

Mishandling Scripture

A review of
The Source
by John Clayton and
Nils Jansma
Howard Pub. Co., West
Monroe, LA. 2001

Steve Wynalda

Benjamin Franklin once said: 'Half the truth is often a great lie'. Readers of John Clayton's and Nils Jansma's book, *The Source*, will find clear and concise proofs of the existence of God, the inerrancy of the Bible and even flaws in biological evolution. But when the authors force Scripture to do semantic gymnastics to gratify their progressive creationist theories, their own logic takes a tumble.

The authors claim they have a high opinion of Scripture. They even devote a chapter to proofs that the Bible is both true and inspired. But the minute it conflicts with astronomical evolution (big bang followed by billions of years) and geological evolution (Earth existing for eons), the authors' opinions drop.

This is never clearer than when the authors preface a few of their proofs with: 'Some of this evidence may raise challenging questions about our traditional interpretations of the Bible. However, if the Bible is to *remain the inerrant Word of God*, we must be willing to reconsider past interpretations in the light of new and heretofore unknown realities' (p. 141, emphasis added).

The authors say this without ever explaining how Scripture can be inerrant, then become errant. Truth is always truth, or it never was at all. The Psalmist writes: 'Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens' (Psalms 119:89).

The authors also suggest a

reinterpretation of Genesis in light of recent scientific discoveries. This is counter to centuries of scholarship that insists that Biblical interpretation should focus on the context and the writer's intent, not the current theory of the week. The word the authors are looking for is not 'interpretation' but 'compromise'.

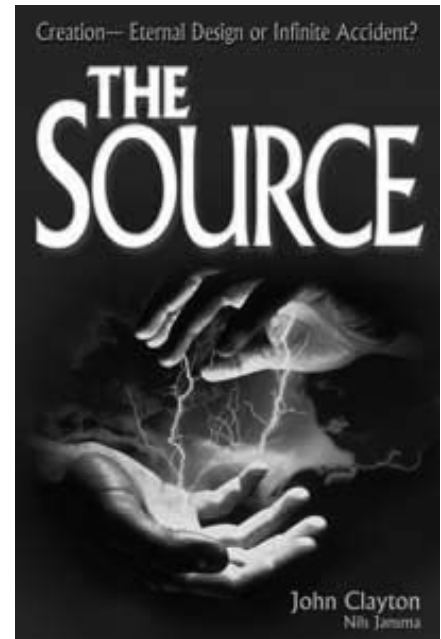
Ever since old-Earth theories began to surface in the scientific community some three hundred years ago, many Christian scholars and scientists have blanched at the thought of standing against the intellectuals of their time. Thus was born Progressive Creationism embracing Special Creation without the stigma of pitching a tent in the Young-Earther's camp.

Clayton and Jansma begin their book by describing the big bang, how the universe formed and how the Earth was forged. This is their first problem with the Biblical text: Genesis says that God created the Earth first, then made the stars and the Sun (Genesis 1:10–19).

The authors attempt to wiggle out of this by theorizing that the first verse of the Bible—'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'—is from God's perspective, and every other verse in the chapter is from an earthbound observer's viewpoint. The authors never say who this observer is but they claim he/she is unaware of the Sun and stars simply because cosmic dust has blotted them out (pp. 104–105). It is only after billions of years and after the dust dissipates that the observer is aware that the universe existed all the time.

Aside from problems with an observer—inspired by an omniscient God—being fooled into believing that there was nothing beyond the ashen sky, the authors are flaunting a significant lack of Biblical exegesis.

While the authors deny it, the first verse is a summary statement of what was done and the verses that follow are details of how it was accomplished.



This is a shift in detail, not in perspective. Moses used a summary statement again in Exodus 40:17 which states: 'So the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year'. The next sixteen verses detail how Moses 'set up' the tabernacle. Moses also wrote summaries followed by details in Numbers 3:1–39, 7:12–83, 13:3–15.

Another problem is that Genesis 1:16 says that God made (*asah*) the Sun and stars, not just revealed them. The authors make much of the fact that *asah* does not necessarily mean a miraculous creation and use the examples that a person can make a face or make someone laugh without supernatural powers (p. 89). The authors claim that when the sky cleared and the Sun and stars appeared for the first time, to the observer it would 'be as if these heavenly bodies had been newly created' (p. 114).

The authors, however, never explain how just seven verses earlier (Genesis 1:9) this 'observer' watches the land rise out of the water, but does not see this as a miraculous creation. Instead, the text says that the dry land 'appeared' (*ra'ah*). How odd that this observer's ability to discern the miraculous drops in seven verses.

The authors declare that anyone who believes in a literal interpretation

of these verses must explain how light appears on the first day, three days before the Sun and stars are made (p. 92). It's surprising that the authors used this tired argument often utilized by those opposed to the Bible entirely. There are many instances in Scripture in which God provided light (Paul's conversion, the angels heralding Christ's birth, the pillar of fire during the Exodus, Christ's transfiguration) without the use of the Sun. God would have no problem providing it on days one through three as well.

Clayton's and Jansma's difficulties with the Biblical text go far deeper. While they steer away from the controversy over whether the days of the Creation Week are actually long ages, it is clear that they believe it. They cleverly rename the six Creation days 'events' and separate them by millions of years.

Again it returns to the Genesis writer's intent. Fellow progressive creationist Pattle Pun of Wheaton College admits:

'It is apparent that the most straightforward understanding of Genesis, without regard to the hermeneutical considerations suggested by science, is that God created the heavens and the earth in six solar days, that man was created on the sixth day, and that death

and chaos entered the world after the fall of Adam and Eve ...'¹

It is interesting that Pun recognizes the *plain* interpretation of Genesis but rejects it not out of an exegesis of the text but out of science.

The rub for progressive creationists is the Hebrew word for 'day' (*yôm*). *Yôm* does indeed have five different meanings in the Bible (compared to the English word 'day' which has fourteen meanings) and appears in Scripture 2291 times. However, every single time *yôm* appears in Scripture with a number and the words 'morning' (*boqer*) and 'evening' (*ereb*) it refers to a 24-hour day. As James Stambaugh writes:

'God is going out of His way to tell us that the 'days' of creation were literal solar days God has communicated the words of Genesis 1 in a specific manner, so that the interpreter could not miss His point.'²

It appears Clayton and Jansma are inconsistent: they say that every word of the Bible is inerrant while they deny its very wording. They answer this by saying that the Bible was never meant to be a science book, that Genesis was written as 'word-images' for primitive readers who had no need of the particulars of Creation (p. 196). They claim—without supporting evi-

dence—that Genesis was a broadside against Egyptian polytheism:

'Recognizing this religious purpose in the Genesis account of creation makes us realize that the book should not be viewed as a scientific treatise written to challenge the technological minds of our day. It was originally penned to be understood by both shepherds and scholars whose world-view was shaped by the primitive cultures in which they lived' (pp. 86–87).

Besides being incredibly egocentric, this statement is very misleading. While it is true that the Bible was never meant to be a 'scientific treatise', when an inerrant book—by definition—touches on science, it would still be absolutely true. And if it is true and inspired by an infallible, infinitely intelligent God, then it should challenge our 'technological' yet fallible and limited minds, no matter what century we come from.

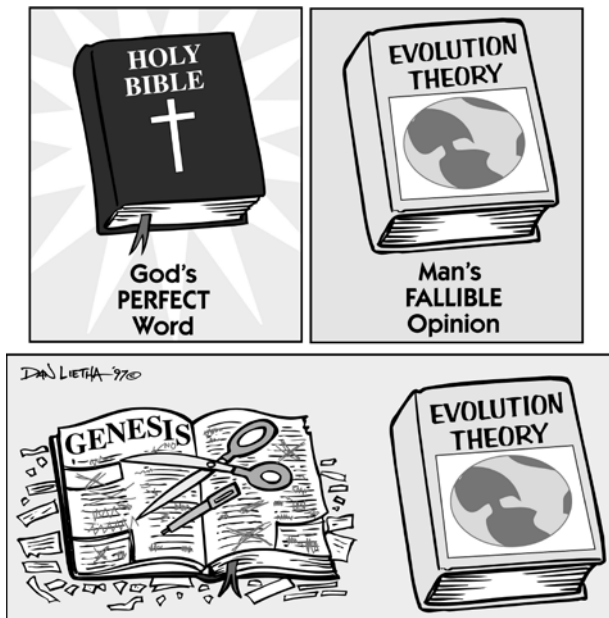
Further, what is it about a protracted, billion-year Creation that 'primitive' minds couldn't grasp? God didn't have to appeal to microbiology or chemistry to explain that His Creation took millennia instead of six solar days. Ancient Hebrews certainly had words they could have used instead of *yôm* to describe just such a creation. If, for example, Moses wanted to convey something other than a solar day, he could have used *olam* or *qedem* in conjunction with *yôm* to say 'it was from days of old.' Or he could have used *yom rab* ('a long day' or 'long time') to convey that the days were equivalent to long ages.³ If the Hebrews had the words to describe long ages, it follows that they could understand them as well.

Why then do Clayton and Jansma need to juggle a low-brow/high-brow opinion of the Bible with such inconsistency? In reference to Job 12:8 ('speak to the earth, and it will teach you'), the authors claim that Earth 'speaks' of its lengthy existence through radiometric dating. They ask:

'Since state-of-the-art technology has made it possible for the earth to speak to us in amazingly sophisti-



'And the evening and the morning was Day One'—Gen. 1:5. Ancient Hebrews certainly had words they could have used instead of *yôm* to describe something other than a solar day. Words such as *olam* or *qedem* in conjunction with *yôm* could have been used to say 'it was from days of old'.



When people **TRY** to make them agree, guess which one gets **"MODIFIED"**!!!!

cated language, how can the Bible, with its account of creation written almost four thousand years ago, have any relevance on the subject of how the earth and life on it came into existence?" (p. 83).

The authors discount problems with radiometric dating as negligible and ignore the axiom that any data resulting from this technology can be interpreted in different ways. They obviously prefer this flawed 'state-of-the-art technology' over the inerrancy of the Biblical text.

In discussing Genesis 2:7, the authors write:

'Is this statement regarding Adam's body being made from the 'dust of the ground' to be taken literally? Of course not. How do we know this? We can examine the human body and see that it is not made of dust and dirt or any earthlike, organic compounds' (p. 166).

Earlier in the book the authors claim they are 'literally' interpreting the first chapter of Genesis (p. 92), but here scoff at a literal interpretation of a verse in the very next chapter. When does literal interpreting begin and end? Notice they scoff, not out of an exegesis of the text, but because of science. How cheaply they discard Scripture.

The authors claim the 'Bible tells us about the Who and Why of Creation, and science the What, How and When' (p. 85). They got two out of five right. The Bible never explicitly says 'Why' we were created but does tell us 'What' was created. Because creation is a non-repeatable miraculous event, science can never, ever tell us 'How' or 'When' it came about. Only a witness to the events can tell us 'How and When' and it's the Bible that provides the account of an infallible one. The suggestion that science is the sixty-seventh book of the Bible is backward: it's the Bible that needs to be added to science.

And that's really the essence of the problem—the authors are looking at the issue backwards. Instead of considering science inerrant, they should be acknowledging Biblical inerrancy. Instead of standing with something that is transient and fallible, they should be standing with the infallible, unchanging Word of God. If they did, the necessity for murky exegesis falls away and the implication of their teachings becomes clarified.

What is that implication? Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death, and yet how can that be if, as the authors surmise, millions of years of death and disease preceded Adam's

sin? If death was already present, then Adam was not really punished for his sin. And if Adam wasn't punished for his sin, why should a just God punish anyone else? And if none of us are punished for our sin, why do we need a Savior? Why do we need the Cross? Why do we need Jesus?

The answer is that the authors are mishandling the Biblical text for the price of affirmation from their fellow intellectuals. And by mishandling it, they undermine the importance of Christ's saving grace, the very bedrock of Christianity.

Dr Terry Mortenson voiced his concern in this way:

'... We fear God's discipline for not accurately handling the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15). We fear the spiritual devastation that is coming and will continue to come to individuals and churches and schools, which depart from the clear teaching of Scripture and compromise with the false teaching of evolution and millions of years based on worldly philosophy (2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 6:20–21; Colosians 2:8; Acts 20: 28–32). Those are Biblical fears, and woe to that Christian who does not have them.'⁴

References

1. Pun, P.P.T., *J. American Scientific Affiliation* 39:14, 1987. It should be emphasized that Pun is a progressive creationist and rejects this 'straightforward understanding' of Genesis.
2. Stambaugh, J., The days of Creation: a semantic approach, *CEN Tech. J.* 5(1):70–78, 1991.
3. Grigg, R., How long were the days of Genesis 1? *Creation* 19(1):23–25, 1997.
4. Mortenson, T., in his critique <www.answersingenesis.org/pcreation> of a Christian Leadership Ministry's website article; Ross, H. and Ross, K., The real issue: the Creation date controversy, <www.leaderu.com/real/r19403/date.html>.