

The Battle for the Beginning – Chapter 4 When He Marked Out the Foundations of the Earth

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In this chapter, MacArthur tackles the issues of Days Two and Three of creation. The introduction to the chapter has nothing of relevance for the age of the earth debate.

Day Two: The Firmament (Page 88)

This section starts out with an interesting thing...an admission that there was a "primordial soup." Creationists often joke that life could not have started from this soup, yet here MacArthur admits it was there.

MacArthur makes the statement at the bottom of page 90, "There is no need for any scientific or naturalistic explanation of how this might have occurred." No, there is no need, but it does not mean we should not try to explain it through science. It is not a sin to study the creation and theorize about how God did it. It is not a sin to come up with a theory contrary to the young earth interpretation...they are both theories, and have no bearing upon the key doctrines of the Bible, such as Salvation.

He then discusses the Hebrew word "made" vs. the word "created." There are no problems here from an old earth perspective. At the end of this, he says "It also clearly involves the creation of something that never existed before" (referring to fiat creation, or out of nothing). Earlier in Chapter 3, the earth was void and without form. MacArthur claims God then shaped the earth, out of the unmolded clay, if you will. On the one hand, he preaches fiat creation, on the other, God molds and shapes previously existing material.

Next, he presents the water canopy theory, clearly explaining that not all creationists believe this theory. He errs on page 92, however, when he says "Scripture says that before the Flood there was no rain (Genesis 2:5)" Genesis 2:5 says:

⁵ before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; ⁶ but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

It says there was no rain on the earth prior to the plant's growing (Day Three of creation). It says nothing of rain from the time of the end of creation until the Flood. To expand this verse to apply until the start of the Flood is inserting something into the Bible that is not supported by the Scriptures.

Day Three: The Sea and Dry Land (Page 93)

This section starts out with a discussion of the possibility of God doing this enormous amount of creative work within a 24 hour period, and he explains it away by attributing it to the supernatural power of God. There are no problems with his arguments, as they don't impact old earth belief. You still need supernatural powers even in an old earth framework of understanding the creation.

At this point, he tackles the Big Bang. Why he chose this location, in the middle of Day Three, is unknown. With this discussion he jumps back to the beginning of Day One of creation. After some words on the Big Bang, which are not significant, he turns again to the idea of God completing a massive amount of work on Day Three. Nothing of significance here.

Interestingly, he makes the claim that when God created the land, it was dry instantly! Next, he alludes to the land being one giant continent, with the possibility of it breaking up during the Flood.

Next, he moves into Job 38 and Psalm 104, and uses these as proof that it happened instantly. However, a reading of the passages yields no indication of how much time the creative event took. For instance, in Psalm 104, it says

The waters stood above the mountains. At Your rebuke they fled;

There is nothing here that indicates a time frame. MacArthur can no more claim that it took place instantly than I can claim that it took 100 million years...we just don't know.

The End of Day Three: Plant Life (Page 97)

Next MacArthur addresses plant creation. Naturally, he says it was a direct result of God's decree...in other words, it did not evolve. However, if God decreed it, and started life via evolution, this is a perfectly acceptable method of creation also. In both instances, God has decreed it.

Don't get me wrong...as a progressive creationist, I agree with MacArthur that the generation of life from that which is inanimate is impossible. However, if God is involved in the evolutionary process, then it is a valid explanation that a believer may hold to, no matter how much the young earth creationists rant and rave against evolution. If God started life out of the inanimate, and then let evolution run its course, then there are no theological reasons why people cannot believe this, and be brothers and sisters in Christ, right alongside young earth creationists.

MacArthur makes the claim that "God created plants, not merely seeds. He made them mature..." Again, he is reading too much into the text that is not there. From the time that God said, "Let there be..." to the time the plants appear, is open to interpretation. No time frame is specified between the creative words, and the final created product...we simply don't know!

On page 99, he discusses genetics and the fact that all organisms will reproduce after their kind. Then he says that nothing in Scripture "suggests that any living species evolved from another species." Nothing prohibits it either, and with God in the creative process guiding evolution, there is no problem here for the theistic evolutionist.

He goes on to state "In fact, it is fair to say that this crucial phrase, "according to its kind," clearly refutes the very heart of the evolutionary idea." It does no such thing!

With no conclusive proof of the amount of time it took from the time God spoke until the organism appeared, it is impossible to condemn evolution.

Think of creation this way...the events of creation are grouped together into days (even MacArthur admits this). When God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass...", God is giving a brief account of the creation of plants, but it is probably not a complete description. For instance, could the events of plant creation be further broken down, i.e. "let there be grass," and "let there be ferns" and let there be seaweed, and let there be a Venus flytrap." Instead, God gives us a generic explanation. There is no need to list everything that God created...Genesis would be larger than the entire Bible if He did!

On page 100, he quotes Henry Morris, and argues that the order of creation is different than the fossil record. Put simply, flowering plants require insects to pollinate them. However, insects were created according to Morris on Day Six, and plants on Day Three. The thought is that this three-day gap would not hurt the plants, as they could live until the insects were created.

However, plants are latecomers to the fossil record, arriving after the creation of many marine animals. This actually presents no problems for old earth belief. Remember, the events of creation are broken into days, each distinctly describing a particular creation event. Plants are in fact the earliest fossils we have. Single-celled algae were the first on the scene in the fossil record. New plants continue to show up in the fossil record, right up to recent times. This means that Day Three represents a specific creation, and not a specific time period. The days of creation overlap one another, without contradicting Scripture, and without the Scriptures contradicting the fossil record. There is still a beginning and ending of each creative event...it's just that the ending of each creative day meets with the final creation of Adam.

This may sound strange to some of you, but this interpretation can be supported while still believing in a literal translation, and an inerrant Bible. I realize not all old earth creationists hold to a literal translation of the Genesis account...but it is possible.

In the quote on page 100, Henry Morris says "The idea of theistic evolution is counter to the biblical record of creation in practically every passage." Nothing could be further from the truth.

MacArthur goes on to claim, "There is nothing here that permits the belief that any new species arose through any evolutionary process. There is nothing here that demands a long era instead of a twenty-four-hour day." There is nothing that prevents such a belief either! When one looks at science, and sees the great age of the universe and our world, the only possible conclusion is that the earth is old. To twist science, as young earth theorists do, is completely unnecessary and an embarrassment to the church.