry. It's midway between the two: grand, formal and highly structured, but without following many of the conventions of Hebrew poetry. Second, there were no human eyewitnesses to these events; at the very least, God had to reveal this to someone at some later time. Third, it is written in a different style to the rest of Genesis, and stands outside the overall structure of the book. Clearly, most of Genesis is intended to be read as straightforward historical narrative. But chapter 1 is not straightforward, whether or not you believe that the days are periods of twenty-four hours.

Can we be more certain about why it was written in the first place? Its purpose was clearly to teach the ancient Israelites some crucial theological truths about God, about the nature of the world they lived in, and about what it meant to be a human being. How long creation took was of little or no interest. It has only become such a highly charged issue in the last couple of centuries. As with all Scripture, the primary purpose is theological. There are also clues in the text which suggest that it was written to challenge false beliefs prevalent in the ancient Near East. In particular, it confronts specific pagan beliefs. There were five main areas of attack:

1. It was standard belief in the ancient Near East that there were many gods. But Genesis constantly refers to God singular: there is only one true God and he is the creator of everything.
2. In Babylonian mythology, before the gods could create anything they had to defeat ancient sea monsters which represented chaos. Genesis 1:21, however, insists that God creates them ('great creatures of the sea' in the NIV). They are God's creatures, under his authority, not his rivals to challenge him.
3. Again in Babylonian mythology, the gods struggled to separate the lower and upper waters (sea and sky). In Genesis 1:6–10, God separates them by simply speaking. He creates by the power of his word, not by magic as the Egyptians believed.
4. Most nations worshipped the sun and moon as gods. But Genesis describes them simply as lights, nothing more. Genesis doesn't even name them. They are not to be worshipped.

5. Human beings were an afterthought in Babylonian belief. The gods made humans to do their work and to provide food for them. But the climax of Genesis 1 is the creation of human beings, uniquely made in the image of God. In chapter two we're even told that God provides us with food. The relationship between humans and our creator is one of the truly distinctive features of the Genesis account of creation.

Critics of Christianity often like to point out the similarities between Genesis and some of the other creation accounts. These similarities are very superficial; the theology of Genesis repeatedly challenges the theology of these other accounts. Genesis was not based on the surrounding creation myths, but deliberately sets out to reject them.

All Christians who believe that the Bible is God's word agree on this. Where we disagree is over whether the days are literal 24-hour days, whether they represent aeons of time, or whether they are a literary device that says nothing about timescales. We disagree over whether God creates instantaneously (special creation) or over long periods of time using processes which he designed for the purpose (evolutionary creation).

There are two extremely important implications of this. The first is that we must not lose sight of the big theological issues by becoming preoccupied with timescales. Second, the fact that people who honour and believe the Bible still come to different conclusions shows that we don't yet know enough to be categorical about these issues. It is vital that we exercise humility in our approach to the text, in forming our conclusions about it, and in the way that we relate to other Christians who reach different conclusions. We must be clear about the theology that this marvelous chapter teaches, but we must bear with one another in love as, together, we wrestle with these issues.



## Session notes

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### Section One: 'And God saw that it was good'

1. 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.' (Genesis 1:1). Why is the first sentence of the Bible so important for understanding everything? What (regardless of different views about processes and timescales) are the implications of these chapters for our view of humanity and our place in the world?
2. Play *Clip G: Look What I Found*

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How do the Darwin children feel about the natural world? Why? How do you feel about it? What aspects of the natural world give you most pleasure?

3. Read **Genesis 1:1 – 2:3**. Genesis 1 repeatedly declares that God's creation is good. What makes it good? In what ways does the creation reflect its creator (see also 2:8–14; Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:20)?
4. What does it mean to be made in the image and likeness of God (vv. 26–29)? How are human beings like God? How are we different?
5. Read **Genesis 2:15–20**.  
Annie Darwin is excited to find a starfish in a rock pool, and delighted at correctly identifying it. What clues are there in Genesis 2 to suggest that the urge to find out about the world and classify things is part of how God has made human beings? How does this affect our view of science?
6. Read **Psalm 111:2**.  
Historian Nick Spencer says that Darwin saw himself as being like Isaac Newton, finding the natural laws which God has ordained for the world. To what extent should this be true of all science? Do you think this notion limits science or motivates it?



## Section Two: Bones of contention

1. Remind people of *Clip G: Look What I Found* (or play it if you haven't done so already). How did you respond to Charles Darwin's explanation of the process of sedimentation? Some Christians would agree with Darwin's statement that the rocks were deposited millions of years ago, whereas others would argue that the sedimentary layers are a result of the Great Flood (Genesis chapters 6 to 9), and therefore are only a few thousand years old. What is there in favour of each of these positions? What are the objections to each of them?
2. Play *Clip F: It's Only A Theory*

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Annie says, 'It's only a theory,' but her father responds, 'It changes everything.' Who do you think is right? If human beings are solely the result of a series of accidents and natural selection, what are the implications for the following:

- the nature of human beings?
- morality?
- our ability to know what is true?



Optional clip: *Darwin Uncovered 3*

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3. Young Earth creationists argue that human beings are special because they are created directly by God's word and in his image. Many evolutionary creationists argue that God breathed his Spirit into human-like creatures at some point in history, stamping his image on them. Compare these ideas with the quote from Richard Dawkins on the handout. How do the different Christian ideas challenge the atheistic evolutionist understanding of human beings?
4. Although Darwin came to describe himself as agnostic, he never entirely lost his belief that God was the original creator. Darwin seems to believe God simply set the wheels of creation in motion, and thereafter remained remote from it. Look at the conclusion to *On the Origin of Species* and Darwin's comment to Joseph Hooker (both on the handout), then read Colossians 1:15-17 and Hebrews 1:3a. How do these passages challenge Darwin's understanding of God's detached relationship with the created order?

### Section Three; Science and faith at war?

1. Play *Clip H: A Battle You Cannot Win*

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Emma is deeply concerned about Charles' soul. After this scene Charles says, in a voiceover, that, 'The loss of religious faith is a slow and gradual process, like the raising of continents.' Do you think he was at war with God? Do you think, as Emma argues, that his obsession with scientific proof closed his mind to spiritual issues?



2. How would you go about sharing your faith with someone who has a scientific background? How might that make it easier to get them to think about the claims of the gospel? How might it be more difficult?
3. Read **1 Corinthians 1:20–25; 2:12–14**. How do you understand the idea of God 'making foolish the wisdom of the world'? To what extent could passages like these legitimately be related to the discussion about science and religion?
4. Play *Clip M: You Decide*

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What different factors do you think led Emma to her decision to let Charles publish his book? Did she make the right or wrong decision? What would you have done in her place?

5. Read **Romans 14:1–13**.

How can arguments about science and faith become 'stumbling blocks or obstacles' for Christians or for others? Would you describe Emma's actions here as satisfying the



demands of this passage or going against them? Does this passage – or any others that have been part of this meeting – make you want to reassess the way you engage with others on the issue of science and faith?

## Additional notes for leaders

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### Section One: 'And God saw that it was good'

1. God and God alone is the creator of everything (Genesis 1:1). For the first readers of Genesis, it was important to realise that God is unique, and that all other gods are nothing. In our culture, we may be more likely to encounter the idea that there is no God at all, but the Bible insists from the outset that there is a God, and that everything else ('the heavens and the earth') owes its existence to his will. Whatever view we have of the process of God's creation (special creation or evolutionary creation) and timescales involved, the theology of this chapter is crucial. As well as affirming that God is the creator of a good and fundamentally moral universe, it makes clear that human beings are the pinnacle of creation: part of it like any animal, yet radically different because we alone bear the image of God.
2. Darwin makes some observations in the video clip about rocks which some Christians may dispute. Don't allow the group to get sidetracked into discussions about geological formation and dating of sedimentary rocks at this stage, but encourage them to save this level of discussion until the first question of section two.
3. God's creation is ordered (see especially Genesis 1:14–18); it has a moral dimension (e.g. Genesis 1:28); it is characterised by dependence on God and interdependence (Genesis 1:29–30 and Genesis 2:15), usefulness (Genesis 1:29, 30; 2:9; see also 3:6) and beauty (Genesis 2:9, 12; 3:6). It is also something that human beings can understand (Genesis 2:10–14, 19–20).
4. Being made in the image and likeness of God does not refer to our physical characteristics, since God is spirit (in his incarnation Jesus becomes a man, but this does not mean that the human form is somehow a characteristic of God). Rather it means that we share some of his abilities and attributes. This would include our capacity for relationships, rationality, creativity, moral awareness, freedom and spirituality. In the ancient world, 'image' also referred to the delegated authority of the king (someone bearing the king's image or seal could act on his authority).
5. The descriptions of trees (Genesis 2:9) and the land of Eden (Genesis 2:10–14) indicate that human beings are interested enough in the natural world to take careful note of them. Observing the natural world is the beginning of science. Adam is given the task of naming the animals and birds. The process of naming involves at least some degree of classification, another fundamental aspect of science. In Genesis 4:22 we see that human beings are also able to develop raw materials into new ones (bronze) and tools: the beginning of technology.
6. Psalm 111:2 was carved above the door of Cambridge's famous Cavendish Laboratory in 1874 at the request of its first director, James Clerk Maxwell. The astronomer Johannes Kepler saw his work in a similar way to Newton, expressing it as 'thinking God's thoughts after him'. The Nick Spencer comments referred to in this question can be found in the Culturewatch.tv episode on *Creation*.

Download from [www.damaris.org/creationmovie](http://www.damaris.org/creationmovie)

## Section Two: Bones of contention

1. This question raises a very contentious issue. Some Christians dispute this, arguing for a young Earth and seeing the six days of Genesis 1 as literal days. Others see no difficulty with the idea of an old earth, seeing the days of creation as long aeons of time or as a literary device which tells us nothing about timescales. Encourage the group to look at the various positions as fairly and objectively as possible, and don't let people become embroiled in a major debate. Encourage brief, gracious responses, and model this yourself.
2. You might find it helpful to show the video clip *Darwin Uncovered 3* (part of the Culturewatch.tv episode on *Creation*) in which Nick Spencer talks about Darwin's questions about the validity of human reason.

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3. One key difference is summed up with the idea of humans being created in the image of God. Both Christian accounts referred to here emphasise the unique place that humans have in God's creation, and see our purpose in life as being tied up in our relationship with God. This stands in stark contrast with the atheist evolutionary view of humans as just another variety of DNA machine, no different from any other form of plant or animal life.
4. Darwin's view is called 'deism'. It accepts God as a first cause but nothing beyond that, with no ongoing involvement in creation and no revelation. Colossians 1:17 states that not only did Christ create all things, but he also holds all of creation together. Hebrews 1:3 states that he sustains all things. It is hard to interpret either of these verses as suggesting a creator who winds his creation up and then simply sits back to watch it go.



### Section Three: Science and faith at war?

1. This discussion could be taken into the broader issue of open or closed minds. While some critics of Christian faith like to characterize the division between 'honest doubt' and 'blind faith', it is equally possible for honest enquiry to lead to faith, and for a closed mind to be found on the side of science. Nobody likes to admit to not being open-minded, but challenge your group to think seriously about whether they may have fallen into a tendency to let others do their thinking for them.
2. This question can easily follow on from the previous one. Both science and religion are, to some extent, attempts to discover truth. Establishing that common ground can enable scientists to consider afresh the truth claims of the Christian faith. For some the issue of proof may be an obstacle, but it may be useful to point out the distinction between proof and evidence. You may find it helpful, in advance of the meeting, to watch the Culturewatch.tv interview with Darwin biographer Nick Spencer, who comments on this towards the end of the interview.

Download from [www.damaris.org/creationmovie](http://www.damaris.org/creationmovie)

3. 1 Corinthians 1:20–25 talks primarily about how Jesus' sacrificial death confounds human wisdom, and is not an attempt to belittle rational, scientific enquiry. Nevertheless, as 1 Corinthians 2:12–14 suggests more directly, it is true that spiritual truth needs to be discerned spiritually. Spiritual truth is by no means irrational, but it cannot be understood in a solely rational way. It is something more than rational, and without the action of the Holy Spirit, we are unable to grasp it. None of this means that we should neglect or look down on rational thought – we are, after all, told to love God with all of our mind, as well as all of our heart and soul (Matthew 22:37).
4. This clip is legitimately open to different interpretations. It could be argued that Emma read Charles' book and was convinced by his argument. It could equally be argued, with reference to her comment 'may God forgive us both', that she was not fully convinced, but felt that the theory warranted further public debate. Alternatively, it may be that she was motivated solely by love for her husband, and that she wanted the book published to save him feeling that he had wasted twenty years of work. Whatever the reasons behind her decision, the clip does suggest that she was concerned about the possible ramifications of it.

It is worth pointing out that while there is no historical evidence that the scene in this clip ever happened, that is not to say that it could not have happened. From what we know of the Darwins' relationship, it is unlikely that Charles would have gone ahead and published without Emma's blessing, making a scenario like the one in the clip entirely plausible. At worst, it is an artistic invention which demonstrates an important truth about Charles and Emma's relationship.

5. Make sure that this final question focuses attention on how you and the group members might apply all this to your own lives. A better understanding of the relationship between science and faith may move some of you past obstacles on your own spiritual journey. It may also be invaluable as a way of helping others to do the same.

## Further resources

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### Resources from Damaris

Other resources relating to *Creation*, including a Culturewatch.tv episode in which Tony Watkins interviews Nick Spencer, are available on [www.damaris.org/creationmovie](http://www.damaris.org/creationmovie)

For other Damaris resources for talking about films, try the following:

[www.culturewatch.org](http://www.culturewatch.org) Thousands of articles and study guides on popular films, television, music, books and more

[www.pollardonfilm.com](http://www.pollardonfilm.com) Nick Pollard thinking through films

### Other resources

*Creation* movie official website [www.creationthemovie.com](http://www.creationthemovie.com)

*Darwin and God* by Nick Spencer (SPCK, 2009)

*Creation and Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* by Denis Alexander (Monarch, 2008)

*Genesis for Today: The Relevance of the Creation/Evolution Debate to Today's Society* by Andy McIntosh (Day One, 2006)

*The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation* (Crux, 2001)

'Ten Things You Need to Know About the Creation/Evolution Debate', article by Tony Watkins, first published in Christianity magazine (with a list of recommendations for further reading) [www.tonywatkins.org/10things](http://www.tonywatkins.org/10things)

American Scientific Affiliation [www.asa3.org](http://www.asa3.org)

Answers in Genesis [www.answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org)

Biblical Creation Society [www.biblicalcreation.org.uk](http://www.biblicalcreation.org.uk)

Christians in Science [www.cis.org.uk](http://www.cis.org.uk)

The Discovery Institute [www.discovery.org](http://www.discovery.org)

Reasons to Believe [www.reasons.org](http://www.reasons.org)





## Acknowledgements

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Designed by Iain Gutteridge ([www.ig-graphic-design.co.uk](http://www.ig-graphic-design.co.uk))

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## Creating Conflict: Are science and religion friends or foes?

*We are machines built by DNA whose purpose is to make more copies of the same DNA. . . . That is exactly what we are here for. We are machines for propagating DNA, and the propagation of DNA is a self-sustaining process. It is every living object's sole reason for living.*

Richard Dawkins, *Growing up in the universe*, BBC Study Guide to the Royal Institution Christmas lectures, (BBC Education, 1991) p. 21.



*It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing in the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. . . . Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.*

Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (John Murray, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1860) p. 490. The first edition did not have the words 'by the Creator' between 'originally breathed' and 'into a few forms or into one'.



*My theology is a simple muddle; I cannot look at the universe as the result of blind chance, yet I can see no evidence of beneficent design or indeed of design of any kind, in the details.*

Charles Darwin, letter to Joseph Hooker, 12 July 1870.

## Glossary

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- Day-Age View:** the idea that each day in Genesis 1 corresponds to a long period of time, with acts of special creation at intervals.
- Evolutionary Creationism:** an alternative name for theistic evolution, the idea that God has created the biological diversity which we see in the world through a process of evolution.
- Intelligent Design (ID):** the idea that certain features of the natural world can only be explained by the existence of an intelligent designer.
- Special Creation:** an instantaneous act of creation by God.
- Theistic Evolution:** see Evolutionary Creationism.
- Young Earth Creationism:** the idea that God created through acts of special creation, and that the earth is therefore only several thousand years old.