

Sizing the day

A review of
The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation
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This volume is the most recent in a spate of publications presenting multiple views on Genesis and Creation. Unlike the other volumes, this one focuses on what the *Bible* says about the length of the Creation days.

The three views presented are (1) the 24-hour literal day view, (2) the day-age view, and (3) the literary framework view. These views are defended by three teams comprising David Hall and J. Ligon Duncan (24-hour view), Hugh Ross and Gleason Archer (day-age view), and Lee Irons and Meredith Kline (literary framework view). Apart from Hugh Ross, all contributors are from the Presbyterian tradition. The format of the debate has each team presenting their view, followed by a response from each of the other teams. The first team then has the opportunity to make any further clarifications or to respond to any criticisms raised by the opponents.

The relevance of literal Creation days

Hall and Duncan open their presentation by highlighting the great importance of this debate:

‘The debate over the Genesis creation days involves issues of enduring significance to the evangelical Christian community. It involves our doctrine of knowledge (epistemology), doctrine of man (anthropology),

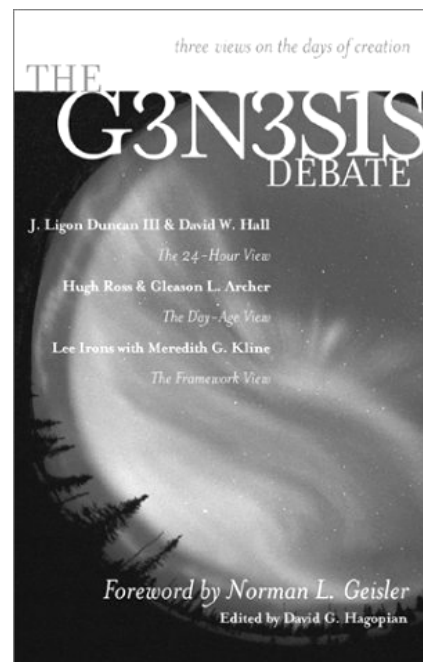
defense of the faith (apologetics), and method of interpretation (hermeneutics), all of which are intertwined with the Genesis creation account’ (p. 21).

Therefore, contrary to popular belief, the debate over the days of Creation is not a trivial or irrelevant side issue—it greatly affects the foundations of Christian theology.

Furthermore, they rightly point out that this is not just a purely exegetical debate—it is also a hermeneutical and theological debate—especially in light of the total lack of exegetical support for the other views (pp. 22–23). Hall and Duncan demonstrate that the Genesis account is not just an apologetic against the pagan world-views of that day, but does indeed present an accurate, historical cosmogony.

History of Genesis interpretation

Hall and Duncan give a broad overview of why they accept the literal day view, as well as offering brief refutations of the most common objections raised against literal days. They also include short analyses of what the rest of the Bible says about Creation. However, probably the most valuable element of their contribution is their summary of the history of interpretation of the Creation days, which clearly demonstrates that the literal day view was the dominant view up to the time of the scientific revolution. This is especially helpful in light of the fact that the historical evidence is often distorted and revised by those who want to find historical support for their non-literal views. Although a very small number of interpreters understood the Creation days in a more figurative sense (e.g. Augustine), Hall and Duncan show that none of these interpretations resemble anything like the day-age or literary framework view.



Overall, Hall and Duncan do a reasonable job of presenting and defending the literal day view, although they tend to rely too much on the history of interpretation. Their exegetical case is relatively shallow.

In their response, Hugh Ross and Gleason Archer attempt to cast doubt over the accuracy of Hall and Duncan’s historical summary. They claim that (contra Hall and Duncan) Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Lactantius, Victorinus of Pettau, Methodius of Olympus and Hippolytus ‘all explicitly endorse six consecutive thousand-year periods for the Genesis Creation days’ (p. 69). This is a wild distortion of the truth and reveals how carelessly Ross and Archer read the ancient sources.

As Hall and Duncan document in their counter-response, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Lactantius, Victorinus and Methodius believed that the literal creation days *represented* six future periods of 1,000 years which would comprise the *entire history of the world*. In other words, the days of creation essentially foreshadow the whole of world history. None of these fathers considered each of the actual Creation days to be literally 1,000 years in length. Ross and Archer also cite Clement of Alexandria as holding to six consecutive 1,000 year periods,

but again Hall and Duncan expose their careless analysis: Clement held to an instantaneous Creation similar to that of Augustine. The same shallow historical research is apparent in Ross and Archer's treatment of Basil and Ambrose, Luther and Calvin, and the Westminster divines.

Arguments from authority?

One point to which Ross and Archer object is the citation of James Barr in support of the 24-hour view. Several years ago, in a letter to David C.C. Watson, James Barr admitted that he thought the literal 24-hour day view was the most natural and sensible understanding of the text and that, to his knowledge, no Hebrew or Old Testament scholar at any world class university thought any differently. Young-Earth creationists (YEC) (including myself) have naturally gained a great deal of mileage out of this admission, citing Barr in their presentations and publications.

However, as Ross and Archer point out, Barr has an agenda. He is an avowed enemy of Biblical inerrancy, so it is not surprising that he makes the above admission, because, from his liberal and rationalistic perspective, the Genesis account is so obviously wrong with respect to the facts of history and science that it forms a perfect platform for him to debunk inerrancy.

Furthermore, Barr's actual claim regarding the opinions of other scholars is quite dubious. The only way Barr's comment could be regarded as remotely truthful is if he defines 'world class university' as only those universities where the faculty share the same liberal, rationalistic, critical views as he does. Contra Barr, R. Laird Harris, Walter C. Kaiser and Gleason Archer himself are well known and internationally recognised Hebrew and Old Testament scholars (and certainly known to Barr) who hold to the day-age theory.

However, it's clear from their writings that they realize that the plain meaning is just as Barr says, but it can't

be right because it disagrees with the supposed 'facts' of science (which are really naturalistic *interpretations* of the facts). So to preserve inerrancy, they invent other ways of understanding the text. And most creationists realize that Barr is a liberal, and point out that Barr doesn't actually believe Genesis. But Barr is simply saying that sound exegesis (in pursuit of the author's intended meaning) would lead one to believe that the writer(s) of Genesis believed in and intended their readers to understand and believe in six literal days of Creation a few thousand years ago and a global Flood. Barr, being an evolutionist, thinks the writer/s was/were pre-scientific and superstitious and therefore wrong, so has no motivation for trying to reinterpret the text.

In any case, citing Barr is really an 'appeal to authority' which is, of course, a logical fallacy. Therefore a citation from Barr should be accompanied by concrete exegetical or theological support for his view, for which there is ample.

General and special revelation

Ross and Archer claim that Hall and Duncan have downplayed the significance of general revelation, since (according to them) knowledge from this source has increased exponentially—especially in astronomy (p. 73). Unfortunately, they do not see the glaring oxymoron in this statement. General revelation, as the name suggests (and as any standard work on systematic theology will show) is revelation that is accessible to all people, in all places and in all times. But if the so-called 'knowledge' from astronomy and other sciences is rapidly increasing at this time in human history then how can it be called general revelation? It was not available to people in previous generations! Clearly, Ross and Archer have wrongly equated modern scientific interpretations and conclusions with general revelation.

Ross and Archer also claim that Christianity is unique in that it is

'testable' and cite Paul's exhortation to 'test everything' (1 Thessalonians 5:21) in support (p. 73). However, this verse is most certainly taken way out of context. Paul is admonishing the Thessalonians to test any prophetic utterances in the church, in order to check whether they are authentic messages from God. This has nothing at all to do with the kind of scientific verification which Ross and Archer obviously have in mind. Furthermore, where does faith come in? Hebrew 11:1 states: 'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see'. To have faith means that we are certain about God's promises even though we do not actually see them. Indeed, that is why we need to trust God!

Repeating tired anti-creationist canards

Other objections raised by Ross and Archer include the 'problem' of non-solar light on Days 1–3, the 'too many' tasks of Adam on the sixth day, and the missing 'evening' and 'morning' close-out phrase on Day Seven. These objections are, of course, nothing new and have been answered many times before in young-Earth publications, and it is tiresome to see the same old objections being raised without any interaction with the responses already published in YEC literature.¹

In their response, Irons and Kline claim that the relationship between the first and fourth days poses an exegetical problem for the 24-hour day view, since a chronological reading implies there were evenings and mornings even though there was no Sun, whereas the framework interpretation avoids this problem. But this is not a new argument, because it has been answered many times in the young-Earth literature.¹ Furthermore, my own critique of Kline's framework interpretation demonstrates that his view introduces many more exegetical problems than it solves.²

Another alleged exegetical problem for the 24-hour day view is the

‘eternal’ sabbath which is supposed to imply an eternal seventh day (they cite Psalm 95 and Hebrews 4 in support). This is also not a new argument, and it too has been answered in the YEC literature.³ Ironically, Irons and Kline criticize (with some justification) Hall and Duncan for not being particularly well acquainted with the literature of the framework interpretation, which has resulted in their general misrepresentation of that position, and their failure to deal with the exegetical issues. Yet in light of Irons and Kline’s lack of familiarity with young-Earth creationist literature, their criticism seems rather like a case of ‘the pot calling the kettle black’.

Like Ross and Archer, Irons and Kline also question Hall and Duncan’s historical analysis, but their objections are rebutted in the response.

Defending the day-age dogma

After reading the contribution on the day-age view by Ross and Archer, I am convinced that both these men are so totally confused that it is difficult to take their ideas seriously. Their presentation opens with an affirmation of the ‘dual-revelation theory’ which is not only a denial of the historic doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, but also shows a great misunderstanding of what general revelation entails.⁴ In addition, as with Irons and Kline, they also claim that the seventh day of Creation is still continuing, and therefore the other Creation days must also be long periods of time.

Ross and Archer make the absurd claim that the Creation day controversy continues because people are afraid to integrate science and Scripture, believing that science will shatter their confidence in Scripture (p. 124). First, much of what goes by the name of ‘science’ is not science at all, but rather, philosophical paradigms and untestable assumptions dressed up to sound scientific. Second, the very fact that YEC reject this pseudo-science in favour of the Genesis account demonstrates that they have full confidence in the truth and authority of Scripture.



In Exodus 20:10–11, God himself equates the days of Creation with the periods of time we now experience. If ‘day’ in Genesis 1 means anything other than a normal solar day, this commandment becomes nonsense.

Third, until recently, nearly all of the YEC writers have been highly qualified scientists, who have attempted, with remarkable success, to show that evolution is not scientific fact or even science and that the true scientific facts confirm the literal truth of Genesis.

It seems, however, that it is Ross and Archer and others who hold to the day age view, who have lost their confidence in Scripture. I.e. they appear to be absolutely certain about naturalistic theories about the age and origin of the cosmos and Earth, but are very skeptical about the obvious meaning of Genesis 1–11. Thus, they have no problem with bending and stretching the text way past breaking point in order to get it to fit the latest consensus theories of the scientific establishment. They are, however, quite right that the controversy is being prolonged by nonexegetical issues. A considered and thorough exegesis of Genesis 1 reveals overwhelming support for the literal 24-hour day view.

What is a literal ‘day’?

Ross and Archer claim that the day-age interpretation is just as ‘literal’ as the literal 24-hour day view. They assert that because Hebrew has a much smaller vocabulary than English, it is natural that *yôm* has multiple literal definitions, one of which is ‘a long (but finite) time period’ (p. 125).

First, this argument is based on a very naïve view of language, which is very surprising given Archer’s reported knowledge of many languages. Linguistic studies have shown that it is possible to express any concept in any language, regardless of the available vocabulary. Languages which have a limited vocabulary may simply require more words to express a concept which a language with a rich vocabulary can express in a single word.

Second, *yôm* can only refer to a period of time when it occurs in a grammatical relationship with certain other words (e.g. in Genesis 2:4, the

preposition *b^e* is prefixed to *yôm*). However, the instances of *yôm* in Genesis 1 do not occur with any of these other words which give it the sense of an indefinite period of time. What we do find in Genesis 1 is *yôm* with a modifying numeral, and in every other instance where *yôm* is modified by a numeral it always refers to a literal 24-hour day. Thirdly, even if Ross and Archer could demonstrate the possibility that *yôm* could *inherently* refer to a long period of time (and they cannot), it would not necessarily mean or imply that the instances of *yôm* in Genesis 1 also refer to a long period of time. It must be demonstrated that *the context of Genesis 1 requires this meaning of yôm*. Neither Ross and Archer nor any other proponent of the day-age view has been able to demonstrate this.

Misrepresentations

One of the more bizarre claims in Ross and Archer's presentation is that YEC, by accepting the (observable) concept of rapid speciation, somehow accept the concept of biological evolution! (pp. 127–128). It should be obvious from such comments that Ross and Archer have very little, if any, understanding of what speciation and biological evolution actually entail. It should not be too difficult for them to understand the difference between variation produced by sorting and loss of already-existing information versus molecules-to-man evolution which requires information-increasing change. However, they evidently have no intention of correctly representing what YECs actually teach, despite the abundance of YEC literature, leaving Ross and Archer without excuse.

The presentation contains many of the same old, tired and erroneous 'Biblical' arguments for the day-age view, which are found in Hugh Ross's own books and writings. These arguments have been refuted over and over again, so there is no need to repeat those refutations here.^{5,6} Indeed, this is the most disappointing aspect of the

Ross/Archer presentation. Ross is known for his exegetical fallacies and general mishandling of Scripture, but one would expect that Archer, who *is* a Hebrew scholar, would inject some careful exegetical analysis and sound judgement. Unfortunately, he has not done this.

Another disappointment is the relatively shallow and defensive response by the literal 24-hour day advocates, Hall and Duncan. It is doubtful whether their comments will make much impression at all on the reader.

Framework fudging

In their response, Irons and Kline object to Ross and Archer's hermeneutic and handling of the text, which, they correctly point out, is driven by science rather than exegesis. It is ironic, however, that the hermeneutic program adopted by Irons and Kline is also driven by scientific concerns, since the framework view is purposely designed to free the Biblical text from scientific criticism.

The framework view presented by Irons and Kline is well organized, well argued and well defended. This view takes the Genesis account of Creation as a theological framework rather than a strictly historical, chronological account. It is important to note that proponents of the framework view do not deny that the people and events alluded to in the Creation account are essentially historical. It should be obvious, however, that in denying the historical and chronological nature of the account, they have very little basis for this acceptance. This particular view is quite sophisticated and has gained a great deal of support among evangelical and conservative theologians and commentators. It does, however, have many serious problems. Unfortunately, both teams of responders do a relatively poor job of exposing these problems. Thus, for thorough refutations of this view, one should consult the work of Joseph Pipa⁷ and my own recently published paper on the framework view.²

In conclusion, although the literal day presentation by Duncan and Hall is one of the better recent defences of the young-Earth interpretation, it would have been much stronger if they had devoted more space to exegetical issues and responded more thoroughly to their opponents' exegetical arguments. This is their presentation's weakest element. For this reason, and in light of the good presentation by Irons and Kline, I think that a searching reader may be more drawn to the framework hypothesis. Nevertheless, this volume has many good points and one will learn a great deal from all of the presentations and their respective responses.

References

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