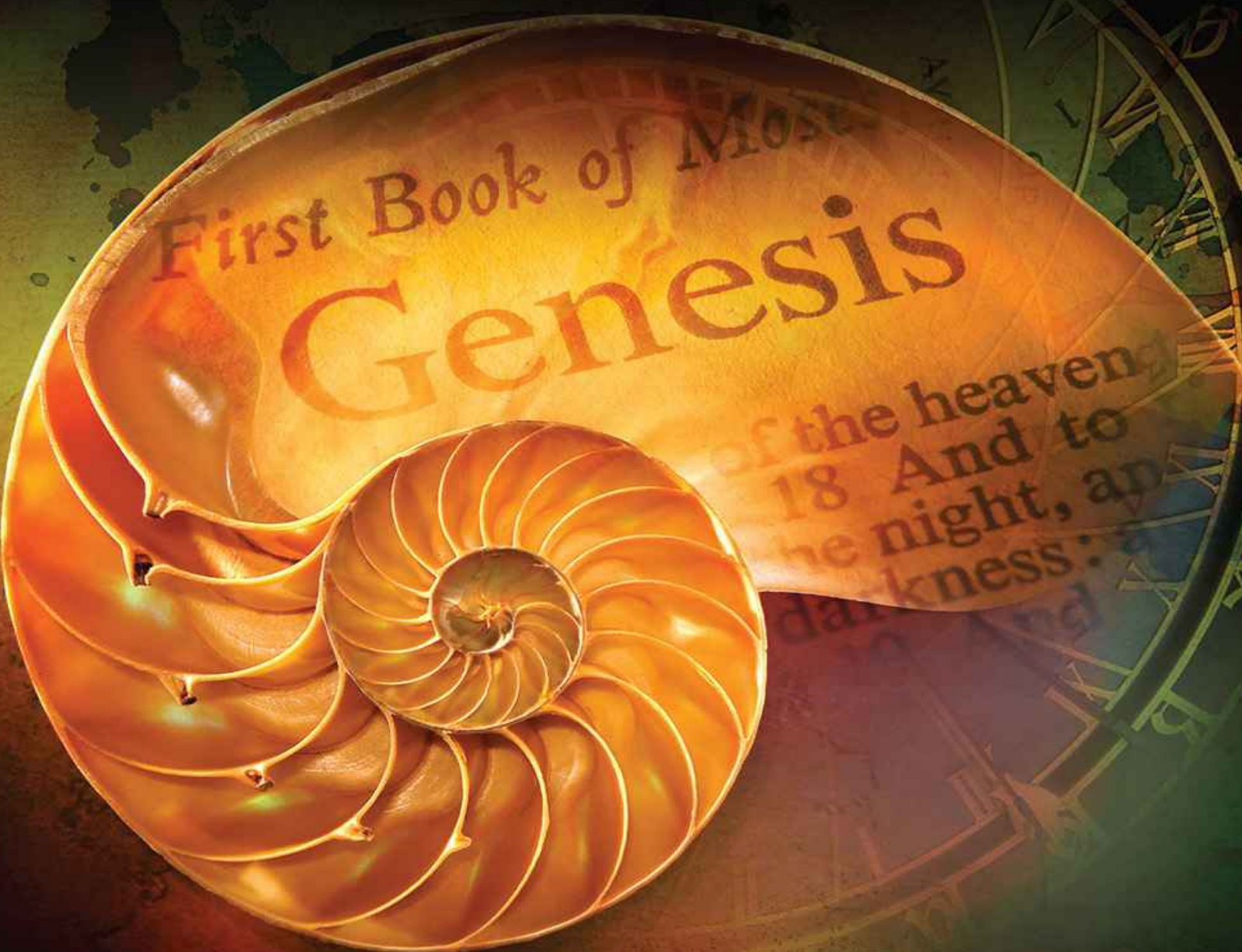


15 REASONS TO TAKE GENESIS AS HISTORY



First Book of Moses
Genesis

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TO TAKE
GENESIS AS HISTORY

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TWO MILLENNIA ago, the Apostle Paul wrote, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). In the last 200 years, people have increasingly argued against the knowledge of God, claiming that ‘nature is all there is’. They claim that natural processes, alone, can explain the origin and history of everything. This *historical naturalism* sees no evidence for God.

The big bang, uniformitarian geology and biological evolution all *assume* naturalism. Is it then a surprise that all three theories allegedly *support* naturalism?

All three of these ideas contradict the biblical big-picture view of history, which is founded on Genesis 1–11 (not just Gen. 1). However, there are good biblical, historical and scientific reasons to take Genesis 1–11 as a straightforward history of the origin of everything. This booklet presents 15 biblical and historical reasons to take Genesis as history. Other sources cover the scientific arguments.

1. Jesus understood the Old Testament as history

Jesus regarded the OT Scriptures as God’s Word; that is, spoken by God or inspired by the Holy Spirit, although written by the hands of men (Matt.19:4, 5; 22:31, 32, 43; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37) and therefore even the smallest letter or stroke was inspired and would “never pass away” (Matt. 5:18; Luke 16:17). Jesus cited nearly every book in the OT as authoritative, thus authenticating the canon as we know it.¹ There is no room here for regarding any part of Scripture as deficient in any way due to it supposedly being the product of the minds of ‘illiterate primitives’ (campfire stories of Semitic nomads, ‘primitive goat-herders’, etc.).

A proper hermeneutic (interpretative method) that is consistent with Jesus’ attitude involves *exegesis*, or reading *out of* Scripture what the writer

was teaching—not *eisegesis*, or reading things *into* Scripture. That is, an honest reading of Scripture entails finding out what God is saying, not trying to make it say what we find acceptable.

This is not 'bibliolatry' (worshipping a book), a term of derision applied to those who accept that Scripture is God-breathed, as it claims. Rather, it is because Christians submit to the lordship of Christ that they take their lead from Him. In many places Jesus said, "It is written" (in the OT) to settle an argument and, "Have you not read?" which substantiated the authority of Scripture. Not only was Jesus *not* jealous of the attention men paid to the Bible, He censured them for their ignorance of it (Matt. 22:29; Mark 12:24). In fact, Jesus affirmed the historical accuracy of even the scriptural passages that skeptics most scoff at today.² See also Reason 2.

'Inerrancy' derives logically from Jesus' view of inspiration, for how can God inspire error? And if Scripture contains error, then whoever decides which parts are in error actually becomes the authority and so usurps God's authority. The ultraliberal 'Jesus Seminar', in which lots are cast to determine which of the words attributed to Christ in the Bible were actually spoken by him, is a logical outcome of such an approach.³

Scripture is not authoritative if it is not inerrant: for example, is "love your enemies" an error, or "you shall not steal", or "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins"?

Some say, 'The Bible is authoritative in matters of faith and practice.' This is dangerously deficient: if we cannot trust the Bible in matters of history, for example, how can we trust it in matters of faith and practice (theology)? Luke 16:31 says, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." And Jesus asked Nicodemus: "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" (John 3:12). So if we can't trust the Bible about earthly things (such as the timeframe of creation and order of events), why should we trust it on heavenly things (e.g. forgiveness of sin, heaven, and moral laws)?

The Chicago Statement on inerrancy is a standard statement among evangelicals,⁴ and concurs with Christ's teachings by affirming "that what Scripture says, God says. May He be glorified."

Please note that belief in inerrancy does not mean wooden literalism (a

common straw-man argument). We apply the standard, orthodox, grammatical-historical hermeneutic, which recognizes the various forms of writing such as metaphor and hyperbole.⁵ In other words, we take as literal history those passages which were clearly intended to be taken as such (including Gen. 1–11).

2. Jesus regarded Adam, Eve and Noah as historical people

Jesus affirmed many people and events of the past that skeptics deny ever existed or happened: Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:3–6; Mark 10:2–9), Abel (Luke 11:51), Noah and the Flood (Matt. 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–27), Abraham (John 8:56–58), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15; 11:23, 24), Jonah and the great sea creature (Matt. 12:39–41). Either Jesus was mistaken, in which case He does not deserve our worship, or the skeptics and their allies are wrong. Jesus also placed man at the *beginning* of creation, not at the end of billions of years (e.g. Mark 10:6, Luke 11:50–51).⁶

Christ was also fully God, and God never makes mistakes. But some within the church, to justify dismissing Jesus' statements indicating belief in a young creation, assert that Jesus in His humanity was mistaken. This is called the *kenotic heresy*, which abuses Phil. 2:6–11. The 'emptying' was really an *addition* of human nature ("the Word became flesh" John 1:14), *not* any subtraction of the divine attributes.⁷ In reality, Jesus voluntarily surrendered the exercise of His powers, e.g. omniscience, independent of the Father's authority (which is why He didn't know the day or the hour of His return), although He could immediately switch them on at will, e.g. to know what people were thinking. But he never surrendered such absolute attributes as His perfect goodness, truthfulness, mercy, etc.

Therefore, what Jesus *did* preach, He proclaimed with absolute authority (Matt. 24:35, 28:18). Indeed, Jesus Himself said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). He also gave the sober warning:

"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26).

Furthermore, Jesus spoke with the full authority of God the Father (John

5:30, 8:28, 12:44-50), who is always omniscient. So if skeptics want to maintain their charge that Christ was mistaken because of His humanity, they must logically charge God the Father with error as well.

These critics also confuse two concepts:

- *Adaptation to human finitude vs accommodation to human error*: the former does *not* entail the latter. A mother might tell her four-year-old, 'You grew inside my tummy'—this is simplified rather than false. Conversely, 'The stork brought you' is an outright error. Similarly, God, the author of truth, used some simplified descriptions (e.g. using the earth as a reference frame, as modern scientists do today) and anthropomorphisms, but never error.
- *Limitation vs misunderstanding*: while the Second Person of the Trinity was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, He voluntarily limited His omniscience, i.e. in His humanity, He did not know all things. But this does *not* mean that He was mistaken about anything He said. All human understanding is finite, but this doesn't entail that every human understanding is errant.

3. Genesis was written as history

Hebrew uses special grammatical structures for historical narrative and Gen. 1–11 uses those structures. It is the same form as Gen. 12 ff. and most of Exodus, Joshua, Judges, etc. It is not poetry or allegory. Genesis is peppered with *waw* (*vav*, ו) consecutives (*and...and...and*), which characterize historical writing. The Hebrew verb forms of Gen. 1 have a particular feature that fits exactly what the Hebrews used for recording history; a series of past events. That is, only the first verb is a *qatal* (perfect), while the verbs that continue the narrative are *wayyiqtol*s (imperfects).⁸ In Gen. 1, the first verb, *bara'* (create), is *qatal*, while the subsequent verbs that move the narrative forward are *wayyiqtol*s.⁹ Parallelisms, a feature of Hebrew poetry (e.g. many Psalms), are almost absent in Genesis, except when someone is quoted.

The strongest *structural* parallel of Gen. 1 is Numbers 7:10–84. Both are

structured accounts, both contain the Hebrew word for day יום (*yôm*) with a numeric—indeed both are numbered *sequences* of days. In Numbers 7, each of the 12 tribes brought an offering on the different days:

- The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nahshon, son of Amminadab of the tribe of Judah. ...
- On the second day, Nethanel, son of Zuar, the leader of Issachar, brought his offering. ...
- On the third day, Eliab, son of Helon, the leader of the people of Zebulun, brought his offering. ...
- On the twelfth day, Ahira, son of Enan, the leader of the people of Naphtali, brought his offering. ...

The parallel is even stronger when we note that Num. 7 not only has each day (יום *yôm*) numbered, but also opens and closes (verses 10 and 84 KJV) with “in the day that” to refer collectively to all the ordinary days of the sequence. In spite of the use of “in the day that”, no-one doubts that the numbered day sequence in Num. 7 is anything but ordinary-length days, because these days lack a preposition like ‘in’. This refutes the claim by some critics that “in the day that” (ביום *b^eyôm*¹⁰) in Gen. 2:4, summarizing Creation Week, shows that the Gen. 1 days are *not* normal-length. This is a Hebrew idiom for ‘when’ (see NASB, NIV Gen. 2:4).¹¹

In this structured narrative (Num. 7) with a sequence of numbered days, no-one claims that it is merely a poetic framework for teaching something theological and that it is not history. No-one doubts that the days in Num. 7 are ordinary days, so there simply is no grammatical basis for denying the same for the Gen. 1 days. That is, Gen. 1 is straightforward history.

Hebrew scholars concur that Genesis was written as history. For example, the Oxford Hebrew scholar James Barr wrote:

“... probably, so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that:

- a. creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience
- b. the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by

simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the biblical story

- c. Noah's flood was understood to be world-wide and extinguish all human and animal life except for those in the ark."¹²

Barr, consistent with his neo-orthodox views, does not *believe* Genesis, but he understood what the Hebrew writer clearly taught. Some skeptics criticize the use of the Barr quote, because he does not believe in the historicity of Genesis. That is precisely why we use his statement: he is a *hostile witness*. With no need to try to harmonize Genesis with anything, because he does not see it as carrying any authority, Barr is free to state the clear intention of the author. This contrasts with some 'evangelical' theologians who try to retain some sense of authority without actually believing it says anything about history.

Some other Hebrew scholars who support literal creation days include:

- Dr Andrew Steinmann, Associate Professor of Theology and Hebrew at Concordia University in Illinois.¹³
- Dr Robert McCabe, Professor of Old Testament at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, Michigan.¹⁴
- Dr Ting Wang, formerly lecturer in biblical Hebrew at Stanford University.¹⁵

4. The rest of the Old Testament takes Genesis as history

A major hermeneutical principle is that Scripture interprets Scripture. We should always consider how other parts of the Bible understand a text.

Exodus 20:11 summarizes the Creation Week. It eliminates any possibility of an extended timescale by *any* interpretive scheme (framework hypothesis, day-age idea, gap theories, God's days, etc.), since it is given as the basis for our seven-day week with a day of rest (v.10): "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Note Ex. 20:1: "And God spoke all these words ..." These are the very words of God himself, not the ideas of Moses, or some redactor or even J, E, D or P (long discredited nonsense taught, sadly, at many