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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Genesis 1 - Fact or Framework?

One popular view held by many old-earth advocates is known as the "framework hypothesis." This is the belief that the "days" of creation are not even distinct eras, but overlapping stages of a long evolutionary process. According to this view, the six days described in Genesis 1 do not set forth a chronology of any kind, but rather a metaphorical "framework" by which the creative process is described for our finite human minds.

This view was apparently first set forth by liberal German theologians in the nineteenth century, but it has been adopted and propagated in recent years by some leading evangelicals, most notably Dr. Meredith G. Kline of Westminster theological seminary.

The framework hypothesis starts with the view that the "days" of creation in Genesis 1 are symbolic expressions that have nothing to do with time. Framework advocates note the obvious parallelism between days one and four (the creation of light and the placing of lights in the firmament), days two and five (the separation of air and water and the creation of fish and birds to inhabit air and water), and days three and six (the emergence of the dry land and the creation of land animals)—and they suggest that such parallelism is a clue that the structure of the chapter is merely poetic.

Thus, according to this theory, the sequence of creation may essentially be disregarded, as if some literary form in the passage nullified its literal meaning.

Naturally, advocates of this view accept the modern scientific theory that the formation of the earth required several billion years. They claim the biblical account is nothing more than a metaphorical framework that should overlay our scientific understanding of creation. The language and details of Genesis 1 are unimportant, they say; the only truth this passage aims to teach us is that the hand of divine Providence guided the evolutionary process. The Genesis creation account is thus reduced to a literary device—an extended metaphor that is not to be accepted at face value.

But if the Lord wanted to teach us that creation took place in six literal days, how could He have stated it more plainly than Genesis does? The length of the days is defined by periods of day and night that are governed after day four by the sun and moon. The week itself defines the pattern of human labor and rest. The days are marked by the passage of morning and evening. How could these not signify the chronological progression of God's creative work?

The problem with the framework hypothesis is that it employs a destructive method of interpretation. If the plain meaning of Genesis 1 may be written off and the language treated as nothing more than a literary device, why not do the same with Genesis 3? Indeed, most theological liberals do insist that the talking serpent in chapter 3 signals a fable or a metaphor, and therefore they reject that passage as a literal and historical record of how humanity fell into sin.



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Where does metaphor ultimately end and history begin? After the flood? After the tower of Babel? And why there? Why not regard all the biblical miracles as literary devices? Why could not the resurrection itself be dismissed as a mere allegory? In the words of E. J. Young, "If the 'framework' hypothesis were applied to the narratives of the virgin birth or the resurrection or Romans 5:12 ff., it could as effectively serve to minimize the importance of the content of those passages as it now does the content of the first chapter of Genesis." [Studies in Genesis One (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, n.d.), 99.]

Young points out the fallacy of the "framework" hypothesis:

The question must be raised, "If a nonchronological view of the days be admitted, what is the purpose of mentioning six days?" For, once we reject the chronological sequence which Genesis gives, we are brought to the point where we can really say very little about the content of Genesis one. It is impossible to hold that there are two trios of days, each paralleling the other. Day four . . . speaks of God's placing the light-bearers in the firmament. The firmament, however, had been made on the second day. If the fourth and the first days are two aspects of the same thing, then the second day also (which speaks of the firmament) must precede days one and four. If this procedure be allowed, with its wholesale disregard of grammar, why may we not be consistent and equate all four of these days with the first verse of Genesis? There is no defense against such a procedure, once we abandon the clear language of the text. In all seriousness it must be asked, Can we believe that the first chapter of Genesis intends to teach that day two preceded days one and four? To ask that question is to answer it. [Ibid.]

The simple, rather obvious, fact is that no one would ever think the time-frame for creation was anything other than a normal week of seven days from reading the Bible and allowing it to interpret itself. The Fourth Commandment makes no sense whatsoever apart from an understanding that the days of God's creative work parallel a normal human work week.

The framework hypothesis is the direct result of making modern scientific theory a hermeneutical guideline by which to interpret Scripture. The basic presupposition behind the framework hypothesis is the notion that science speaks with more authority about origins and the age of the earth than Scripture does. Those who embrace such a view have in effect made science an authority over Scripture. They are permitting scientific hypotheses—mere human opinions that have no divine authority whatsoever—to be the hermeneutical rule by which Scripture is interpreted.

There is no warrant for that. Modern scientific opinion is not a valid hermeneutic for interpreting Genesis (or any other portion of Scripture, for that matter). Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16)—inspired truth from God. "[Scripture] never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Jesus summed the point up perfectly when He said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17, KJV). The Bible is supreme truth, and therefore it is the standard by which scientific theory should be evaluated, not vice versa. ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*



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Monkeying with the Meaning

At this moment in history, even though most of modern society is already fully committed to an evolutionary and naturalistic world view, our society still benefits from the collective memory of a biblical world-view. People in general still believe human life is special. They still hold remnants of biblical morality, such as the notion that love is the greatest virtue (1 Corinthians 13:13); service to one another is better than fighting for personal dominion (Matthew 20:25-27); and humility and submission are superior to arrogance and rebellion (1 Peter 5:5).

But to whatever degree secular society still holds those ethical standard; no reason whatsoever for esteeming "virtue" over "vice"; and no justification whatsoever virtues in esteem, it does so entirely without any philosophical foundation. Having already rejected the God revealed in Scripture and embraced instead pure naturalistic materialism, the modern mind has no grounds whatsoever for holding to any or regarding human life as more valuable than any other form of life. Modern society has already abandoned its moral foundation.

As humanity enters the twenty-first century, an even more frightening prospect looms. Now even the church seems to be losing the will to defend what Scripture teaches about human origins. Many in the church are too intimidated or too embarrassed to affirm the literal truth of the biblical account of creation. They are confused by a chorus of authoritative-sounding voices who insist that it is possible—and even pragmatically necessary—to reconcile Scripture with the latest theories of the naturalists.

Of course, theological liberals have long espoused theistic evolution. They have never been reluctant to deny the literal truth of Scripture on any issue. But the new trend is different, comprising evangelicals who contend that it is possible to harmonize Genesis 1-3 with the theories of modern naturalism without doing violence to any essential doctrine of Christianity. They affirm evangelical statements of faith. They teach in evangelical institutions. They insist they believe the Bible is inerrant and authoritative. But they are willing to reinterpret Genesis to accommodate evolutionary theory. They express shock and surprise that anyone would question their approach to Scripture. And they sometimes employ the same sort of ridicule and intimidation religious liberals and atheistic skeptics have always leveled against believers: "You don't seriously think the universe is less than a billion years old, do you?"

The result is that over the past couple of decades, large numbers of evangelicals have shown a surprising willingness to take a completely non-evangelical approach to interpreting the early chapters of Genesis. More and more are embracing the view known as "old-earth creationism," which blends some of the principles of biblical creationism with naturalistic and evolutionary theories, seeking to reconcile two opposing world-views. And in order to accomplish this, old-earth creationists end up explaining away rather than honestly exegeting the biblical creation account.

A handful of scientists who profess Christianity are among those who have led the way in this revisionism—most of them lacking any skill whatsoever in biblical interpretation. But they are setting forth a major reinterpretation of Genesis 1-3 designed specifically to accommodate the current trends of naturalist theory. In their view, the six days of creation in Genesis 1 are long ages, the chronological order of creation is flexible, and most of the details about creation given in Scripture can be written off as poetic or symbolic figures of speech.



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Many who should know better—pastors and Christian leaders who defend the faith against false teachings all the time—have been tempted to give up the battle for the opening chapters of Genesis.

An evangelical pastor recently approached me after I preached. He was confused and intimidated by several books he had read—all written by ostensibly evangelical authors—yet all arguing that the earth is billions of years old. These authors treat most of the evolutionists' theories as indisputable scientific fact. And in some cases they wield scientific or academic credentials that intimidate readers into thinking their views are the result of superior expertise, rather than naturalistic presuppositions they have brought to the biblical text. This pastor asked if I believed it possible that the first three chapters of Genesis might really be just a series of literary devices—a poetic saga giving the "spiritual" meaning of what actually occurred through billions of years of evolution.

I answered unapologetically: No, I do not. I am convinced that Genesis 1-3 ought to be taken at face value—as the divinely revealed history of creation. Nothing about the Genesis text itself suggests that the biblical creation account is merely symbolic, poetic, allegorical, or mythical. The main thrust of the passage simply cannot be reconciled with the notion that "creation" occurred via natural evolutionary processes over long periods of time. And I don't believe a faithful handling of the biblical text, by any acceptable principles of hermeneutics, can possibly reconcile those chapters with the theory of evolution or any of the other allegedly scientific theories about the origin of the universe.

Furthermore, much like the philosophical and moral chaos that results from naturalism, all sorts of theological mischief ensues when we reject or compromise the literal truth of the biblical account of creation and the fall of Adam. ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*

How to Read Historical Narrative

The Bible records the covenantal narrative about God's creation of all things, humanity's fall into sin, redemption through the covenant of grace and its various administrations, and the consummation of all things in eschatological glory. God Himself is the master narrator as the One who declares the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10) and who is Himself the first and the last (Isaiah 44:6; Isaiah 48:12). It is an ancient narrative told over a span of some fifteen hundred years in three different languages. The literary devices of the ancient world are not always like our own, so it can be challenging to understand what we encounter in these accounts. What follows, therefore, are three reading strategies that can help us better understand and appreciate the art of the ancient historical narrative as set forth in the Bible.

1. Understand that the unified narrative of the Bible is not always set forth in chronological order.

This can be seen in an ancient literary technique whereby the author makes a statement and then circles back to focus on important details about the event itself or how something came to be.



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How to Read Historical Narrative

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Sometimes in the Bible, theology trumps chronology in the arrangement of recorded events. For example, Genesis 2 begins with a description of the seventh day of creation (vv. 1–3), but the rest of the chapter steps back in time to reconsider the events of day six in more detail (vv. 4–25). Genesis 10 records the names and descendants of Noah, the so-called table of nations, listed “by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations” (Gen. 10:31). However, in the very next chapter, we return to the time when there was only one clan, language, land, and nation in order to focus on the events of the tower of Babel. The same is true of 1 Samuel 16 and 17. At the end of chapter 1 Samuel 16, David is loved by Saul and serving full-time as his armor-bearer. In the very next chapter, David is unknown to Saul and does not know how to handle his armor.

2. Whenever possible, let the text interpret itself.

Biblical narrative consists of both recorded events and the dialogue, or speech, of characters appearing in those events. Sometimes, a bit of climactic dialogue will give you the clue that you need to understand why such events were recorded and what those events signify.

For example, in 1 Kings 17 we are introduced to the prophet Elijah, who delivers the message of a three-year drought to King Ahab. He then departs to a river where he is fed by ravens for an unspecified amount of time. Then, at the command of the Lord, he travels out of the promised land to live with a widow and her young son. The son dies, and Elijah miraculously raises the boy from the dead. The widow’s response is the key to the entire account: “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth” (1 Kings 17:24). The same technique is employed again in the very next chapter. After Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal in a contest, the people proclaim, “The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God” (1 Kings 18:39). In a day of false prophets and other gods, the Bible testifies in both word and deed that the Lord is the true God and that His prophets speak His truth.

3. Watch for the unexpected.

Sometimes, something odd or out of place is recorded to foreshadow or anticipate a future, more climactic event. Ancient historical narrative teaches by rehearsing and repeating itself. Always listen for the echo. For example, in Exodus 2, just after his birth account, it is recorded that Moses killed an Egyptian who was striking a Hebrew. Then, his own people complained against him and he fled to the wilderness, where he spent the next forty years wandering in the wilderness (vv. 11–15). What are we to think of this brief narrative? Is it saying, “Your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23)? Or, is it saying that if God can use someone like Moses, a murderer, then he can certainly use someone like you or me? Both things are true, but they are not the point of the narrative. These events in the life of Moses foreshadow what is to come. As God’s instrument, Moses is about to deliver all of God’s people, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Egyptians. After that, he will spend another forty years wandering in the wilderness with his fellow Hebrews, who will continue to complain and grumble against him. When reading these narratives, read carefully and consider all the details, both what is included and what is not. ~ *Dr. Miles V. Van Pelt - Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages and director of the Summer Institute for Biblical Languages at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi*



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in June that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please contact Walt or e-mail him at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner June 2023

Birthdays

Gene A. (6)
Mike P. (27)

Anniversaries

Zachary and Corissa (16)
Ben and Carrie P. (23)
Scott and Ruth T. (25)

The book of James has an unusual sentence construction that links the word glory with the name of Jesus: “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality” (James 2:1). In this verse the words “Lord of glory” have alternate renditions. Some translations read, “Our glorious Lord.” Still another possible translation reads, “Jesus Christ, who is the glory.”

B. B. Warfield, in his book *The Lord of Glory*, says, that Jesus was the glory of God, the shekinah. According to the Old Testament, the shekinah was the visible manifestation of the invisible God. The shekinah was a radiant cloud or brilliant light within a cloud that signaled the immediate presence of God. For Jesus to be identified with the shekinah was to be equated with the presence of God Himself. In Jesus we see the full manifestation of the majesty of God.

That the New Testament writers ascribed glory to Jesus was a clear indication of their confession of His full deity. Glory, in the sense it is used with reference to Jesus, is a divine attribute. It is the glory of God that He refuses to share with any man. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



***West Suffolk Baptist Church
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