

Very Very Good, Very Good, and Animal Death before the Fall

"Very good" is not the highest good as expressed in the Hebrew of the Bible

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This article is about the claim that the words “very good” in Genesis 1:31 indicate that there was “no animal death before the Fall.” This claim is often used to assert that the fossilized bones of animals (i.e., the bones of fossil record) cannot be older than Adam (mankind) and therefore the six creative times of Genesis could not be long periods of time. This interpretation is used to oppose the accepted geological dating of the fossils, and to oppose “day-age” and other old Earth creationist views. The successful affirmation of the truth claims of the Bible requires that enthusiastic advocates not make claims beyond what can be supported by Scripture. The inerrancy of the Bible and the truth of the biblical creation account are impaired by any claims that are not consistent with the Hebrew text of the Bible.

What do the Hebrew words translated “very good” mean?

The Hebrew text of the Bible uses “very very good” to indicate that things are “more good” than “very good.” “Very good” does **not** exclude physical death as commonly asserted by those who advocate the doctrine of “no animal death before the Fall.” This will be established by two examples. Following the examples, additional verses used by those advocating “no animal death before the Fall” will be discussed.

Example 1: The “very very good land” reported in Numbers 14:7. This is the report of Joshua and Caleb where they advocate entering the land of Canaan following the Exodus. The KJV and YLT (Young’s Literal Translation) are both shown below. The YLT closely follows the Hebrew as shown by the translation below the four Hebrew words used to describe the land in Numbers 14:7.

KJV Numbers 14:7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying,
The land, which we passed through to search it, *is an exceeding good land.*

YLT Numbers 14:7 and they speak unto all the company of the sons of Israel, saying,
The land into which we have passed over to spy it, *is a very very good land;*

מֵאֵד מֵאֵד הָאָרֶץ טוֹבָה (The ה ending the word טוֹבָה “good” shows that “good” refers to the land.)
very very the land good ← **Start here. Hebrew reads from right to left.**

The phrase “very very good” means that the land was exceedingly fertile and productive, not that it was perfect or free of death and danger. The productivity of the land is described in Numbers 13:27 as “. . . and surely it floweth with milk and honey. . .” This “very very good land” was also a land in which animal death was occurring, thereby contradicting the claim that the “very good” indicates “no animal death before the Fall.” This “very very good land” contained dangerous people. The Israelites feared death and other dangers as indicated in Numbers 14:3.

KJV Numbers 14:3 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

Exodus 23:29, quoted below, refers to the future entry of the Israelites into the land of Canaan, and illustrates more about the animals. The animals (beast of the field) are also dangerous.

KJV Exodus 23:29 I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the הַשָּׂדֵה הַחַיָּה beast of the field multiply against thee.

Hosea 13:8 places the bear and the lion among the הַשָּׂדֵה הַחַיָּה “beast of the field.” In Hosea 13:8, the two Hebrew words הַשָּׂדֵה הַחַיָּה are usually translated as “wild beast” or as “wild animal,” thereby illustrating the meaning.

Is the doubled use of adjectives common in biblical Hebrew?

Yes, repeated adjective use is common. As an example, consider “holy” and “more holy” as expressed in biblical Hebrew. In Hebrew, holy is indicated by a single use of the word holy. The next stage, more holy, is indicated by a doubled use of the word holy. Some translations (such as the NAS) translate the doubled Hebrew as “holy of holies,” closely following the Hebrew. More commonly, English translations translate the repeated “holy holy” as “most holy,” concealing the underlying Hebrew word pattern. The pattern of multiple uses of the word holy

for a higher level of holiness continues in Isaiah 6:3. There the seraphims cry “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts.” The cry “Holy, holy, holy” repeats in Revelation 4:8, a scene that is similar to the scene of Isaiah 6:3.

Example 2: Another use of “very very” in a verse about the flood of Noah:

KJV **Genesis 7:19** And the waters **prevailed exceedingly** upon the earth; and all the high hills, that *were* under the whole heaven, were covered.

YLT **Genesis 7:19** And the waters have been **very very mighty** on the earth, . . .

וְהַמַּיִם וְהַבְּרִיּוֹת מְאֹד מְאֹד עַל הָאָרֶץ Genesis 7:19
 the earth upon very very mighty and the waters ← **Start here. Hebrew reads from right to left.**

In Genesis 7:19, “very very” is used to indicate the magnitude of the flood, which cannot adequately be described by “very.” The KJV translates “prevailed exceedingly” instead of the more literal “very very mighty” of the YLT. The doubled Hebrew מְאֹד מְאֹד (very very) appears in the Bible six times, two of which are in Genesis. It also appears as “in-very very” six times, three of which are in Genesis.

What does the Bible say about animal death?

In Job, chapter 38, God rebukes Job for his assumption that he (Job) understands the working of God’s creation. The rebuke is recorded in verse 2.

KJV **Job 38:1-2** ¹ Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,
² Who *is* this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

What does God say about carnivorous animals? How does God view carnivorous animals using other animals as food? The Bible records that God provides the other animals as food and that God views this as **good**. After rebuking Job for speaking without knowledge, God speaks of His creation of planet Earth and the physical processes thereof. Then, in Job 38:39-41, God refers to His feeding of carnivorous animals.

KJV **Job 38:39-41** ³⁹ Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion? or fill the appetite of the young lions,
⁴⁰ When they couch in *their* dens, *and* abide in the covert to lie in wait?
⁴¹ Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat.

In the end, Job first admits that he has spoken without knowledge.

ASV **Job 42:3** Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not, Things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. . . .

Job then repents.

ASV **Job 42:6** Wherefore I abhor *myself*, And repent in dust and ashes.

Similarly in Psalm 104, a Psalm that glorifies God and refers to the goodness of God’s creation, God takes credit for feeding the lion.

KJV **Psalm 104:20-21**

²⁰ Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep *forth*.

²¹ **The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.**

Then, in verses 25-28 the feeding of the living creatures is described as “they are filled with good.”

KJV **Psalm 104:24-28**

²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.

²⁵ *So is* this great and wide sea, wherein *are* things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts.

²⁶ There go the ships: *there is* that leviathan, *whom* thou hast made to play therein.

²⁷ **These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give *them* their meat in due season.**

²⁸ **That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good.**

Conclusion: The use of “very very good” in the Bible contradicts the claim that “very good” indicates “no animal death before the Fall.” The term “very very good” is used to describe the land of Canaan and therefore does not exclude animal death. Other verses tell us that God provides animals as food for carnivorous animals and that this is good. The phrase “very good” then also must allow animal death as it is intermediate between the good and the “very very good” which do include animal death. The death that God considers **not good** is the death of humans as stated in Genesis 9:5-6.

ASV **Genesis 9:5-6**

⁵ And surely your blood, *the blood* of your lives, will I require; At the hand of every beast will I require it. And at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man’s brother, will I require the life of man.

⁶ Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: **For in the image of God made he man.**

Biblically, humans differ from the animals. Mankind is consistently said to be made in the image of God. Animals are provided as food to carnivorous animals, are food for mankind, and are specified as food for festivals of thanksgiving to God, and as sacrifices. Human sacrifice is prohibited. There is a difference.

Why is the “very good” argument made?

The “very good” argument is usually made because another argument, based on Romans 5:12-21 and 1Corinthians 15:21-22, has been shown to be incorrect. Those advocating that planet Earth is young (i.e., about 10,000 years old) often use an argument that starts by first quoting Romans 5:12, and then expanding the claimed scope of Romans 5:12 to include the death of animals in addition to the death of men. Romans 5:12 is:

KJV Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one **man** sin entered into the world, and **death by sin**;
and so **death** passed upon all **men**, for that all have sinned:

In Romans 5:12, Paul refers to man and does so using a form of the Greek word ἀνθρώπος (*anthropos*), the word from which we get the English word anthropology. Thayer’s Greek lexicon says of *anthropos*: “It is used 1. universally, with reference to the genus or nature, without distinction of sex, *a human being, whether male or female*.” Restated more clearly, *anthropos* always refers to **human beings**. Paul also uses *anthropos* in 1Corinthians 15:21-22 and 1Corinthians 15:34-39. In 1Corinthians 15:39, Paul shows that his use of *anthropos* does **not** include animals and birds by stating that the **flesh** of men (*anthropos*) and the **flesh** of animals and birds are different.

NAS **1Corinthians 15:39** All **flesh** is not the same **flesh**, but there is one *flesh* of **men**,
and another **flesh** of beasts, and another **flesh** of birds, and another of fish.

What sort of “death” is being referenced in Romans 5:12-21 and 1Corinthians 15:21-22?

It is generally held that the death is spiritual death. The words sin, justification, grace, and law used in Romans 5:12-21 apply to mankind’s spiritual nature. Many commentators note that Adam did not physically die when he ate the forbidden fruit, but that he became spiritually separated from God and his eventual physical death was certain. It is commonly observed that sin is possible only for **men** (*anthropos*). A good discussion of the spiritual death of Adam, physical death, and eternal death can be found in the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* by Gleason Archer.¹

A more complete explanation about what Genesis says about the age of the Earth can be found in my book **READING GENESIS ONE: Comparing Biblical Hebrew with English Translation**. That book and another smaller book, **Genesis One and the Age of the Earth** are available from www.creationingenesis.com **READING GENESIS ONE** is also available from amazon.com

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¹ Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties*, pages 72-74, Regency Reference Library, Zondervan, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1982, ISBN 0310435706.