

LCMS

Frequently Asked Questions

LCMS Views – The Bible

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The Bible

Age of the earth

Q: *What is the LCMS position regarding the age of the earth? Must we accept literally the creation account that points in the direction of a relatively young earth, given the amount of scientific evidence that concludes the earth's age to be in the billions of years?*

A: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod does not have an official position on the precise "age of the earth," since the Bible itself does not tell us how old the earth is. Nor is it the Synod's position that everything in the Bible is to be understood "literally." There is much in the Bible that clearly purports not to be understood literally--but this must be determined by the Bible itself, not by science or human reason. There is nothing in the Bible itself to suggest that the creation account is not meant to be taken literally.

The Synod has affirmed the belief, therefore, based on Scripture's account of creation in the book of Genesis and other clear passages of Scripture, that "God by the almighty power of His Word created all things in six days by a series of creative acts," that "Adam and Eve were real, historical human beings, the first two people in the world," and that "we must confess what St. Paul says in Romans 5:12" about the origin of sin through Adam as described in Genesis 3 (1967 Synodical Resolution 2-31). The Synod has also, therefore, stated that it rejects "all those world views, philosophical theories, exegetical interpretations and other hypotheses which pervert these biblical teachings and thus obscure the Gospel" (1967 Synodical Resolution 2-31).

At the same time, the Synod firmly believes that there can be no actual contradiction between genuine scientific truth and the Bible. When it comes to the issue of the age of the earth, several possibilities exist for "harmonizing" Biblical teachings with scientific studies (e.g., God created the world in an already "mature" state, so that scientific "data" leads one to the conclusion that it is older than it actually is, etc.)

Numerous books are available that discuss these issues in more detail. One of these is *Studies in Creation* by John Klotz (1985), available by contacting Concordia Publishing House (800-325-3040 or www.cph.org), and asking for stock no. 12-3004.

Usage: We urge you to contact an LCMS pastor in your area for more in-depth discussion.

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Animals in Heaven?

Q: *My four-year-old son wants to know if he will see his dog when he dies and goes to heaven. Will he? Do I tell him that even though God created all the animals too, people are the only ones that go to heaven?*

A: In the "Q&A" column of the January 1995 issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran* (the official periodical of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod), Rev. John Brug gives the following helpful response to the question, "Will there be animals in heaven?"

Since animals do not have immortal souls, we might think the answer is no. Several facts, however, make one hesitant to be satisfied with a simple "no." Our eternal home is a new earth (Isaiah 65:17ff, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1). Isaiah 65:25 speaks of it as a place in which the wolf and the lamb live together peacefully.

This may be figurative language, but one other passage suggests animals might be in our eternal home. Romans 8:21 says that "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage." In this present, sin-cursed world, we inflict suffering on animals, and they inflict suffering on us. At Christ's coming, when this world is freed from the effects of sin, animals, too, will be freed from suffering.

That text also says the creation will be "brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." That might mean there may be plants and animals in the new earth as there were in the first earth. If there are animals on the new earth, they will be good creatures of God as the animals of the first earth were.

In short, the answer is a cautious "maybe."

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Are Bible stories true?

Q: *I was raised in the Lutheran church, believing that the Bible stories we learned were literally true. Since our transfer to Louisiana, I had been attending a Methodist church because there is no Lutheran church in this area. A lay leader has been telling us that the story of Jonah is a fictional story, not true. What does the Lutheran church teach with respect to this and other stories in the Old Testament?*

A: It is true that there are different kinds of literature in the scriptures including such things as poetry, wisdom literature, historical narrative, apocalyptic literature and perhaps others. However, unless there is some reason not to, the words of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament are to be taken literally.

With respect to the matter of Jonah, there is no indication in the text that the account is not to be taken literally. In fact, it would seem that our Lord, Jesus, took it literally as he spoke of his death and resurrection. He pointed out that as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man would be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.

While I see no reason for or indication of the fact that the account regarding Jonah as well as many other accounts of incidents in the Old Testament are not to be taken literally, it is perhaps best to concentrate on the purpose of the recording of these accounts. In the case of Jonah, it is clear that God was intending to point out that He is a God of grace and mercy who will forgive and spare those who turn to Him and that He is the Lord and Deliverer not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles.

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Is there a translation the LCMS prefers?

Q: Which translation of the Bible has been officially adopted by the LCMS? Since, we, as Lutherans, believe the Bible to be our infallible guide, which guide should we be using? KJV, NIV, RSV, Living Bible, Phillips, etc.?

A: The LCMS has not "adopted" nor does it officially promote any particular translation of the Bible. Each translation must be judged by its faithfulness to the original texts (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) in which Scripture was originally written, and by its helpfulness in communicating what the Bible actually says in language that people today (of various cultures, languages and dialects) can understand.

A helpful discussion of this issue is contained in an article written by LCMS professor Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs titled [All Those Translations!](#) that appeared in the November 1998 issue of *The Lutheran Witness*.

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Bible inerrancy

Q: *I'm interested in how the LCMS came to the view of inerrancy of the Bible since the evidence is overwhelming that Martin Luther rejected the notion of Biblical inerrancy.*

A: In response, let me note the following. Luther said the following in the *Large Catechism*: "We know that God does not lie. My neighbor and I-in short, all men-may err and deceive, but God's Word cannot err" (LC IV, 57). Again he states in the *Large Catechism*, "If you cannot feel the need, therefore, at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you, and they know your flesh better than you yourself do" (LC V, 76). Luther's view on this question is summarized by the Lutheran Cyclopedia as follows: "Scripture remained [Luther's] sole authority. Though many things in the Bible puzzled and amazed him, he admitted no error in its original MSS. At the same time he emphasized the human part in its writing."

The Lutheran position on the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures was first developed by the Lutheran dogmaticians (theologians) of the 17th century. For a review of this teaching and its roots following the period of the Reformation see Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture in the Concordia Heritage Series* (Edinburgh, 1955), 76-87. See also "F. The Infallibility of Scripture" in *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*.

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Connection between the antichrist and the pope

Q: *As a Methodist living in a new town, I have found a local LCMS church where I feel comfortable and fed. Seeking information, I have looked over your pages on the net and have developed some questions. The connection between the antichrist and pope are unclear to me. Do you believe the pope is the only enemy?*

A: The LCMS does not teach, nor has it ever taught, that any individual Pope as a person, is to be identified with the Antichrist. The historic view of LCMS on the Antichrist is summarized as follows by the Synod's Theological Commission:

The New Testament predicts that the church throughout its history will witness many antichrists (Matt. 24:5,23-24; Mark 13:6,21-22; Luke 21:8; 1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7). All false teachers who teach contrary to Christ's Word are opponents of Christ and, insofar as they do so, are anti-Christ.

However, the Scriptures also teach that there is one climactic "Anti-Christ" (Dan. 7:8,11, 20-21, 24-25; 11:36-45; 2 Thessalonians 2; 1 John 2:18; 4:3; Revelation 17-18). . . Concerning the historical identity of the Antichrist, we affirm the Lutheran Confessions' identification of the Antichrist with the office of the papacy whose official claims continue to correspond to the Scriptural marks listed above. It is important, however, that we observe the distinction which the Lutheran Confessors made between the office of the pope (papacy) and the individual men who fill that office. The latter could be Christians themselves. We do not presume to judge any person's heart. Also, we acknowledge the possibility that the historical form of the Antichrist could change. Of course, in that case another identified by these marks would rise.

In a footnote, the Commission adds:

To the extent that the papacy continues to claim as official dogma the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent which expressly anathematizes, for instance, the doctrine "that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is that trust alone by which we are justified," the judgment of the Lutheran confessional writings that the papacy is the Antichrist holds. At the same time, of course, we must recognize the possibility, under God's guidance, that contemporary discussions and statements (e.g., 1983 U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue statement on "Justification by Faith") could lead to a revision of the Roman Catholic position regarding Tridentine dogma.

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