



*"THE HEAVENS DECLARE
THE GLORY OF GOD"*
PSALM 19:1

What's Happening?

We plan to hold another chapter meeting in a few months. In the meantime, we are working on planning for the future to improve the effectiveness of the local chapter. The key of which is finding more and better ways to get local people involved in our efforts.

Reasons To Believe is at the forefront of trying to reach unbelievers by using science to remove the obstacles to faith in Jesus Christ. The harvest is great, but the workers are few. We ask you to think prayerfully about how you might contribute to RTB and get involved in the local ministry. If you want to get involved, we encourage you contact us at seattle@reasons.org.

For those who want to grow in the area of apologetics, check out RTB educational programs. Through Reasons Academy, you can take a variety of courses, like "Good Science, Good Faith" a high-school level science apologetics course, and/or college level courses like "Creation and the Bible," "Creation vs. Evolution," "Astronomy and Design," "World Religions" and even "Biblical Archaeology." You can also train to become an official RTB apologist. To do this, contact us and we'll tell you how to proceed.

We welcome your questions and comments. Contact us at seattle@reasons.org or visit our facebook page,  RTB Seattle Area Chapter.

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When Beliefs Become Blinders (Part 4 of 4)

By Greg Moore

This article critiques, "Systematic Theology Texts and the Age of the Earth," by young-earth creationist Terry Mortenson. Parts 1 and 2 dealt with the issue of pre-Fall animal death. Part 3 examined Mortenson's claim that old-earth creationism is contrary to God's character because he did not require long time periods to creation. Here we examine Mortenson's second argument involving God's character.

Long Creation Days Insult God's Character

Of all the issues Mortenson raises, this is the most offensive because it questions the emotional, intellectual and moral qualities of a Being who would choose to behave differently than what the young-earth model dictates. He begins by stating:

If the day-age view or framework hypothesis or any other old-earth view is true, then what kind of God is it who would create the earth instantly and then leave it covered with water for millions of years and then create dry land and plants and let them produce for millions of years before He made the sun? And what kind of God would make the sun, moon and stars to enable man to measure time, but then wait billions of years before He made man to measure the time?⁸³



Let's examine what biblical text tells us about when the sun was created. In Genesis 1:1 we are told, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew phrase "the heavens and the earth" (hashamayim we ha' arets) refers to the entire universe, entire creation and everything that can be seen or has physical existence.⁸⁴ So according to the text, everything in the universe—the sun, moon, stars, planets and other objects—were created prior to the six creative "days."

The idea that the sun was created later comes from a faulty exegesis of the fourth creative "day" (Genesis 1:14-18). Young-earth creationists interpret verse 16—"And God made the two great lights [the sun and moon]...He made the stars also"—to mean God made the heavenly bodies at that time. However, many Bible scholars dispute that view.⁸⁵

Genesis 1:14-18 forms what is known as a temporal overlay. Verses

14-15 tell us God caused the lights to appear in the sky and explains their purpose (to serve as time markers). Verses 16-18 then provide retrospective information about the creation of the lights. The temporal shift comes from the Hebrew word translated “made” (asah) in verse 16 which is better rendered “had made.” This indicates that God “had made” the lights prior to the “and it was so” of verse 15.⁸⁶ From Genesis 1:1, it is evident that this took place “in the beginning.”

So, what happened on “day” four? Let’s examine the creation narrative.

In Genesis 1:2, the scene shifts to the surface of the earth where we are told it is formless and dark with the Spirit of God moving over the waters of the deep. On “day” one, God transforms the atmosphere and causes light to penetrate the darkness that envelops the earth (v. 3-5). On “day” two, he again transforms the atmosphere and establishes a stable water cycle (v. 6-8). On “day” three, he makes dry land appear and causes vegetation to sprout (v. 9-13). From this we can surmise the atmosphere was translucent, permitting sufficient light for plant growth (photosynthesis), but obscuring the heavenly bodies from view. Then on “day” four, he further transforms the atmosphere allowing the heavenly bodies to be visible for the first time from earth.

How much time God took to perform the creative work prior to the fourth “day” cannot be determined from text. Genesis 1:1 does not state how long God took to create the universe and there is no indication how long the events of each creation “day” took. There are also unstated time intervals in the narrative between verse 1:1 and 1:2, verse 1:2 and 1:3, and between each of the creative “days.” As a result, seconds or billions of years could have passed before the sun, moon and stars became visible on “day” four—we simply can’t say with certainty.

Why would God create over long time periods? Because time is meaningless to God. God is an eternal Being who exists outside the space-time dimensions of our universe. Given his extra-dimensional nature, he is omnipresent and has the capability to interact with everything that occurs in our universe at any point in time—past, present or future.⁸⁷ So, it is erroneous to think of God as “waiting” or “taking time” to create. This is why the apostle Peter reminds that “with the Lord a thousand years are like a day” (2 Peter 3:8).

Mortenson goes on to say:

What kind of God would create the earth 4.5 billion years ago and let it exist for one billion years before He made the first microscopic creatures (protozoans) and then waited another 2.875 billion years before He made the first metazoans and then waited another 625 million years before He made Adam, who was the ultimate goal of His creation and was made to rule over all the animals, most of whom lived and died before Adam was created? This is a bizarre, wasteful God, and nothing like the wise and omnipotent Creator revealed in Scripture.⁸⁸

If we follow Mortenson’s logic, anytime God intervenes in the natural order he must accomplish his purposes expeditiously. However, as previously noted, there are many examples of

miraculous events that God performed over time. Consider, for example, the Flood of Noah. God could have flooded the earth the instant Noah’s family was safely aboard the ark. Yet, he chose to take 40 days to do it. Likewise, if God chose to take millions or billions to prepare the creation, who are we to stand in judgment of his methods?

Mortenson continues:

And if God really created in the order and over the long timescales that evolutionists claim, does this not make God a deceiver or a liar when He inspired Moses to write the Genesis 1 account of the order of His creative acts, which is so contradictory to the evolutionary order of events of history?⁸⁹

This assertion is based on Mortenson’s view of the creation narrative and the scientific paradigm which he discloses in another article.⁹⁰ Those interpretations are debated at length elsewhere.⁹¹ Here it suffices to say that when the Hebrew text of Genesis 1 and the scientific data is examined objectively there is no conflict. Rather than contradicting the Bible, science powerfully confirms the veracity of the biblical creation account.

Next Mortenson states:

If millions of years of death and extinction and disease really occurred, then God is like the wicked man of Proverbs 12:10 and He was doing exactly the opposite of what He told the Jews to do. The acceptance of millions of years is an assault on the character of Almighty God.⁹²

Proverbs 12:10 equates animal cruelty with wickedness and several commandments in Leviticus and Deuteronomy demonstrate a concern for the suffering of animals. So, it is clear that God wants us to treat animals humanely. However, this has no bearing on the issue of pre-Fall animal death. If God chose to include animal death in the original creation it was his prerogative and must be considered good because cruelty and wickedness are a violation of his divine nature

Why would God have done that? Animal death plays an important role in the ecosystem he designed. Without predators, herbivore populations will soar. If left unchecked, herbivore populations will over-consume essential fauna, resulting in an ecological meltdown.⁹³ Also many things that are essential for human life come from the death and decay of organisms—coal, oil, limestone, topsoil to name but a few. Both of these illustrate the greater good that comes from animal death.

Mortenson then states:

If God created over those millions of years, then He clearly was not intelligent enough and powerful enough to create the world right in the first place. Either He lacked the sovereign power to control His creation so that it did not destroy most of His previous work or He intentionally created obstacles to hinder Himself from accomplishing His intention of making a very good world. And then all along the way He kept making creatures very similar to the creatures that He had just destroyed by intention or by incompetence and impotence. What a monstrous God this would be! He would be less competent than the most incompetent engineer or

construction worker. And He would be grossly unjust and unrighteous compared to the God of Isaiah who said that when the knowledge of Him fills the earth, animals will not hurt or kill each other or people (Isaiah 11:6–9 and 65:25). Such a cruel, bumbling, and weak God could not be trusted and would not be worthy of our worship.⁹⁴

It is one thing to be passionate about one's beliefs, but it is an entirely different matter to vilify God as a means to discredit an opposing view. God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8) and as Creator he has the prerogative to accomplish what he desires in any manner he chooses. It is not our place to demand that he act according to our expectations. Since both the old-earth and young-earth views are faithful to the biblical text, the debate is over which interpretation best fits the message the divinely-inspired author was trying to convey.

And Mortenson concludes by saying:

Only young-earth creationism gives us a view that is consistent with the glory, wisdom, power, holiness, truthfulness and omniscient intelligence of the God revealed through the pages of Scriptures. As the Bible presents them, the doctrines of death and the nature of God are utterly opposed to the millions-of-years view. If we believe the Bible on these points, then we must completely reject the old-earth view. They cannot both be true.⁹⁵

Neither God's character nor the truth of Scripture hinges upon the age of the earth. The age of the earth has never been an essential doctrine or test of orthodoxy in the Church. While young-earth creationists attempt to elevate it to that status, there is no Scriptural basis for such a contention. Therefore, Christians are free to follow their conscience and have our own conviction before God on this matter (Romans 14).

Synopsis

The argument that God did not require long time periods to create is a simplistic appeal that frames the debate over the length of the creation "days" as a question of what God is capable of. This ignores the fact that God's omnipotence also gives him the freedom to act in any manner he chooses. So, the real issue is what the biblical text informs us about the nature of God's creative work, not what we believe God could or would have done.

As we examine Genesis 1, it becomes evident that the text does not specify how long God took to complete his creative work. The Hebrew verbs in God's creative commands do not require instantaneous miracles. The "it was so" phrase informs us the creative acts were completed, not how or when they were performed. The "evening and morning" refrain merely signals the transition from one "day" to the next. And, there are unstated time intervals of indeterminable length throughout the narrative. So, the text is perfectly consistent with the old-earth contention that the creation occurred over long time periods.

More troubling is the charge that long creation days insult God's character. It is not only unreasonable, but demeaning to insist that God's wisdom, power and goodness depend on the young-

earth view of Genesis 1. In fact, such a claim actually damages the young-earth position. For if God can do no wrong (Deuteronomy 32:4), then this violates Scripture by implying that for God to act certain ways is wrong. Since the Bible does not require a young-earth interpretation of Genesis 1, we should exercise caution in claiming to know how an omnipotent and omniscient Being would create.

CLOSING COMMENTS

People often do the wrong thing for the right reason. There is no doubt Mortenson's article is motivated by a desire to uphold the authority of Scripture. However, that does not justify denigrating other biblically-defensible views of Genesis 1. Readers would be better served by an objective presentation of data that allows them to assess the pros and cons of the two models for themselves, rather than a one-sided advocacy of young-earth creationism.

The Bible tells us that God created the heavens and the Earth, but makes no statement about the age of the universe or planet Earth.⁹⁶ Granted, when one reads English translations of Genesis 1 the wording seems to suggest that the creation "days" were 24-hour periods. However, proper Bible exegesis requires examining the original Hebrew text and taking careful note of the word meanings. When this is done it becomes clear that the question regarding the length of the "days" cannot be answered in dogmatic terms and to demand otherwise is to mold Scripture to our own beliefs rather than come to it as our guide and teacher.⁹⁷

Christians have an intellectual and moral responsibility to pursue truth and represent other people's beliefs fairly and accurately (Acts 17:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:21).⁹⁸ The old earth (day-age) interpretation of Genesis 1 is faithful to Scripture and upholds the essential Christian doctrine. Therefore, it is a completely acceptable view of how God performed his creative work. Mortenson seems to take pride in chastising Christians who don't hold the young-earth view, but here he should heed Calvin's motto that where God makes an end of teaching we should make an end of trying to be wise.⁹⁹

We Christians have "bigger fish to fry." What is lost in the all rhetoric over age of the earth is that our faith is all about Jesus. It is only in him and through him that we are saved and have the promise of eternal life. To demand more simply takes our eyes off Jesus and does more injustice to the Gospel message than any disagreement over secondary issues. This is particularly important as we strive to stem the tide of young people leaving the church and proclaim the Gospel to an unbelieving world.

So I implore Mortenson and other young-earth brothers to remove the blinders of your beliefs and recognize that the pillars of our faith do not hinge on the age of the earth. Old-earth (day-age) creationists are not enemies, but allies in bringing people to Christ—and like you our sole desire is to make people aware of the gift of salvation that is available to us from God through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. No one is asking that you abandon your views. All we ask is that you extend us the grace and liberty to disagree on the age of the earth, something that has been permissible since the earliest days of the Church.¹⁰⁰

Greg Moore is a trained RTB apologist and works for the City of Everett, WA. He is a member of the Seattle Chapter and publishes the chapter newsletter.

ENDNOTES

83. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology...", 180.
84. Whitefield, Reading Genesis One—Comparing Biblical Hebrew with English Translation, (San Jose, R. Whitefield, 2004), 17.
85. See Archer, Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties, 61; J. Vernon McGee quoted in Rodney Whitefield, "The Fourth Creative Day of Genesis," <http://www.creationingenesis.com/TheFourthCreativeDay>.
86. Whitefield, "The Fourth Creative Day of Genesis": Rodney Whitefield, Reading Genesis One—Comparing Biblical Hebrew with English Translation, 104; Archer, Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties, 61.
87. Rich Deem, "The Extradimensional Nature of God," <http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/xdimgod.html>.
88. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology...", 180.
89. Ibid.
90. Terry Mortenson, "Evolution vs. Creation: the order of events matters!" <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs2006/0404order.asp>.
91. Greg Moore, "Does Old-Earth Creationism Contradict Genesis 1?" <http://www.reasons.org/does-old-earth-creationism-contradict-genesis-1>.
92. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology...", 180.
93. Fuzale Rana, "Animal Death Prevents Ecological Meltdown," <http://www.reasons.org/animal-death-prevents-ecological-meltdown> (March 31, 2010)/
94. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology...", 180.
95. Ibid., 181.
96. Whitefield, "Genesis One and the Age of the Earth," 32.
97. Western Theological Seminary, "Westminster Theological Seminary and the Days of Creation."
98. Ken Samples, "Islamic Jihadists Clash Over 9/11 Conspiracy Theory," New Reasons to Believe Vol 3/No. 4 November 2011, www.reasons.org/files/images/e-zine/2011/e-zine-2011-04.pdf
99. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1:6, title, quoted in Western Theological Seminary, "Westminster Theological Seminary and the Days of Creation," <http://www.wts.edu/about/beliefs/statements/creation.html>.
100. Millam, "Coming to Grips with the Early Church Fathers' Perspective on Genesis," http://www.godandscience.org/youngearth/genesis_days_church_fathers.html.



Seattle Chapter Reasons To Believe

Who Are We?

The Seattle Chapter of Reasons To Believe is a local extension of the worldwide, interdenominational Reasons To Believe ministry. We exist to support our parent organization and foster local involvement in the ministry. We serve the Puget Sound and are composed of Christians of different ages and backgrounds.

It is our conviction the same God who created the universe inspired the Bible. Therefore, God's Word must agree with the facts of nature. We reject the notion that science and the Bible are at odds and provide a scientifically-sound and Biblically-faithful alternative to Darwinism and young-Earth creationism.

What Do We Do?

Our mission is to remove the doubts of skeptics and strengthen the faith of believers. We provide scientific, historical and philosophical evidence that supports the Christian worldview and helps remove barriers to a belief in God, the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We carry out this mission by:

- Helping people access RTB and other scientifically and biblically sound resources.
- Bringing nationally-known speakers into the area to promote the scientific reliability of the Bible.
- Assembling a team of local apologists to address questions about science and the Bible.
- Building alliances with local churches, ministries and groups to maximize the exposure of RTB.
- Reaching out to unbelievers with gentleness and respect, to expose them to God's word.

We welcome your involvement and support. For more information, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to: Seattle RTB, PO Box 99683, Seattle, WA 98139-0683.

Questions? Get Answers.

If you're looking for scientific support for your faith or answers to questions about God, the Bible, and science, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Or call the RTB hotline seven days a week, 5:00 to 7:00 PM at 626-335-5282.