

# An important academic resource

A review of  
*Coming to Grips with  
Genesis: Biblical Authority  
and the Age of the Earth*  
by Terry Mortenson and  
Thane H. Ury (Eds.)  
Master Books, Green  
Forrest, AR, 2008

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This book is a *festschrift* (tribute) to veteran YEC theologian Dr John C. Whitcomb Jr. The editors, Terry Mortenson and Thane Ury, have assembled a team of ten evangelical scholars willing to defend the traditional young-earth interpretation of the genesis account of creation. There are two Forewords—one by the late Dr Henry Morris (who co-authored the pioneering *The Genesis Flood* with Whitcomb), and one by Dr John MacArthur, President of The Master’s Seminary—as well as a biographical tribute to Whitcomb by Paul Scharf. The book also contains a set of articles of affirmations and denials relating to a Christian worldview concerning creation, and has an extensive set of recommended resources, a subject index, and a name index.

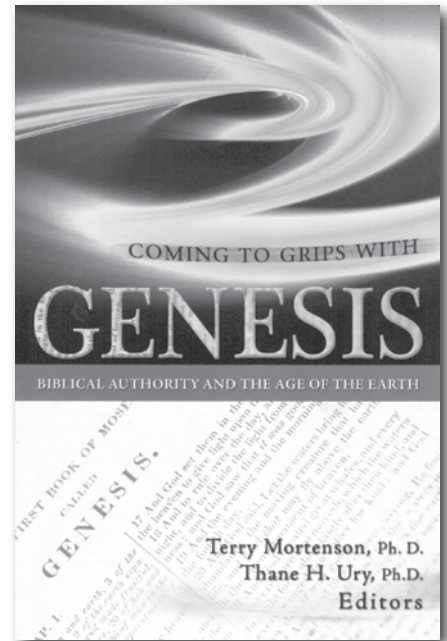
In the prologue, the editors make it clear that belief in the traditional young-earth creationist (YEC) interpretation of the Genesis account is not a necessary condition of salvation. Failure to accept the YEC view, however, does raise some major issues in relation to biblical authority and hermeneutics, and has implications for our understanding of death as well as the nature and character of God. Thus, the chapters in the book seek to highlight and expound these issues.

## Contributors and contributions

James Mook (Capital Bible Seminary) opens with a chapter on the church fathers’ interpretation of Genesis, the Flood, and the age of the earth. Mook gives a good account—including many direct quotations—of what the fathers actually believed, and concludes that although some did not interpret the days literally they all held to a young-earth view of creation. However, Mook’s treatment of the fathers view of the Flood is quite brief and cursory, amounting to just over a page of discussion. A much more thorough survey and analysis should have been done.

David Hall (pastor, Midway Presbyterian Church, Georgia) gives a brief overview of the history of exegesis of Genesis 1–11 from Luther to Charles Lyell. Hall examines the views of the Protestant Reformers, the Puritans, and the Westminster assembly up until the triumph of Lyellian uniformitarianism, and concludes that they all understood the early chapters of Genesis as straightforward literal history. It was the influence of Lyell’s uniformitarian geology that allowed the likes of Warfield, Shedd and others to incorporate modern evolutionary thought.

Terry Mortenson, whose doctoral thesis was on the history of geology, has a chapter on deep time and the Church’s historical compromise. His discussion examines the origins of deep time, and the debate between the catastrophists and the uniformitarians during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mortenson rightly emphasises that modern geological theory is a product not of rigorous empirical science but of an anti-biblical ideology that governed the early geologists’ assumptions, observations and interpretations. The work of these early geologists had a profound and lasting influence on the theologians of the latter half of



the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and led most to reinterpret the Genesis account in order to incorporate long ages and an ancient earth. Such compromise has had disastrous effects, not just in relation to the interpretation of Scripture, but in the personal lives of many Christians such as Charles Templeton, a former colleague of Billy Graham, who, after accepting evolutionary ideas, ultimately rejected Christianity altogether.

Richard Mayhue (The Master’s Seminary) examines the question of whether nature is the 67<sup>th</sup> book of the Bible. The belief that nature is the 67<sup>th</sup> book is a common claim made by Christians with a scientific background. Hugh Ross is an obvious example, so Mayhue responds primarily to his claims. However, more sophisticated defences of this view have been made by David Diehi and Roger Forster and Paul Marston, so it is unfortunate that Mayhue did not specifically interact with their views.<sup>1</sup> In any case, Mayhue rightly rejects the view that nature is the 67<sup>th</sup> book of the Bible because such a view:

- (1) violates the scriptural warning not to add to the scriptural canon,
- (2) dramatically overstates what Scripture says about general revelation,

- (3) falsely elevates general revelation to the same authority level as special revelation,
- (4) wrongly equates the character of general and special revelation,
- (5) fails to take into account the Fall and man's diminished intellectual capacity to think and reason generally and objectively,
- (6) deviates from the norm of historical grammatical hermeneutics, and
- (7) is derived from a flawed worldview, apologetics, and integration approach.

Todd Beall (Capital Bible Seminary) examines contemporary hermeneutical approaches to Genesis 1–11, and argues that any hermeneutical approach should satisfy two basic conditions:

- (1) it should be able to be applied uniformly throughout the first 11 chapters, and
- (2) it should arise from a study of the scriptures themselves, not from an external set of rules imposed upon the text.

Beall suggests that all hermeneutical approaches fall into four basic groups:

- (1) the account is basically a myth that is substantially unhistorical,
- (2) the account is predominantly figurative,
- (3) the account is partly literal and partly figurative, and
- (4) the account is straightforward literal history that should be taken at face value.

Liberal critical scholars who deny the inerrancy of Scripture largely hold to the first view. The second and third views are generally held by a variety of liberal and evangelical scholars who reject the YEC view. The fourth view is largely held by conservative evangelical scholars who accept the YEC view.

Beall goes on to evaluate the various assumptions and claims made by those who argue against the YEC view. He rightly concludes that those who reject the straightforward literal history view do so not on exegetical grounds, but on alleged scientific grounds. They simply assume that the truth claims of scientists are incontrovertible and therefore the testimony of Scripture must be moulded and manipulated to fit in with current scientific 'truth'.

Stephen Boyd's (The Master's College) chapter summarises his research for the RATE group on the genre of Genesis 1, including his statistical analysis of the preterite (or *wayyiqtol* verb form) in 97 representative texts, concluding with virtual certainty that Genesis 1 is historical narrative.

The concept of 'deep time' and the possibility of it being embedded in the Genesis account is discussed by Trevor Craigen (The Master's Seminary). The term 'deep time' is defined as time that is other than ordinary time or everyday time. It refers to the vast epochs of geological time. Craigen rightly points out that deep time is essential to those who wish to integrate the 'truth' claims of geologists and cosmologists with the text of Genesis. He goes on to examine the various ways deep time advocates have twisted various elements of the creation account in order to incorporate the supposed vast geological ages, but does not offer a particularly strong refutation of their twisted exegesis.

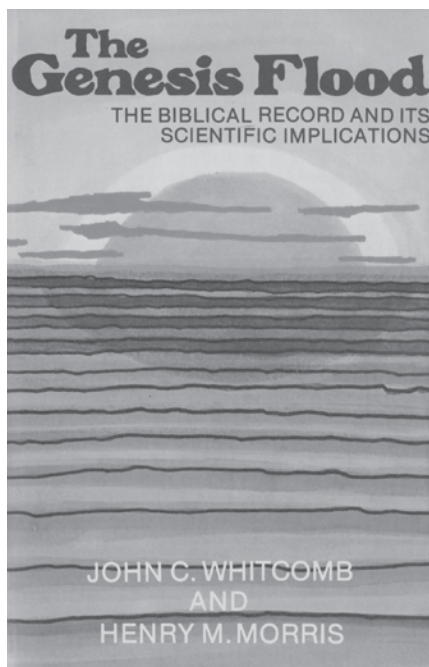
Robert McCabe (Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary) offers a comprehensive, albeit verbose, critique of the Framework view of the creation account. There is some overlap here with Stephen Boyd's and Todd Beall's material. McCabe includes a revealing quote from Kline regarding his framework interpretation:

"I have advocated an interpretation of biblical cosmogony according to which scripture is open to the current scientific view of a very old universe and, in that respect, does not discountenance the theory of the evolutionary origin of man" (p. 248).

McCabe rightly points out that this quote indicates the true motivation for the framework view: it is based not on a careful exegesis of the text but on a desire to accommodate the current truth claims of mainstream, secular, humanistic science.

William Barrick (The Master's Seminary), discusses Noah's Flood and its geological implications. Barrick rightly points out that so many Christians—including many evangelicals—refuse to take the biblical record *a priori* as the truth. Instead, they tend to be reluctant to accept it as reliable unless it is supported or verified by other extra-biblical evidence. In other words, the biblical record is held to be an inferior source of historical information when compared with other ancient near eastern accounts and writings, or with forensic reconstructions of the past. Thus, even evangelicals are now beginning to adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion: biblical accounts are automatically assumed to be unreliable unless proven otherwise, yet extra-biblical accounts can be accepted at face value. Such a hermeneutic is a big departure from traditional evangelical belief and practice.

Barrick notes that the language that permeates the Flood account clearly indicates that "the disruption of the earth's surface was comprehensive and global", and that geological implications "must be derived from the collective impact of the entire narrative" (p. 254). He adds that



John Whitcomb was co-author of *The Genesis Flood*, the pioneering book that launched the modern young-earth creationist movement.

“[c]orrelation between the chronology of the Flood and the geologic record must be built upon the bedrock foundation of sound biblical exegesis” (p. 254). Barrick goes on to do just that: the rest of the chapter contains a detailed and comprehensive exegetical discussion of key words and phrases, and grammatical, literary and contextual issues that relate to the geological effects of Noah’s Flood. Creationist geologists working on Flood related research would do well to pay careful attention to Barrick’s analysis and observations and ensure that any assumptions they make or models they produce are in accord with what the Flood account actually says.

Travis Freeman (Baptist College of Florida), examines the question of whether there are gaps in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. Whether or not there are gaps in these genealogies has a bearing on whether they can be used the way James Ussher and John Lightfoot used them—as precise chronologies. Freeman provides a detailed discussion of the evidence, as presented by both critical and evangelical scholars, both for and against gaps in the Genesis genealogies, and then offers a persuasive analysis showing the superiority of the evidence against gaps (which is correct, but actually contrary to Whitcomb’s view in *The Genesis Flood*). Freeman also includes a detailed discussion of the textual problem relating to the ‘second Cainan’ (ie. son of Aphraxad) in the Genesis genealogy and Luke’s reproduction of it in his gospel (cf. Gen 11:12 and Luke 3:36). According to general text critical principles, the text in Luke that includes Cainan is thought to be relatively firm, but no corresponding person can be found in the Masoretic text of Genesis 11. It is, however, found in the Septuagint. Scholars who allow for gaps in the genealogies argue that Luke accepted the reading from the Septuagint as being accurate and therefore included the second Cainan in his account. Scholars who reject the possibility of gaps in the genealogies argue that the second Cainan was never a part of Luke’s original account, but rather, was inserted at a later time by copyists who

wanted to harmonise Luke’s account with the Septuagint’s because they believed it was more accurate. Again, Freeman offers a persuasive argument for accepting the Masoretic text over the Septuagint and for adopting the minority reading in Luke that excludes the second Cainan.

Terry Mortenson also examines Jesus’ view of the age of the earth. He begins by demonstrating that Jesus clearly treated the events described in the creation account as actual historical events. He then focuses on three gospel texts (and their parallels) that refer to human beings and “the beginning of creation”, and shows that “the beginning” refers to the very beginning in Genesis 1:1, and therefore, human beings existed at the very beginning rather than many millions of years after. Thus, in light of the chronological nature of the genealogies in Genesis and in Luke, Mortenson rightly concludes that Jesus implicitly held to a young earth, six-day creation view. Mortenson also notes that many old earth advocates completely ignore Jesus’ comments in their discussion of the age of the earth, and those few that do cover them employ faulty exegesis in order to nullify their force or relevance.

Ron Minton’s (missionary) contribution examines the apostolic witness to the Genesis accounts of creation and the Flood. Minton notes that almost no-one has paid any attention to the apostles’ comments on creation and the Flood, and suggests that the reason why old earth advocates in particular, have ignored them is because “there is not a single statement in the apostolic writings that would incline one toward believing the earth is millions of years old or that the Flood of Noah was anything less than global in extent” (p. 348). Rather, Minton contends, “the NT writers teach both a recent creation and a worldwide Flood” and cites the implications of the witness of creation (Rom 1:18–25) as a clear demonstration. After discussing the significant NT passages, he concludes:

“The Apostles ... do not give as much information about the time of creation as other sections of the

Bible. But when they do speak, their voice strongly supports, and in no way contradicts the young earth view” (pp. 369–370).

James Stambaugh’s (Institute of World Politics) chapter discusses the theology of physical death and the problem of evil. He begins by asking the following three basic questions:

- (1) What is physical death?
- (2) Was the original creation subject to physical death?
- (3) When did physical death begin?

After some solid analysis, Stambaugh concludes that plants are not living in the same way that humans and animals are; that the law of entropy was in operation during creation week; and that human and animal death did not occur in God’s “very good” creation but was a result of the Fall.

In the final chapter, Thane Ury (United Wesleyan Graduate Institute, Hong Kong) also discusses the problem of evil and our response to it (theodicy), with specific reference to Luther, Calvin, and John Wesley.

Ultimately, all the contributors “are convinced that no properly interpreted scientific facts will ultimately contradict a straightforward reading of Genesis” (p. 427).

### Critique

As to be expected from a compendium of essays by different authors, the quality of the contributions is uneven, and there is some repetition, and the book lacks a binding theme or meta-narrative. This is its biggest weakness. For example, although the authors wisely avoid the error of making the YEC view a fundamental of the faith, they fail to make the important point that it is the only view that gives the gospel a coherent, logical and internally consistent theological foundation, and the only view that does justice to biblical text. One could, arguably, *infer* this from what has been written—in particular, from some of Stambaugh’s remarks—but there is no clear statement to that effect.

There are also some issues of consistency: Boyd contradicts Beall on the issue of the phonetic similarity between *tehom* and *Tiamat*



(pp. 134–135 and 190). Despite Freeman’s persuasive argument to discount the notion of any generation gaps in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, the ‘Affirmations and Denials’ allow for such gaps (probably because of Whitcomb’s own views)!

The list of recommended resources is woefully inadequate. The list is extremely short and significant YEC works (biblical and scientific) are missing. For example, there is no mention of the *Journal of Creation*, *Creation Magazine*, *Origins* or *Creation Research Society Quarterly*.

The name index also appears to be incomplete. The book cites my own work in two places (pp. 152, 247) but I am not listed in the name index. There may well be missing references to other writers.

The editors devoted a few pages in the Epilogue to the Intelligent Design Movement. This topic warrants a more comprehensive discussion because it is often used by theologians and Christian apologists as a justification for theism. However, the intelligent design argument is ultimately incapable of identifying any specific ‘designer’ let alone the God of the Bible. Indeed, the argument intentionally marginalises the Bible.

### Conclusion

Despite the above weaknesses, this book is a valuable biblical resource. It is a scholarly, detailed, biblical and exegetical work aimed at theologians, seminarians, pastors, and Bible teachers. Like my own book,<sup>2</sup> it is a plea to the Christian community to return to faithful exegesis of the Genesis account using the methods employed and conclusions reached when employing the traditional historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

### References

1. See Kulikovskiy, A.S., Scripture and general revelation, *Journal of Creation* 19(2):23–28, 2005.
2. Kulikovskiy A.S., *Creation, Fall, Restoration: A Biblical Theology of Creation*, Mentor, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, 2009.

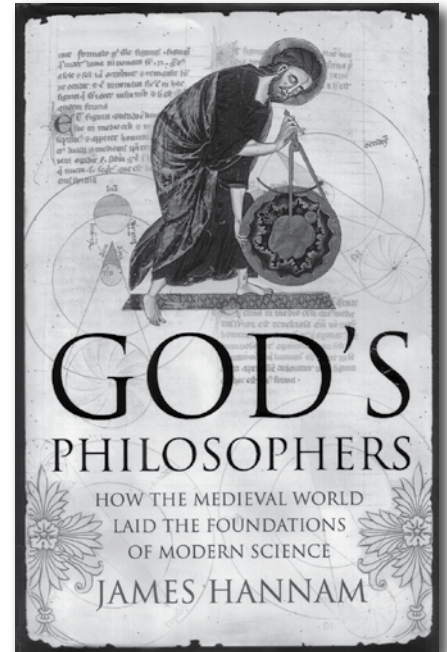
## Helpful in places, confusing in others

A review of  
*God's Philosophers:  
How the Medieval World  
Laid the Foundations of  
Modern Science*  
by James Hannam  
Icon Books, London,  
UK, 2009

Dominic Statham

I received a copy of James Hannam’s *God’s Philosophers* with great anticipation. With a degree in physics from Oxford University and a Ph.D. in the history and philosophy of science from Cambridge University, the author appeared to be well placed to provide a helpful insight into the progress of Christian scientific thought in medieval times. Some of what he presents is indeed helpful, but overall I was disappointed and felt that he failed to bring the clarity so needed in this most important and controversial of subjects.

The medieval period is often referred to as the ‘Dark Ages’, a period of scholarly amnesia, intellectual stagnation and widespread ignorance, in which Christianity stifled technological progress. Along with many other historians, Hannam rejects this view as inaccurate, and cites a number of significant developments and inventions which arose during this period. These include progress in agriculture which significantly improved crop yields; the building of windmills; development of military technology such as the stirrup, metallurgy and explosives; the blast furnace; discoveries in optics and the manufacture of spectacles; the compass; printing; mathematics; understanding of projectile motion; and the design of mechanical clocks. Hannam also shows that most of the stories about how the Church held back science are myths. Although little of



what is presented is new, the case for the medieval period being a time of significant technological progress is argued clearly and in a way which is easy to follow. A link between the rise of science and the Bible, however, is not really made.

### Scholasticism

In many respects, *God’s Philosophers* is a celebration of Roman Catholic Scholasticism—the system of theology and philosophy taught in medieval European universities and based largely on Aristotelian logic. Thus, in many ways, Hannam attributes the rise of science to the development of Greek knowledge. He also gives much credit to the Muslim scholars who preserved the ancient Greek texts and continued to develop philosophy, medicine and mathematics prior to the medieval period. Speaking of a “Twelfth-Century Renaissance”, he writes, “Most significant of all for the future development of science was the movement to translate into Latin an enormous body of newly discovered scientific and medical writing from