

# Misunderstanding creation

A review of  
**Holman QuickSource™  
Guide to Understanding  
Creation**  
by Mark Whorton and  
Hill Roberts  
Holman, Nashville, TN,  
2008

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This work is part of a series of ‘quick guides’ to various Christian topics published by Broadman and Holman. The book contains forty short chapters divided into nine parts, covering all the key elements of creation, the Bible and science, and includes a generous smattering of photographs and images. However, neither of the authors have any formal theological qualifications. Whorton has a Ph.D. in aerospace engineering and Roberts has an M.S. in physics. Both have a long history of articulating and defending old earth creationism.

## Purpose of the Genesis account

In discussing the ‘thrust’ of Genesis 1, the authors state that “The ‘how’ for all of these creation events is not exhaustively detailed in Genesis 1. We are simply told that God spoke and things came into existence” (p. 24). In other words, we are not told *how* God created, only that He spoke things into existence! The capacity of supposedly learned people to say such utterly stupid things never ceases to amaze me.

Whorton and Roberts make constant reference to their belief that the creation account is intended to be a polemic against pagan mythological ideas. Gerhard Hasel has shown that the creation account is to some extent

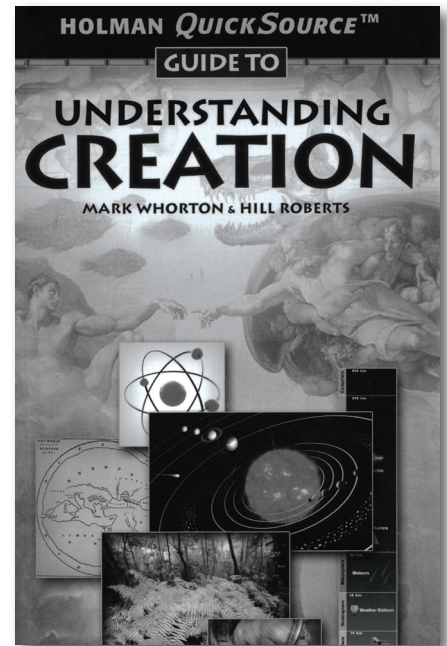
polemical, but only in regard to the creation of the luminaries, the purpose of the creation of mankind, and the method of creation ‘by word’,<sup>1</sup> but in every other respect, the tone is not polemical—indeed, quite the opposite. Umberto Cassuto writes: “The language is tranquil, undisturbed by polemic or dispute; the controversial note is heard indirectly, as it were, through the deliberate, quiet utterances of Scripture.”<sup>2</sup> Blocher adds: “The style of the prologue is amazing for its deliberate simplicity, its ascetic style. It shows not the slightest trace of rhetoric.”<sup>3</sup> Of course, the fact that Genesis records the truth implies that it may also serve as a polemic, although this is not the primary purpose. Indeed, Church Fathers such as Theophilus<sup>4</sup> and Basil<sup>5</sup> used the literal creation of the sun on Day 4 after the vegetation to point out the foolishness of sun worship. But this polemic works only because the account is *historical*.

The authors also claim that the account employs cultural accommodation: the terminology in Genesis corresponds to ancient near Eastern cosmogonies such as the *Enuma Elish*. But if the Genesis account is intended to rebut these near Eastern cosmogonies, why would it adopt their suspect terminology?

Whorton and Roberts go on to claim that God’s fundamental purpose is to “warn his people against worshipping the things Jehovah God has created” (p. 26). But how do they know this? In the absence of any other explanatory material, an author’s purpose can only be derived from the text itself. What in the text leads them to this conclusion? They do not say.

Furthermore, Whorton and Roberts claim that although

“Genesis does not answer many of the science questions we could ask of it, God did provide a highly



detailed account of natural history elsewhere. It’s found in nature itself. As King David said, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims the work of His hands. Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge’ (Psa. 19:1–2).”

But if Whorton and Roberts had kept reading Psalm 19, they would have seen that the point of this text is that even though the creation does not audibly speak or communicate in human language, it nevertheless testifies to God’s existence and His power and glory, and that this testimony is universal. Language and physical location present no barriers to ‘hearing’ and seeing God in creation. This is consistent with Paul’s point in Romans 1:20—no one has any excuse for not acknowledging God, because creation has made His existence and power obvious to everyone.

In any case, the authors’ claim of a detailed account of natural history in nature itself goes against their subsequent admission that nature only provides “irrefutable evidence of His existence, His power, and His goodness” (p. 27) and therefore no-one has any excuse for denying God.

## Science and Scripture

Whorton and Roberts begin by rightly affirming that General Revelation in nature conveys inescapable impressions about God's power and divinity, whereas Special Revelation in Scripture communicates God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. However, they go on to take a leap in logic when they posit that theology is the work of interpreting Scripture, and science is the work of interpreting nature. One does not need to be a scientist to understand God's message in the natural world. It is obvious to all! That is why it is called General Revelation—because it is generally available to all people at all times and in all places.<sup>6</sup>

They later claim the recent creation view conflicts with general revelation because the weight of scientific evidence indicates that the earth and the heavens are considerably older than 10,000 years. But the authors are conflating science and general revelation. They are not the same thing.

The authors affirm the authority and perspicuity of Scripture, but point out that both scientific and theological interpretation are subject to error. The problem, however, is that they appear to think that all scientific truth claims are absolute facts and therefore beyond question. Thus, when there is any conflict between science and Scripture, it is always Scripture that must yield to being reinterpreted in order to fit the so-called scientific facts, which are, in reality, nearly always 'interpret-facts' rather than actual facts. Indeed, Whorton and Roberts explicitly state that "theology does not always take precedence over science when it comes to discerning truths about the natural world" (p. 56). But what about the virgin birth? Christ's miracles (see figure 1)? The Resurrection? These are all scientifically impossible, so does that mean they did not really happen the way the gospels seem to indicate? If God supernaturally intervened in these cases, then why could He not



**Figure 1.** Jesus instantly turned water into fine wine at the wedding in Cana, despite it being scientifically 'impossible' (from Horne & J. Brewer, ref. 7).

have also supernaturally acted in the process of creation?

The authors also argue that the Curse could not have significantly altered the creation because Romans 1 states that God's general revelation is the basis for holding all people accountable. However, Whorton and Roberts are falsely equating the testimony of creation to God's existence and power with detailed scientific knowledge about how the universe operates and came into being.

Whorton and Roberts also endorse the principal of accommodation for reconciling science and the Bible. In other words, God accommodates human limitations by communicating in a way that conforms to the human context. Therefore, in matters of science, the Bible often speaks in a way that makes concessions to limited human understanding.

By way of illustration, the authors cite the New Testament example of Jesus' parable comparing the Kingdom of Heaven to a mustard seed. The mustard seed may have been the smallest known to the Jews but it is not the smallest seed (Matt 13:32). Indeed, a closer examination of the original Greek shows that Jesus did not intend to convey any such thing. As

in English, Greek adds different endings to adjectives to indicate *degree*. In English, we use the term 'smaller' (comparative) when making a size comparison between two objects, and if no other object is as small as the object we are comparing, then we say it is the 'smallest' (superlative). In this case, the Greek word translated 'smallest' in Matthew 13:32 can also be translated as a *comparative* (both have the same ending in the Greek), so a better translation would be 'one of the smallest' or 'relatively small'.

### The Genesis account

The authors also appear to favour a theistic evolutionary model: God providentially guided evolution to create all life. Theistic evolutionists are highly critical of both young-earth creationism and progressive creationism because they claim their proponents repeatedly appeal to miracles needlessly. But the very nature of the theistic evolutionary view requires constant divine intervention at all times and at all levels. Indeed, the authors admit as much: "God governs creation's development by being *continuously and imminently involved in all its affairs* [emphasis added]" (p. 79).

When discussing the problem of light being created before the sun, Whorton's and Roberts' constrained scientism is displayed for all to see. They argue that there are only two options:

1. light emanated from a temporary source for the first three days;
2. light emanated from the sun to the first three days but the sun could not be seen from the surface of the earth until Day 4.

They argue that option 2 fits the data better because, according to them, a temporary light source implies that the source had the same mass, chemical composition, and thermonuclear processes as our sun, or that the laws of physics were different on the first three days. But why are we constrained to find a naturalistic explanation of something that is clearly supernatural? Could God not have provided this light either directly or indirectly without using natural processes or being constrained by the laws of physics that He himself created? They also object to the notion of temporary light source because Hugh Ross says that life requires much more than 'mere light'. Life requires the total electromagnetic spectrum. But why could the temporary light source not embody the entire spectrum? Indeed, how could it not?

Regarding Genesis 2, the authors argue that the language implies that God worked through natural processes rather than instantaneous miracles. They write: "He could have miraculously accelerated its growth, but the text does not imply that conclusion. And in fact, the language seems to imply a long period of time was spent preparing the garden for its future inhabitants" (p. 144). In other words, the commands issued on those days would take more than 24 hours to fulfil. However, I have previously shown that this is not a problem at all.<sup>8</sup>

Whorton and Roberts also point to the events of the third day as an example of God using both supernatural and natural processes to create. They

note that God did not command vegetation to come into being. Rather, He commanded the ground to produce vegetation. Thus, they argue that because ground does not normally produce vegetation instantly, natural processes must have been at work. But this argument begs the question. Because the ground does not produce vegetation instantly, does this not indicate a miracle by fiat command? Whorton and Roberts also argue that a rigorous literalism would have land literally producing the animals. After all, this is what the text actually says. The land produced living creatures as a result of God's fiat command!

Regarding the seventh day, the authors consider God's 'rest' to be an anthropomorphism because God does not need to rest or be refreshed. But this should not be understood as indicating that God was somehow tired and fatigued as a result of His creative activities. The Hebrew verb form does not inherently mean 'rest' but rather 'stop', 'cease' or 'desist'.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the verb is further qualified by the phrase 'from all His work He had done'. Humans do not necessarily work for six whole days before becoming tired, only then requiring sleep/rest and then doing so for one whole day before resuming work. Rather, we recover from our fatigue and tiredness every night throughout the week. In Exodus 20:11, however, the Qal verb used to describe God's resting carries the notion of 'settling' 'remaining' or 'stopping'.<sup>10</sup> That this verb cannot mean 'resting from work' is shown in Genesis 2:15: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Clearly the verb cannot mean 'resting from work' because Adam was put into the garden to 'work it'. Therefore, 'rested' is an inadequate rendering, and in the context of Exodus 20:11 a better rendering would be 'stopped.'

Exodus 31:17, on the other hand, although very similar to Exodus 20:11, includes an additional clause: 'and was refreshed'.<sup>11</sup> Unlike 'stopped', the verb

clause 'was refreshed' does imply a recovery from tiredness and fatigue. But note that fatigue and tiredness are distinctive consequences of bodily existence. Since God has no body, and in the light of the verses discussed above, it cannot refer to God being literally refreshed after being tired from His creative activities. Rather, this appears to be an anthropomorphism. God was refreshed in that, after a short stoppage, His desire, excitement, and enthusiasm for interacting with His creation was reignited. Leon Morris writes: "So we should think of the rest as something like the satisfaction that comes from accomplishment, from the completion of a task, from the exercise of creativity."<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, regarding the account of the Fall in Genesis 3, the authors write: "The text employs anthropomorphism, so there are things we can only dimly understand." But isn't the whole point of employing anthropomorphism to help the reader to understand?

### The meaning of 'day'

Whorton and Roberts argue that *yom* can have other meanings apart from a 24-hour day. This is true, but that does not mean that all possible meanings are equally applicable in any particular context.

In response to the argument by YECs that *yom*, when modified by a number, refers to an ordinary day, Whorton and Roberts assert that such an argument cannot be sustained because they claim there are no other such instances to serve as a point of comparison. But this is simply not true: Numbers 7:10–84 and 29:12–35 also contain numbered sequences of days similar to Genesis 1.

The authors also cite Zechariah 14:7 and Hosea 6:2 as examples of where *yom* with a number does not appear to communicate a normal day. Zechariah 14:7 states: "It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light." But the 'day' in question is surely the

same as that mentioned in verses 1, 4, and 6, and it is clear from verse 5 that on ‘that day’ the Lord will return. In other words, it describes a specific time at which a space-time event occurs in the future. How can the return of the Lord take a long period of time? It is an event: at one moment on that day, He will be absent—in the next moment, He will have returned. Therefore, the ‘unique day’ in Zechariah 14:7 does indeed refer to a literal 24-hour day.

In the case of Hosea 6:2, the text reads: “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.” However, this verse is set in poetic parallelism—and parallelism of a very specific kind. This particular parallelism is a common Semitic device, which takes the form X//X + 1. Given that these instances are part of a well-defined Semitic device, they must be interpreted in accordance with that device. In this case, the use of ‘two days’ and ‘three days’ communicates that the restoration mentioned in the previous verse will happen quickly and surely.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, these instances must refer to normal days as opposed to long periods, otherwise the literary device would lose its meaning. In other words, the restoration would not be quick and certain if the days were long periods of time. There may also be a subtle prophetic allusion to the restoration of humanity after the death and Resurrection of Christ—especially since much of Hosea serves to prophetically illustrate future events. Again, this demands that the days be taken as 24-hour days.

Regarding the use of ‘evening’ and ‘morning’, the authors claim this could simply be a marker for the beginning and ending of an extended creation period. They also claim that ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ do not describe a normal 24-hour day but only half a day; that period from sunset to morning. They claim: “The uniqueness of this phrase in the old Testament may alert the reader that something other than normal days are in view” (p. 181). But the uniqueness of a particular combination of words or terms does not mean or imply that those words

or terms suddenly lose all meaning! In any case, Whorton and Roberts are correct in observing that the evening and morning refer to only half a day—the period from sunset to sunrise—but that day is still a normal 24-hour day!

The authors admit that the normal-day view held by YECs was the majority view in history. However they state that “Virtually all of the Church Fathers from the first centuries after Christ allowed latitude on the length of the days” (p. 181). This is misleading at best. Some church fathers adopted a non-literal interpretation in order to find deeper spiritual truths in the account, but this did not mean they rejected the notion of actual, literal, historical 24-hour days.<sup>14</sup>

Whorton and Roberts try to mitigate the force of Exodus 20:11 by arguing that other passages, such as Leviticus 25:3–4 and Exodus 21:2, are also based on a six-day work week and Sabbath rest, yet they refer to years rather than days. But that is the critical point: these verses specifically mention ‘years’, whereas Exodus 20:11 specifically mentions ‘days’!

Regarding the existence of light and the occurrence of evenings and mornings before the creation of the sun, the authors state that “Genesis never says a temporary pseudo-sun was created” (p. 183). But the text does say that God initially “separated the light from the darkness” (v. 4) and then subsequently appointed the sun and moon to fulfill this purpose (v. 14). In addition, they note that the word translated ‘place’ on Day 4 can have a number of meanings that do not necessarily imply ‘create’. They then conclude: “This seems to indicate that on day four the heavenly bodies became visible in the sky and could therefore serve as markers for time, seasons, and direction” (p. 192). That *natan* does not necessarily mean ‘create’ is true but completely irrelevant. The lights had already been created *ex nihilo* (v. 14) before they were ‘placed’ in the expanse in order to separate day and night.

Citing the late Gleason Archer, Whorton and Roberts also raise the old

canard that the events of Day 6 could not be completed in a single 24-hour day. However, I have shown elsewhere that this is not the case.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the authors cite the utterly inane argument that Adam’s exclamation “at last!” when he met Eve (Gen 2:23) implies a long period of time because, according to them, it is hard to understand his excitement if he had only been waiting a few hours. But the phrase “at last” expresses a relative time period. In the context of naming several thousand animals over several hours, it is not at all surprising to hear Adam express relief at finally meeting a creature that was perfectly suited for him. Is it not uncommon for us to say to a partner or friend who arrives at an appointment half an hour late: “At last! You’re finally here”? Furthermore, the same Hebrew word *happa’am* is used in Abraham’s dialogue with God in Genesis 18:32 about the coming destruction of Sodom: “I will speak *this last time* . . .”

### Extent of the Flood

Whorton and Roberts posit that the extent of the Flood is not clear and could refer to a local flood on the basis that the Hebrew text is not as unequivocal as the English Bible. They point out that the term *erets* most often simply refers to a local region rather than the whole earth. Again, just because a term *most often* refers to a limited geographical region does not necessarily mean or imply that it has this meaning in the Flood account. The context is determinative, and the context of Genesis 6–9 clearly indicates that *erets* refers to the entire earth.

The authors also argue that the term ‘entire heavens’ can equally refer to a limited area (e.g. Deut. 2:25), and assert that—to the Hebrews—the entire world was limited to the region of Mesopotamia. But even if we grant the notion that the author of the account did not have a global perspective, why should this limit the Holy Spirit from communicating a true global perspective? Is this not

the whole point of revelation? To supernaturally reveal information that is not naturally available in the normal course of events?

In response to those who hold to a global flood and who point out that a local flood would make the Ark redundant, Whorton and Roberts argue that global flood advocates miss a critical theological point in that the Ark is a type of Christ. Not only do global flood advocates *not* miss this point, **but the point can only actually** have coherency in a global flood scenario. In a local flood scenario, it is theoretically possible for someone to save themselves by simply walking out of the affected area, but the message of Christianity is that only Christ can provide salvation.

Regarding the promise to never again destroy the earth by a flood, the authors claim that the promise would not be broken if the flood was merely local, because they claim that although it was local it destroyed all humanity. But this cannot be the case if one accepts the geological timescale, as the authors do, since according to the geological timescale the Australian Aborigines have been in Australia for over 50,000 years, and *Homo sapiens* were in Africa almost 200,000 years ago. Yet the authors claim that at that time (around 4,000–5,000 years ago) humans had not yet spread beyond the region of Mesopotamia. In any case, the promise was to never again destroy the *earth*, not just human beings, so a local flood would still breach the promise!

Ultimately the authors are somewhat non-committal as to whether the Flood was global or local. They state: “We believe what the Bible says: that the flood was a miraculous, historical event that killed everyone in the world except Noah and his family” (p. 168).

### **Bowing down to scientific truth claims**

Whorton and Roberts operate on the assumption that a miracle was involved only if it is explicitly stated. But what constitutes a statement of a miracle? When God said: “Let

the land produce living creatures ...”, why is this not considered a miracle, given that living creatures do not spontaneously emerge from the ground?

The book includes a chapter on the reliability of modern radiometric dating methods, which presents them as unquestionably reliable. Once again, the authors point out a few brief objections that have been raised by YEC scientists, but they are always followed by ‘rebuttals’, even though those rebuttals have, in turn, been rebutted by YEC scientists.

Not surprisingly, the authors heartily endorse the big bang cosmology, but do not discuss any of its fundamental problems.

Being a popular-level book aimed at the layman, there are no footnotes, indices or detailed exegetical discussions. There is, however, a categorized suggested reading section that contains a few YEC resources.

### **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, this book is extremely unbalanced and one-sided—which is unforgivable in an introductory text for the layman. Occasionally, there is an impression of fairness and balance but it is artificial. Scientific arguments for the YEC position are presented but only in a cursory and dismissive way, or as a straw-man argument. Moreover, the arguments are always accompanied by OEC (or even TE) ‘rebuttals’, even though those supposed rebuttals have in turn been rebutted by YEC scientists. There are also references to outdated YEC arguments such as the vapour canopy theory and the moon dust argument. However, when scientific evidence for OEC is presented, the authors offer no YEC rebuttals! The OEC view is their pre-ordained ‘truth’ and they make every effort to defend it and protect it from criticism. In other words, the book is designed to lead the reader to the (erroneous) conclusion that the YEC

view is mistaken, both biblically and scientifically.

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