

LITERATURE REVIEWS

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PROBLEMS WITH TIME

A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy. Hugh Ross. 2004. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress. 250 p. Paper, \$15.99.

Reviewed by Aaron Corbit

A Matter of Days is astronomer Hugh Ross' attempt to resolve long-standing disagreements among Christians over the length of the Genesis "days." Ross, a self-described Old-Earth Creationist, is better described by Ariel Roth's "Progressive Creationist" definition: someone who believes "God performed multiple creation events spread over long periods of time. The degree of progression that we find from bottom to top in the fossil record reflects successive creative acts."¹ Believing both science and Scripture are on his side, Ross accepts much of the evidence for Earth and life's antiquity while promoting the "Day-Age" creation week interpretation.²

Ross develops numerous biblical and scientific lines of reasoning. Asserting that the limited Hebrew vocabulary necessitated that words have multiple literal meanings, he justifies translation of the Hebrew "yôm" — translated "twenty-four hour day" by most Christian and secular biblical scholars — as "undetermined period of time." He then stretches to explain away contextual clues that contradict this long-age interpretation.

Ross also claims that several Genesis passages demonstrate creation week "days" must exceed twenty-four hours. In Genesis 2, Ross notes that the "evening and morning" phrase associated with all the other days is absent from the description of the seventh day. He interprets this omission to mean the Genesis seventh "day" has not yet ended and we live in the age of God's rest from creating. The failure of science to observe emerging new species is presented as verifying this interpretation. Given the many years since God stopped creating, the other creation "days" must be similarly long periods of time. Ross also uses the end of Genesis 2, arguing that Adam couldn't have time to name all the animals and become enough

acquainted with nature to realize something (Eve) is missing from his life all within a 24-hour sixth day.³

Seeing the Big-Bang as God's initial creative act, Ross believes everything about the universe, from its finely tuned physical constants to the vast age of Earth and life, was designed by God to specifically support human civilization. This includes the long ages of decay and death which, he says, were necessary to provide, among other things, the petroleum and other resources that our civilization uses. He does not believe God created a perfect, death-free universe, only that God created a "very good"⁴ universe. Rather than restoring Earth to its original perfect form, Ross believes God will create a whole new universe with different physical laws which make possible the biblical claims of no decay, death, or shadows.

Ross expresses disdain for Young Earth Creationists (YECs), characterizing them as narrow-minded, mean-spirited extremists with irrational hatred of Old-Earth Creationists (OECs). This he attributes to their misunderstanding of evolution as the root of all evil and those who believe that Earth is old as akin to evolutionists. Such sentiments Ross condemns as un-Christian because they turn scientific-minded people away from Christianity. Moreover, Ross claims, the YEC model, with rapid speciation of Noah's ark animals after the flood, is more Darwinian than the OEC separate fiat creations model. Because YECs allow for these major changes in living things they must, says Ross, stubbornly cling to their short chronology or full-blown evolution is possible.

While Ross gives the impression that his model ties up all the loose ends, bringing science and the Bible into perfect harmony, it has some major weaknesses. He mischaracterizes all YECs as believing the universe is young. For YECs who believe God created living things during the creation week and that the universe was created at some undetermined prior time, Ross' astronomical evidences for an old universe lose their relevance.

As other authors have noted, OECs like Ross have problems relating the Genesis creation sequence to the geological fossil sequence. The fossil record shows sea creatures, land animals, and then birds. However, Genesis has sea creatures and birds appearing before land animals. Ross interprets Genesis "sea creatures" to mean "sea mammals" and Genesis "land animals" as "land mammals," thus placing mammals at creation's end and topping the geological column.⁵ But this places birds and sea mammals, created during the same "day," 110 million years apart; in the Upper Jurassic and Eocene respectively.

Ross asserts the “death” mentioned in Romans 5:12 applies only to humans, raising questions about the nature of human immortality before sin. If decay and death are inescapable qualities of our universe — pre-ordained as extensions of the law of entropy, would immortal pre-Fall humans have even been possible? He says that Romans 8:19-21, “explains that God [since the beginning of creation], not Satan, subjected the creation to this law [of entropy, suffering, and death], not in punishment but in hope and promise of the freedom that lies ahead.”⁶ This baffling interpretation ignores that the “creation waits in eager expectation” to be “liberated from its bondage to decay,”⁷ clearly implying that decay is evil. A loving God would hardly subject creation to something from which it wants to be liberated.

These problems pale in comparison to the biggest problem: Ross’ understanding of what it means for the Bible to be “free of contradiction and error — doctrinally, historically, and scientifically.”⁸ Ross tests the OEC and YEC models using the scientific method which also doubles as his method for Bible interpretation. Since his OEC model more closely matches his assessment of the current scientific evidence, it must be right. He ignores the possibility that his assessment of the scientific evidence might be wrong! When Ross declares the Bible free from scientific error he really means that he has interpreted the Bible to conform to his understanding of science. Thus he elevates his understanding of science over the authority of the Bible.

At first glance Ross’ view of creation may seem appealing; allowing some scientific respectability while retaining “biblical inerrancy.” However, on examination the cost of his beliefs are too high: God designing animals to die, the Sabbath a long age that has not yet ended and Scripture held subject to the very human discipline of science.

ENDNOTES

1. Roth A. 1998. *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, p 342.
2. The “Day-Age” model holds that each of the days in the Genesis narrative are representative of long periods of time.
3. Genesis 2:19-20.
4. Genesis 1:31.
5. Ross, p 236.
6. Ross, p 107.
7. Romans 8:19-21.
8. Ross, p 14.