

Age of the Earth and the Days of Genesis

Excerpt from Wayne Grudem's Introduction to *Theistic Evolution*.¹

[**Question 1.** Does not taking a stance on the days of Genesis jeopardize the veracity, reliability, or authority of Scripture?]

[**Question 2.** Is taking a stance on the days of Genesis necessary to refute a non-historical view of Genesis 1-11?]

[**Proposition 1:** If the errors of theistic evolution, and an allegorical Adam, may be refuted without taking a stance on the days of Genesis, then taking a stance is not a necessary part of our orthodoxy.]

[**Proposition 2:** If sincere believers, competent teachers, well-respected among the reformed churches, are not convinced that taking a stance is necessary to uphold the veracity, reliability, or authority of Scripture, then neither is it a necessary part of our orthodoxy.]

[**Proposition 3:** If a young earth is not necessary to refute those errors, nor to uphold the truth of Scripture, then taking a stance *against* an old earth, is not a necessary part of our orthodoxy.]

What this book is *not* about

This book is not about the age of the earth. We are aware that many sincere Christians hold a “young earth” position (the earth is perhaps 10,000 years old), and many others hold an “old earth” position (the earth is 4.5 billion years old). This book does not take a position on that issue, nor do we discuss it at any point in this book.²

Furthermore, we did not think it wise to frame the discussion of this book in terms of whether the Bible's teachings about creation should be interpreted “literally.” That is because, in biblical studies, the phrase “literal interpretation” is often a slippery expression that can mean a variety of different things to different people.³ For example, some interpreters take it to refer to a mistaken kind of *wooden literalism* that would rule out metaphors and other kinds of figurative speech, but that kind of literalism is inappropriate to the wide diversity of literature found in the Bible.

In addition, any argument about a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 would run the risk of suggesting that we think each “day” in Genesis 1 must be a literal twenty-four-hour day. But we are aware of careful interpreters who argue that a “literal” interpretation of the Hebrew word for “day” still allows the “days” of Genesis 1 to be long periods of time, millions of years each. Yet other interpreters argue that the days could be normal (twenty-four-hour) days, but with millions of years separating each creative day. Others understand the six creation days in Genesis to be a literary “framework” that portrays “days of forming” and “days of filling.” Still others view the six days of creation in terms of analogy with the work-week of a Hebrew laborer.⁴ This book is not concerned with deciding which of these understandings of Genesis 1 is correct, or which ones are properly “literal.”

¹ Excerpted from *Theistic Evolution*, Ed. J.P. Morgan, Stephen C. Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann K. Gauger, and Wayne Grudem (Crossway, Wheaton IL, 2017), pp. 62-65 of 1007 pages. Acclaimed by K. Scott Oliphint, Prof. of Apolog. & System. Theol., WTS; Michael J. Behe, Prof. of Biol. Sci., Lehigh Univ.; Richard Carhart, Prof. Emeritus of Physics, U. Ill.; Vern Poythress, Prof. of NT Interp., WTS; Gordon Wenham, Prof. Emeritus of OT, U. Gloucester, UK; Gary Habermas, Chair Dept. of Philos., Liberty U.; James Hoffmeier, Prof. of OT, Trinity Evang. Div. School; Greg Koukl, Pres. Stand to Reason; Hank Hanegraaff, Pres. CRI; Wm. Dembski, former senior fellow, Discovery Inst.

² However, the science chapters that argue against a Darwinian explanation of the fossil record operate within the commonly assumed chronological framework of hundreds of millions of years for the earth's geological strata. We recognize that Christians who hold a young earth view would assume a different chronological framework.

³ See the discussion of various senses of “literal” interpretation in Vern Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1987), 78-96. Poythress concludes, “What is literal interpretation? It is a confusing term, capable of being used to beg many of the questions at stake in the interpretation of the Bible. We had best not use the phrase (96). See also his helpful discussion of the terms “literal” and “figurative” in “Correlations with Providence in Genesis 2,” *Westminster Theological Journal* (WTJ) 78, no. 1 (Spring 2016); 44-48; also his insightful article, “Dealing with the Genre of Genesis and its Opening Chapters,” WTJ 78, no. 2 (Fall 2016); 217-220.

⁴ See John C. Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the World: The Beginning according to Genesis and Science* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2011), 39-66, for a clear and perceptive explanation of these various understandings of the days

Instead the question is whether Genesis 1-3 should be understood as a *historical narrative* in the sense of *reporting events that the author wants readers to believe actually happened*.⁵ In later chapters, my argument, and the additional arguments of John Currid and Guy Waters, will be that Genesis 1-3 should *not* be understood as primarily figurative or allegorical literature, but should rather be understood as historical narrative, though it is historical narrative with certain unique characteristics. (See chapters 27, 28, and 29).

Finally, this book is not about whether people who support theistic evolution are genuine Christians or are sincere in their beliefs. We do not claim in this book that anyone has carelessly or lightly questioned the truthfulness of Genesis 1-3. On the contrary, the supporters of theistic evolution with whom we interact give clear indications of being genuine, deeply committed Christians. Their writings show a sincere desire to understand the Bible in such a way that it does not contradict the findings of modern science regarding the origin of living creatures.

But we are concerned that they believe that the theory of evolution is so firmly established that they must accept it as true, and must use it as their guiding framework for the interpretation of Genesis 1-3. For example, Karl Giberson and Francis Collins write,

The evidence for macro evolution that has emerged in the past few years is now overwhelming. Virtually all geneticists consider that the evidence proves common ancestry with a level of certainty comparable to the evidence that the Earth goes around the sun.⁶

Our goal in this book is to say to our friends who support theistic evolution, and to many others who have not made up their minds about this issue,

1. that recent scientific evidence presents such significant challenges to key tenets of evolutionary theory, that no biblical interpreter should think that an evolutionary interpretation of Genesis is “scientifically necessary;”
2. that theistic evolution depends on a strictly materialistic definition of science that is philosophically problematic; and
3. that the Bible repeatedly presents as actual historical events many specific aspects of human beings and other living creatures that cannot be reconciled with theistic evolution, and that a denial of those historical specifics seriously undermines several critical Christian doctrines.

[Conclusion: The authors and contributors do not take a stance on the age of the earth, nor on the days of Genesis, thus allowing for differing views, yet they are agreed that theistic evolution, and an allegorical Adam, are inconsistent with “several critical Christian doctrines.” Therefore, taking a stance, or requiring a young earth, need not become a necessary part of our orthodoxy.]

of creation. Lennox favors the view (which I find quite plausible) that Genesis 1 speaks of “a sequence of six *creation* days; that is, days of normal length (with evenings and mornings as the text says) in which God acted to create something new, but days that might well have been separated by long periods of time” (54, emphasis original). He also favors the view that the original creation of the heavens and earth in Genesis 1.1-2 may have occurred long before the first “creation day” in Genesis 1.3-5, which would allow for a very old earth and universe (53).

⁵ In arguing for the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis, C. John Collins rightly says, “In ordinary English as story is “historical” if the author wants his audience to believe the events really happened” (C. John Collins, “A Historical Adam: Old-Earth Creation View,” in *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, ed. Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2013), 147. Collins has a helpful discussion of what is meant by “history,” pp 146-148.

Carl Blomberg says, “a historical narrative recounts that which actually happened; it is the opposite of fiction.” (*The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill., InterVarsity Press, 1987), xviii, n2.

See also the discussion by V. Phillips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1994), 58-87. Long prefers the term “historiography” (this is, the verbal report of events in the past) for what I am calling “historical narrative” in different ways. His conclusion is helpful: “We conclude, then, that historiography involves a creative, though constrained, attempt to depict and interpret significant events or sequences of events from the past” (87).

⁶ Karl Giberson and Francis Collins, *The Language of Science and Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill., InterVarsity, 2011), 49.