A Reaction to *Coming to Grips with Genesis*: Creation, Scripture, and the Age of the Earth

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Introduction

The first eleven chapters of Genesis raise significant questions for evangelical Christians concerning science, biblical interpretation, and theology. *Coming to Grips with Genesis* approaches these issues from a young-earth perspective, but its larger concern is how to interpret Genesis.

I approached the book already holding a young-earth position. It strengthened the biblical and theological reasons for that view, particularly regarding the creation days, the historical Adam, and sin and death. I found the geological arguments fascinating but not in my sphere of expertise.

Biblical Authority and the Interpretation of Genesis

A major strength of the book is its insistence that Scripture must govern Christian interpretation. This does not mean that scientific investigation has no value. Creation is God's work, and Christians should not be afraid to examine it carefully. The question is one of authority. Scientific conclusions should not be allowed to determine beforehand what the biblical text can or cannot mean. Richard Mayhue argues that biblical authority runs throughout Scripture and that ultimate authority belongs to God alone.[1] This is consistent with 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 2 Peter 1:20–21, where Scripture is grounded in divine revelation.

The way later Scripture uses Genesis is important to this discussion. Exodus 20:8–11 compares God's creation week with Israel's workweek, which seems to provide significant support for understanding the creation days as 24-hour days rather than undefined periods. Jesus

[1] Richard L. Mayhue, "Is Nature the 67th Book of the Bible?" in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, LLC, 2008), 115–18.

appeals to the creation of male and female in his teaching concerning marriage (Matthew 19:4–6), while Paul treats Adam as foundational to his discussion of sin, death, and Christ's redemptive work (Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49). Todd Beall also points out that the biblical genealogies trace the line backward from Abraham through Noah to Adam.[2] That continuity makes it difficult, in my judgment, to treat Genesis 1–11 as fundamentally different in historical character from the chapters that follow.

I found the book's hermeneutical argument most persuasive here. Scripture should be interpreted in light of Scripture. Scientific evidence should be considered without allowing it to be the framework to determine what Genesis must mean.

Evaluating the Contributors' Biblical Case

Robert McCabe's discussion of the creation days is a good example of the book's approach. Rather than simply stating that the days must be literal, McCabe examines the grammar of Genesis 1, including the Hebrew waw-consecutive. He argues that this grammatical form presents the events of the creation account as a sequential narrative.[3] Genesis 1:1–2:3 also numbers the days, repeatedly uses the expression "evening and morning," and is later connected to Israel's ordinary workweek in Exodus 20:11.[4] Taken together, I believe these features make six ordinary days the most natural reading of Genesis 1.

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[2] Todd S. Beall, "Contemporary Hermeneutical Approaches to Genesis 1–11," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, LLC, 2008), 144–46.

[3] Robert V. McCabe, "A Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Week," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, LLC, 2008), 216–25.

[4] Ibid., 242–46.

Day-age and framework interpreters weigh these features differently, but the ordinary-day interpretation still seems to me to require fewer adjustments to the sequence and wording of Genesis 1.

The theological discussion concerning Adam, death, and redemption was even more significant to me. Paul writes that "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin" (Romans 5:12, English Standard Version), and he develops a deliberate contrast between Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience (Romans 5:18–19; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49). Ron Minton argues that Paul understood Adam's sin as an event of actual history,[5] while James Stambaugh argues that creation's subjection to futility belongs after the Fall rather than to the original creation.[6] This fits the biblical movement from a creation declared "very good" in Genesis 1:31, through the Fall, and ultimately toward a creation that now groans while awaiting redemption (Romans 8:19–23).

This connection between Adam and Christ is one reason the question matters to me. If Adam is only symbolic, Paul's comparison with Christ becomes more difficult to understand historically. I find the young-earth connection between sin and physical death compelling, while recognizing that Romans 5 most clearly addresses human death; animal death and natural evil require additional theological argument.

The discussions of Noah's Flood and the Genesis genealogies contribute to the book's cumulative argument. William Barrick interprets Genesis 6–9 as describing a global catastrophe

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[5] Ron Minton, "Apostolic Witness to Genesis Creation and the Flood," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, LLC, 2008), 354.

[6] James Stambaugh, "Whence Cometh Death? A Biblical Theology of Physical Death and Natural Evil," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, LLC, 2008), 397.

and argues that an event of that magnitude should be considered when geological evidence is interpreted.[7] Travis Freeman understands Genesis 5 and 11 as presenting genuine chronological succession.[8] I find these arguments supportive of a young-earth reading, though they are less decisive for me than the biblical arguments concerning the creation days and the New Testament's treatment of Adam.

Freeman's discussion is persuasive because the patriarchal ages appear to establish historical succession. Yet biblical genealogies can be selective, so I remain cautious about specific scientific conclusions. Even so, Genesis 5 and 11 seem more consistent with a chronology measured in thousands of years than with vast geological ages.

Theological Reflections and Present View

After reading *Coming to Grips with Genesis*, I remain convinced that God created in six ordinary days, that Adam and Eve were historical persons specially created in God's image, and that Noah's Flood was global. I reject biological evolution as an adequate explanation for humanity's origin because Genesis presents Adam as formed by God and Eve as specially created from him (Genesis 2:7, 21–22). These convictions remain most consistent with a young-earth chronology.

I hold this position with conviction and humility. Christians who affirm biblical inspiration and God's creative sovereignty can reach different conclusions about Genesis, so I do not make young-earth creationism a test of Christian fellowship or salvation. Nevertheless, the

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[7]William D. Barrick, "Noah's Flood and Its Geological Implications," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, LLC, 2008), 252.

[8]Travis R. Freeman, "Do the Genesis 5 and 11 Genealogies Contain Gaps?," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, LLC, 2008), 284–90.

issue matters because our interpretation of Genesis affects Adam, the Fall, death, and redemption.

Conclusion

Coming to Grips with Genesis strengthened a position I already held. Its greatest value for me was its insistence that questions of origins involve biblical authority, hermeneutics, and the larger biblical account of creation, Fall, and redemption.

I remain more cautious about the geological arguments because I lack the expertise to evaluate every claim. Still, the book showed why a global Flood and biblical chronology should not simply be removed from consideration.

I therefore remain convinced that Scripture most naturally supports six ordinary days of creation, the historicity of Adam and the Fall, and a young-earth chronology. Yet the most important question raised by the book is ultimately not a number. Mortenson and Ury conclude their prologue by asking, "God has spoken . . . are we listening?"[9] For me, that question captures what is ultimately at stake. Before deciding how Genesis must fit with other conclusions, I must first be willing to listen carefully to what Scripture itself says.

[9]Mortenson and Ury, "Prologue," 21.

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