

April 19th

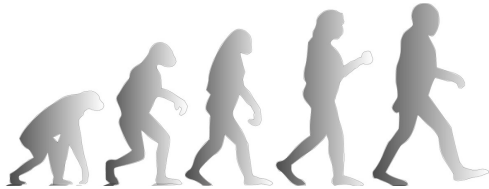
Memory verse

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth:
and the heavens are the work of thy hands.
They shall perish,
but **thou shalt endure**:
yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment;
as a vesture shalt thou change them,
and they shall be changed.

Psalm 102:25-6

These two verses belong together and tell us about the past and the future of the universe. “Thou” refers to God throughout and a very small child could learn the words in bold. A larger family could split the lines up and learn to say them as a joint exercise. In the first chapter of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* it is explained how these words relate to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Something to think about for older children



Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882) died on 19th April. He was a member of a powerful elite group of families, the Darwins, the Wedgwoods (of pottery fame) the Gratton-Guinnesses and others who have held the levers of power in British society down to the present day. We learned about his grandfather, Erasmus, yesterday.

Charles Darwin was a naturalist who worked out a theory to explain the diversity of life on earth without the need for a designer or creator. Noticing the effects of Natural Selection (or adaptation to environment) on creatures, particularly the finches he studied while visiting the Galapagos islands, he concluded that over long ages of time, slow and gradual changes could have produced all the different species of plants and animals we see today from an original “simple” creature such as an amoeba.

The times were right for Darwin's idea. Although the nineteenth century was a time of spiritual revival and widespread preaching of the gospel there were other less healthy currents in society. The vast majority of Victorians believed in God it is true. But the God in whom many of them believed was not the God of the Bible, rather he was a god of their own imagination. Do you remember reading about Charles Jennens' brother in the lesson for 23rd March? He had been told that God did not take any interest in the world once he had set it going. He had been told that he should be dutiful and do good just because it was right and then God would reward him. Such unbiblical ideas gained ground in the nineteenth century.

In Darwin's day, probably the most popular explanation of why we should believe in God's existence was that of William Paley (1743-1805). Paley taught that if we found an intricate thing such as a watch we would assume that someone made it, therefore we should also assume that the world had a creator – God. Now Paley had a point, of course, but his explanation misses out something very important. The world around us is not only complex like a watch: it also contains much evil and suffering. Would a good God really create a world like this?

To begin with, Darwin as he studied for the Church of England ministry, was satisfied with Paley's argument. Later he became uneasy because Paley did not account for the existence of evil. Other experts in the natural world saw no difficulty. They focused on the pleasant aspects of creation and

considered God to be kind but aloof from his creatures. Welsh parson and naturalist Griffith Hughes (1707–c.1758), for instance, had considered the creatures he saw around him as “without defect, without superfluity, exactly fitted and enabled to answer the various purposes of their creator, to minister to the delight and service of man, and to contribute to the beauty and harmony of the universal system.”¹ This view continued to be popular: it was considered rational to think of God as the good creator of a good world. No signs of God's judgement or wrath were recognised in nature, instead his goodness and wisdom were emphasised; pain, suffering and death were glossed over. The cause of these evil things, the sin of our first parents which brought death and suffering into the whole creation, was ignored also. Darwin said he could not imagine that God could be behind the “clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horribly cruel works of nature.”² He made the mistake of assuming that if God was the creator of the world, He was also to blame for the evil now found in it.

A number of thinkers before Darwin had pondered ideas of the gradual development of nature, Robert Chambers (1802-1871), Jean Lamarck (1744-1829) and Darwin's own grandfather Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) among them, as we read yesterday. Charles Darwin, convinced that a good God would not create a universe containing so much evil, began to search for some *natural* law which could have led to the diversity of nature.

Darwin thought he had found the answer in the process of natural selection. If there was enough time, he argued, this would bring about the diversity we see in nature without the need for God's intervention.

Darwin's idea of evolution was taken up eagerly. Only a few people noticed that the theory was faulty even on its own terms. It may have been a way of accounting for the existence of evil but, in removing God from the scene, Darwin also removed any ultimate moral authority. This in turn makes it impossible even to *define* evil.

As science has progressed, other problems with Darwin's idea of gradual evolution by means of natural selection have become apparent. Darwin recognised, for instance, the great gaps in the fossil record. There were no transitional forms – creatures in the process of becoming other creatures. Darwin put this down to the scarcity of fossils and was confident that, if his theory was correct, many transitional forms would be discovered as more fossils were collected. His confidence was misplaced. Very few fossils that could even remotely be described as transitional have ever been found and experts in the field of evolution admit as much. In Darwin's day no one had any idea of the complexity of living things. We now know that every cell is an indescribably complex machine. Darwin had no idea of this; he thought the cell was just a blob of material. But the amoeba is not a simple creature at all. At best this problem pushes the amount of time needed for evolution beyond credible limits. At worst it raises the question starkly: where did the information for this complexity come from? We know that information comes from intelligence; it cannot arise on its own. This is Paley's watch all over again.

But as all these problems came to the surface, Darwin's idea was not abandoned. A theory which released humanity from the necessity of believing in a God who would one day hold its members to account for their actions was too valuable to be thrown away. Even today, most people you meet will tell you they think people and animals and plants evolved. They do not necessarily conclude from this that God does not exist but they tend to live as if he did not. How much more credible is the Bible's account of the origins of the universe! *Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth...*

1 Quoted in Cornelius G. Hunter, *Darwin's God* (Grand Rapids, 2001) p.131

2 Darwin quoted in Cornelius G. Hunter, *Darwin's God* (Grand Rapids, 2001) p.140.

Something to listen to and something to sing

The composer Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876), a close contemporary of Darwin, was born on 19th April. He was a composer of church music and many of his hymn tunes are still sung today. Two of the most popular are *Aurelia* (The church's one foundation) and *Wilton* (O Thou who camest from above) 343 and 783 in the old edition of *Christian Hymns* and easily available on line. His short anthem *Lead me Lord* (892 in the old edition of *Christian Hymns*) is easy to learn to sing too. Try to listen to some of his organ music or choral music.³

Something to make



Have you ever been out on a lake or the sea in a small boat? If the boat had an engine it was probably an outboard motor. Ole Evinrude (1877-1934), a Norwegian inventor and manufacturer was born on 19th April. Evinrude owned a small rowing boat and as he worked hard at the oars one day on his way to picnic on a small island he resolved to invent a way of propelling small boats without so much hard work. This led to the invention of the outboard motor which he patented in 1910. You will find instructions on how to make your own boat powered by a rubber band in the lesson for 23rd April. Make one today if you don't want to wait until then!

3 You can hear his *Lead me Lord* here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIwxmEKdIQw>