Are (biblical) creationists 'cornered'?—a response to Dr J.P. Moreland

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Many highly respected Christian leaders believe one can accommodate the claims of science (*viz*. millions of years of evolutionary history), into the account of Genesis. Such beliefs are based on the uncharacteristic failure of these leaders to apply sound exegesis to the record of creation that God gave to us. Such leaders also appeal to human authority (the majority of evangelical Hebrew experts) to support their view. However, such authorities have also, for the most part, accepted the interpretations of science over the Bible, and are guilty of eisegesis, when it comes to the historical record in Genesis, as can be seen from their writings. Contrary to the views expressed by such compromising Christian leaders, this avenue of thinking *does* lead to the rejection of biblical authority and thus the truth of the gospel.

Sometimes, one can only shake one's head and sigh about the many great Christian scholars and theologians who are so 'spot on' in regard to their approach to the Bible—but only from Genesis 12 onwards!

For instance, consider Dr J.P. Moreland. Qualified in philosophy, theology and chemistry, Dr Moreland has written many books,[1] and been published in a wide variety of journals.[2] He served with Campus Crusade for 10 years, planted three churches, and has spoken on over 175 college campuses.[3]

We have great respect for Dr Moreland. He is a brilliant scholar, an excellent writer and speaker, and a devout follower of Jesus Christ. He justly deserves the appreciation of the church for his many labours. We have no doubts about his sincerity and integrity, and we have learned much from his writings. But on the subject of the age of the earth, he does not display, in our opinion, the careful reflection that is so characteristic of his writings generally. It grieves us to have to disagree with Dr Moreland. But we are compelled to write out of our love for the truth of Scripture and for the church, which is being negatively influenced by his remarks.

A recent article[4] on the Reasons to Believe[5] website publishes (with his approval) Dr Moreland's remarks on the age of the earth, which he made orally before a church in Washington State, USA, in February 2002. Dr Moreland attempts to justify allowing the days of creation to be long periods of time. Sadly, his comments are typical within Christian circles today. Our purpose in focusing on Dr Moreland is purely to show the way in which even otherwise great Christians (we all have feet of clay) use faulty reasoning to justify their rejection of the six literal days of creation only a few thousand years ago.

To his credit, Dr Moreland states, regarding the days of Genesis, that 'we ought not allow science to dictate to us our exegesis of the Old Testament'.[6] But then he does exactly that—and he doesn't see it! Consider carefully his reasoning as he seeks to justify acceptance of millions of years and thus rejection of literal creation days.

First, he says something similar to what we often stress:

> 'The argument is that if you take the days of Genesis as not being six days and take them as maybe longer periods of time, then where do you draw the line … why wouldn't the same reasoning imply that we'll eventually have to reinterpret the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus?'

We make such claims because the major reason most Christian scholars do not accept six literal days is that they start from outside of Scripture, accepting an old Earth (which they claim is based on 'science'), and thus proceed to 'reinterpret' the clear meaning of the word 'day'. This is not exegesis, but using man's fallible ideas (the supposed millions of years) to impose a meaning upon the text. Applying the same principles, one should also reinterpret the Resurrection and Virginal Conception, since all observational (operational) science indicates that people do not rise from the dead, nor do virgins conceive.

Without mentioning this reasoning behind our claims, Dr Moreland then refers to biblical passages which speak of the 'four corners of the earth' and say that the sun 'rises' and 'sets'.

> 'I doubt, sir, that you or anybody else in the room takes the biblical passages that say that "Jesus will call his angels from the four corners of the earth" to teach a flat Earth. I also doubt that anyone in here says that when the sun rises and sets it literally means an earth-centered universe. But you must understand that … there were times when the church interpreted the text that teached [*sic*] that God—Christ will call his angels from the four corners of the world to teach very obviously that the world has four corners. The text says that. There is absolutely no evidence in that text that it means anything other than four corners. You can

read it until you're blue in the face, and it says that the Earth has four corners. Similarly, the Bible says the sun rises and sets. Now, that's what it says. You can dance around it all you want. That's what the text says. But there's nobody in here that believes that. No one in here believes the earth has four corners. And so, what we've done is taken that language and interpreted it metaphorically. Similarly, with the rising and the setting of the sun, we treat that … phenomenologically—we say that's the language of description; it is not meant to be taken literally.'

The four corners

There are several problems with Dr Moreland's line of reasoning about the shape of the earth.

- First, the phrase, 'four corners of the earth' only appears in the New Testament in Revelation 7:1 and 20:8[7] in descriptive statements by the Apostle John. Jesus speaks only of the 'four winds of the earth' (Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:27), as does John in Revelation 7:1.[8] These are all the New Testament occurrences of these phrases. In the Old Testament 'four corners of the earth' appears only in Isaiah 11:12. The same Hebrew words appear in Ezekiel 7:2 but are correctly translated as 'four corners of the land' in the KJV, NKJV, NAS and NIV, since the preceding words in the verse show that *eretz* (the Hebrew word that can be translated either as 'earth' or 'land', depending on context) is referring to the land of Israel, not the whole planet as in Isaiah 11:12.
- Second, we should note that all of the above passages are in prophetic, apocalyptic sections of Scripture, where (unlike Genesis) figurative language is frequently used. Therefore, a discerning reader will be careful about interpreting these phrases literally.[9]
- Third, given the biblical allusions to the earth's sphericity in Job 26:10; Proverbs 8:27; Ecclesiastes 1:6; Psalm 19:6 and Isaiah 40:22 and the fact that the ancients long before the time of Christ had figured out that the earth is a sphere,[10] there is no reason to imagine that Christ or his disciples actually thought the earth was flat and that the wind only blew in one of four directions.
- Fourth, the church never interpreted the 'corners of the earth' to mean that the earth is flat. It is a myth that the church ever believed in a flat earth. As historian Jeffrey Russell shows, that was the view of only a very few odd individuals scattered throughout the last twenty centuries.[11] We use similar figures of speech today. Something is scattered 'to the four corners of the earth' meaning 'all over the earth'. The convention has always been to talk of four directions, or four compass points—north, south, east and west. Neither we, nor the ancients, ever took this to mean that there are only four directions in which one can travel, just as one still talks of the 'four winds'.[12]
- Fifth, these phrases are not worded as statements of literal geographical or atmospheric fact. In other words, neither in these verses nor in any other part of the Bible do we read statements like 'the earth has four corners' or 'there are only four winds that blow on the earth'.

In light of this, we can be certain Dr Moreland is wrong in his assertion that there is no exegetical reason[13] to conclude these verses are teaching anything other than that the earth has four corners. All careful readers would know instinctively that the phrases 'four corners of the earth' and 'four winds of the earth' are idioms, meaning 'everywhere on the earth' or 'from all directions'.[14] In fact, Mark 13:27 shows that Jesus is not teaching geography or atmospheric science in that 'from the four winds' is used as a parallel synonym for 'from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven'.

Thus, contrary to what Dr Moreland has stated, the term 'corners' is easily understood by good exegesis, without using scientific evidence external to Scripture.

Sunrise and sunset

Regarding the issue of the movement of the sun and the earth, Dr Moreland's objection (which has been used against young-earth creationist arguments by others before him for almost 200 years) fails. The statements about the movement of the sun and earth are literal in a *phenomenological* sense, as he points out. In other words, a phenomenon is described from the viewpoint of the observer. We do the same thing today as we (even evolutionists) speak in everyday discourse about the sun rising and setting, even though we know much more about how the solar system works. From the observer's position, that is exactly what happens.[15]

The Bible's phenomenological statement that the sun 'rises' is consistent with *either* a geocentric *or* heliocentric view of the solar system. Scientific evidence has enabled us to distinguish which of these two is actually a correct understanding of the solar system, but it has not, in the slightest, changed our understanding of the meaning of the actual words of the Bible. For there to be a true parallel (as claimed by Dr Moreland and others) with the issue of the creation days, one would have to show that the use of the word 'day' in Genesis is intrinsically consistent with *either* a long age *or* an ordinary day. But this begs the question that Dr Moreland is addressing in the first place! In other words, Dr Moreland is arguing for permission to interpret 'day' as an 'age' by using an argument which would only be sound if such permission were already there in the text! The argument is inevitably trapped in a vicious circle of its own making. In any case, young-earth creationists have demonstrated repeatedly over the last 200 years that the Genesis text simply does *not* permit the 'long-age' option; in contrast, the 'sun rising' texts do not preclude either the geocentric or heliocentric options.

Furthermore, these statements about the sun and moon

moving are very incidental and brief statements. We have very little *in the text* to go on to know how to interpret these phrases or sentences, and most of the references are in the poetic literature, where we should be on the alert for non-literal language. Finally, as with the phrases like 'corners of the earth', we do not find an explicit statement in the Bible such as 'the earth does not move and the sun and stars go around the earth', which could easily have been said in just such simple language.

Contrast these brief statements with the lengthy accounts of creation and the Flood in Genesis. Here we have whole chapters which, in various ways, emphasize that God made the initial creation complete in six literal days (about 6,000 years ago, as the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 indicate) and that He judged the world with a global catastrophic Flood at the time of Noah. The only way to deny this is to not pay careful attention to the text of Genesis 1–11 *and* to ignore the passages in the rest of the Bible that show that Jesus and the biblical writers took these chapters as literal history. Jesus clearly shows Himself to be a young-earth creationist in Mark 10:6, Luke 11:50–51 and elsewhere. In these passages, he states that Adam, Eve and their son Abel were at the beginning of creation, not billions of years after the beginning (as would be the case if the earth is truly billions of years old). There simply is no real comparison between the brief and less-than-clear verses about the movement of the sun and the lengthy and clear passages about creation and the Flood.

Dr Moreland continues in his argument as follows:

> 'So then, suppose that you believe that … those texts do not teach that there are four corners and that the sun rises and sets? Are you now going to deny the virgin birth? Are you going to give up the resurrection? No, of course not. So, the point is … that the general argument from adopting a certain view of one text, there's no way to block the slide to doing that to other texts, is an example in philosophy of what is called hasty generalization; it makes a generalization based upon a slim sampling of evidence. The fact of the matter is that when you interpret biblical texts, you've got to take each one at its own merits and you've got to do the very best you can to handle that text by itself. And so from the fact that one particular text is handled in some way, it does not follow that … other texts will need to be handled in any way whatsoever, unless you can show that there's a clear parallel in the way that the two texts are being handled.'

Young-earth creationists do not endorse 'the general argument' that 'from adopting a certain view of one text, there's no way to block the slide to doing that to other texts'. Given his expertise in philosophy, it is surprising to see Dr Moreland using a straw-man argument, attacking a position that misrepresents what we believe. What we say is that Genesis 1–11 has plenty of evidence that it is historical narrative, even though it describes unusual and miraculous events, just as Matthew 1–2 and Matthew 26–28 are historical narrative passages describing unusual and miraculous events. There is a *very clear* parallel between these passages. It is therefore exegetically inconsistent to interpret the latter passages as literal straightforward history but not the former. Furthermore, historically speaking, in the church the rejection of the literal truth of Genesis preceded (and hermeneutically laid the groundwork for) the rejection of the literal truth of the Virginal Conception and Resurrection of Christ. Christians abandoned belief in Genesis 1–11, before they abandoned belief in the gospels. So young-earth creationists are not the ones guilty of a hasty generalization, but rather Dr Moreland is. Young-earth creationists do not take, and never have taken, every word or verse in the Bible literally, contrary to what many of our critics charge. We have always recognized that there are idioms, parables and other figurative, symbolic phrases or sections of Scripture. What we have contended is that Genesis 1–11 is not one of those sections. It is sober, true and inerrant history.

Dr Moreland continues:

> 'Now, when it comes to the … flat earth and the rising and the setting of the sun: it was scientific evidence that caused people to say "maybe we'd better re-look at those passages". There was nothing exegetically or strictly in the Hebrew grammar and syntax. There was absolutely nothing about the literary genre of the passage or the historical-grammatical method of interpretation that could tell you anything at all about one way or the other—it was scientific evidence. So now the question was raised by the church interpreters: "Is there anything essential to this passage that's violated if we take the four corners of the earth to be metaphorical?" Now, their answer was, in that particular passage, "no". That particular text can allow for that without violating the teachings of the scriptures in that particular text. Now, is this procedure risky in other passages? You bet. But does it follow that it should never be applied? No, you've gotta take texts—each text, on its own. So, the devil's in the details, and you've got to be very, very careful.'

Scientific evidence did *not* lead the church to reject the idea of a flat earth, for the simple fact that, as already mentioned, it never believed this. Scientific evidence at the time of Galileo and later did cause people to re-examine the Scriptures. And they concluded that the relevant texts did not explicitly teach that the sun literally goes around a stationary Earth, but only appeared to do so as seen from Earth. So the Bible could be legitimately interpreted in such a way as to harmonize it with the Copernican theory (and the later revised version[16]), without doing violence to the text. In contrast, despite the best and most ingenious efforts of Christian scholars over the past 200 years, Christians have not been able to show how Genesis can be reinterpreted to make it harmonize with the evolutionary idea of millions

of years. The gap theory, day-age theory, day-gap-day theory, framework hypothesis and many other lesser-known reinterpretations of Genesis have all failed when examined carefully with an open Bible.[17] One of the biggest problems that all these interpretations face, but generally ignore, is the contradiction between the Bible's teaching that death came after the Fall and the evolutionists' claim that millions of years of death, violence, disease and extinction preceded the appearance of man on the earth. Contrary to what Dr Moreland says, the devil is not in the details, he is in the superficial analyses of the Word of God. The Lord is in the details, because every word of Scripture is inspired by God. But what about those godly scholars who are not young-earth creationists? More about this follows.

The days of Genesis 1

Dr Moreland continues:

> 'Now, when it comes to the days of Genesis … I'm of the view on this that while we ought not allow science to dictate to us our exegesis of the Old Testament, nevertheless, if there is an interpretation of the Old Testament that is exegetically permissible—that is, and old age interpretation; that is to say, if you can find conservative, inerrantist, evangelical Old Testament scholars that say that the interpretation of this text that treats the days of Genesis as unspecified periods of time, and that is completely permissible thing to do on exegetical grounds alone, then my view is that that is a permissible option if it harmonizes the text with science because that option can be justified exegetically, independent of science.'

Dr Moreland is doing precisely what he says we ought not to do—allowing science to dictate to us our exegesis of the Old Testament. But the question is not whether an interpretation is exegetically permissible in the opinion of some conservative, inerrantist, evangelical OT scholar, but whether it is exegetically probable and defensible. Furthermore, truth is not determined by majority vote, as Dr Moreland knows. The fact that most contemporary conservative evangelical OT scholars are not young-earth creationists means nothing. They are a minority in church history.[18] More important is the fact that these contemporary conservative scholars, who are justly respected for their many helpful contributions to the church, do not hold to their old-earth views because of exegetical considerations but because they have surrendered the authority of Scripture to what they have been led to believe is solid science on this point. Many quotes could be given to support this claim, but we will cite just a few, first by Dr James Boice and then by Dr Meredith Kline, both respected Bible scholars.

> 'We have to admit here that the exegetical basis of the creationists is strong … . In spite of the careful biblical and scientific research that has accumulated in support of the creationists' view, there are problems that make the theory wrong to most (including many evangelical) scientists. … Data from various disciplines point to a very old earth and an even older universe ….'[19]

> 'In this article I have advocated an interpretation of biblical cosmogony according to which Scripture is open to the current scientific view of a very old universe and, in that respect, does not discountenance the theory of the evolutionary origin of man.'[20]

Another distinguished scholar, Dr Wayne Grudem, is more guarded in his statements and certainly feels the force of the exegetical arguments for the young-earth view. But he clearly indicates that it is the 'apparently overwhelming' scientific evidence for millions of years that is the deciding factor in his not accepting the young-earth view.[21] Many other examples could be cited.

Dr Moreland says that an old-earth interpretation 'is a permissible option if it harmonizes the text with science because that option can be justified exegetically, independent of science'. No such old-earth interpretation exists. They all ignore at least some of the details in Genesis 1 and Exodus 20:8–11 that show overwhelmingly that these were literal days of creation. They all ignore the theological problem of millions of years of death before the Fall and (knowingly or unconsciously) reduce the Curse in Genesis 3 to nothing more than a spiritual consequence affecting man alone. These old-earth views all ignore the clear testimony of Jesus that He was a young-earth creationist, as already noted. Furthermore, most old-earth proponents deny that Noah's Flood was global and catastrophic. If they do believe that, they fail to realize that it had to have left a massive amount of evidence worldwide (which is exactly what we see in the geological/fossil record). But evolutionary geologists deny that the global Flood ever occurred and instead attribute those same fossils and rock layers to processes happening over millions of years. In other words, in spite of their godly sincerity, they fail to realize that it is logically impossible to believe in both a global, catastrophic Noachian Flood and millions of years. The geological evidence for one view means that there is no geological evidence for the other view. They are mutually exclusive. The Flood is crucial to the matter of the age of the earth, but it is ignored or rejected by old-earth proponents.

None of these old-earth reinterpretations are 'justified exegetically, independent of science' but rather are classic examples of *eisegesis* (reading into the text what we want it to say), whereby evolutionary, millions-of-years *hypotheses and assumptions* (not 'science') are used to make the text say what it simply does not say.

Hebrew exegesis

Dr Moreland continues:

> 'Now … I'm not a Hebrew exegete. But I

> will tell you that two of the best-known exegetes of the Old Testament in the American evangelical community are Gleason Archer at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Walter Kaiser at Gordon-Conwell. Walter Kaiser and Gleason Archer are respected in the entire United States as being faithful expositors of the Old Testament. Both of them know eight to ten Old Testament languages, and they both have spent their entire lives in Hebrew exegesis. Both of them believe the days of Genesis are … vast, unspecified periods of time, and are in no way required to be literal twenty-four hour days.'

We are not Hebrew scholars, either. But in this case it does not matter. There are many conservative evangelical scholars (though admittedly they are now in a minority) who know Hebrew and love Christ and display godly character every bit as well as any old-earth creationists do, but who hold to the young-earth view. Additionally, there are non-evangelical scholars who know Hebrew (and other ancient Near Eastern languages) as well or better than evangelicals. These liberal scholars say that the biblical text is indeed teaching young-earth creationism, but because they are thorough-going evolutionists, they do not believe what they say the text plainly teaches. James Barr, Regius Professor of Old Testament at Oxford University (at the time of this statement) and a theological liberal, stated almost 20 years ago,

> 'So far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1 through 11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that (a) creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience; (b) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the Biblical story; (c) Noah's flood was understood to be world-wide and extinguished all human and animal life except for those in the ark.'[22]

The issue, therefore, is not beyond the reach of people who only know English. It certainly does not matter how many ancient Near Eastern languages someone knows. The biblical text of Genesis 1–11 can be rightly understood without these, evidenced by the fact that neither Dr Archer nor Dr Kaiser (nor any other evangelical old-earth creationist) uses other languages to defend his old-earth interpretations of Genesis. Like Drs Boice, Kline and Grudem above, Dr Archer reveals what is driving his interpretation of Genesis:

> 'From a superficial reading of Genesis 1, the impression would seem to be that the entire creative process took place in six twenty-four-hour days. If this was the true intent of the Hebrew author … this seems to run counter to modern scientific research, which indicates that the planet Earth was created several billion years ago ….'[23]

The sixth day too short?

Dr Kaiser holds the day-age interpretation of Genesis 1 because he thinks too much happened on the sixth day to fit into 24 hours.[24] Presumably, he would defend this view in a way similar to Dr Archer, his former colleague at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.[25] Though not explicitly stated, it is most certain that what is really driving Dr Kaiser's interpretation is the same thing influencing Drs Archer, Grudem, Kline, Boice, etc.: the supposed scientific proof of millions of years.

Dr Kaiser does not explain why the events of the sixth day couldn't happen in 24 hours, so let us briefly consider Dr Archer's arguments. They have nothing to do with Hebrew (or any of the neighbouring languages he knows), and in fact his arguments do not even pay careful attention to the biblical text.

Let us first list all the events of the sixth day, according to Genesis 1–2.

1. God created every kind of land animal and creeping thing.
2. God created Adam.
3. God created the Garden of Eden.
4. God commanded Adam to care for it.
5. Adam named some land animals and birds.
6. God realized that Adam was alone.
7. God put Adam to sleep.
8. God made Eve.
9. Adam met Eve and said a short romantic poem.

Now, how long did the above nine events take? The Bible gives us no specific amount of time for any of them. But clearly, events 4, 6 and 9 took less than a minute total. However, there is no biblical or theological reason to think any of the others took very long either. God's creative acts were miraculous, and therefore, as with all the other miracles in the Bible, we should assume they were instantaneous.

We should add here that, contrary to what both Drs Archer and Kaiser say, the Bible does not say that Adam *grew lonely* or *felt* that he needed a companion. The Bible says that *God* saw that Adam was alone (which took no time at all for God to see) and so made a helper for him. This highlights the fact that correct interpretation is based on careful observation of what the Bible actually says, not on imagining what it says. Sadly, Dr Archer fails to observe the text carefully at many points in Genesis 1–2, or he reads into the text what is not there.

What about Adam's activities? Dr Archer says that Eden was a 'large park area', the care of which would have been 'arduous' and would have gone on 'for a fairly extended period of time'.[26] But there is no basis in the text for this statement. The Bible does not tell us how large the garden was or even that it was 'large'. It does not tell us how long Adam cared for the garden (or how hard he worked) before he started naming animals or even that it was 'a long time'. Dr Archer only imagines these things.

But this is not careful Bible study. From the text there is *no* basis for thinking that any more than a few moments at most elapsed between God's command to care for the garden (2:16–17) and God's assignment for Adam to name animals and birds (vv. 18–20).

Dr Archer then asserts, without any basis in the text, that Adam gave 'official and permanent' names in a 'major project of taxonomy' akin to Linnaeus taking 30 years to give double Latin names to all the fauna and flora known to 18th-century scholarship.[27] The Bible, on the other hand, says no such things. It says that Adam named only cattle, birds and 'beasts of the field' (verses 2:19–20). Unlike Linnaeus, Adam did not name any plants, any sea creatures (which make up the majority of living forms), any creeping things or any 'beasts of the earth' (cf. Genesis 1:25 and 2:19–20). The assumption that Adam was naming only animals that would be domesticated is far more reasonable and biblically based than Dr Archer's assumptions. The Bible says nothing about 'official and permanent' names or 'species' names or careful anatomical analysis of each creature, as Dr Archer assumes. Sadly, he is doing the kind of eisegesis that he would have never tolerated if one of us (TM) had done it in one of his seminary classes. For all we know, they could have been names like dog, cow, giraffe, elephant, etc., which have nothing to do with the physical appearance of the animals. At the leisurely pace of five creatures per minute, Adam could have named 3,000 *kinds* of animals and birds in 10 hours of pleasant work, and he could have done so lying down while he nibbled on fruit.[28] Furthermore, the Bible does not give a specific number of creatures named; it doesn't even say something like 'a large number'. We need not think, as Dr Archer suggests, that Adam would have needed to be 'spitting out specie's [*sic*] names faster than the mind could think' to accomplish the task in less than 24 hours.[29]

Dr Archer's statement that 'it is fair to assume that no more than an hour or two would have been left toward the close of the sixth day for the introduction of Eve upon the scene',[30] is unacceptable. It is not fair to assume at all! He adds that there is no suggestion in the text that Adam's divinely-induced nap and Eve's supernatural creation took a short time. On the contrary, God didn't need a long time to perform these miracles, and there is nothing in the text to lead us to think that these acts took any more that a few seconds or minutes. Archer's statement on this matter is absolutely incredible (and insulting to God's creative ability and the clear testimony of His Word). He wrote:

> 'There is no suggestion that this deep sleep was very suddenly induced or very quickly brought to its determination by the removal of the rib within a few seconds. And yet this kind of speed would have been absolutely essential if Adam and God had been working on a very limited time frame while the sun was fast approaching the horizon at the end of the sixth twenty-four hour day.'[31]

When one of the authors was a teenager, his dentist put him to sleep in less than 10 seconds and removed his four wisdom teeth in less than 20 minutes! What is Dr Archer thinking about here?

Again, note that Dr Archer's (and Dr Kaiser's) arguments for the day-age theory have nothing to do with Hebrew or any other ancient language. It is sad indeed to see the apparent lack of careful attention to even the English Bible that the gifted scholar Dr Moreland displays in his respect for these shallow old-earth interpretations of Drs Archer and Kaiser.

The bottom line

Dr Moreland concludes:

> 'Now … my view, then, is this: if all of the Old Testament scholars at our seminaries that I trust, that love the Bible and that I respect their credibility were saying that it's required of us to believe these days are twenty-four hour days, I'd have a problem. But if there is enough of these men that I trust—I'm not talking about people that are trying to give up real estate here and are just bellying up; I'm talking about men that the community recognizes to be trustworthy authorities of that Hebrew exegesis are saying that this is an option—then I'm going to say in that case it's permissible. So that would be my basic response.'

Here is the bottom line. Dr Moreland sees the majority of *modern* evangelical OT scholars as the final authority. He refers to Archer and Kaiser, 'two of the best-known exegetes of the Old Testament in the American evangelical community' (which they are), who both believe the Genesis days to be 'vast, unspecified periods of time'. They say so. Therefore it must be true. End of discussion. Really?

Dr Moreland's reliance on human authority is not unique. For most Christians today, the Bible itself is not the final authority. Too many Christians are failing to carefully examine the old-earth arguments with an open Bible and to consider the careful analyses of their arguments by young-earth scholars. All scholars are only *generally* trustworthy at best. None alone, or together, are beyond question. We all have feet of clay, ourselves included. Whether scholar or uneducated labourer, we must all be like the Berean Jews, whom Luke commended as an example for us because they examined the Scriptures carefully to see if the teachings of Paul were biblical (Acts 17:11). Furthermore, neither we nor any other young-earth creationist we know is accusing old-earth scholars of evil *motives*. People can be sincerely wrong. There are godly evangelical scholars on both sides of the debates about the roles of men and women, spiritual gifts, church government, Calvinism vs Arminianism, the Millennium and Tribulation, etc., etc. In every case, some godly, scholarly people must be wrong in their views and others must be right. We cannot escape this unpleasant conclusion that godly scholars, even the majority at a

particular time in history, can be wrong on an important point of biblical teaching. So let us press on to know the Word of God, submitting to its supreme authority in every area of our thinking, speaking and behaviour.

God said through the prophet Isaiah (66:1–2):

> 'Thus says the Lord, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being," declares the Lord. "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word".'

The problem is that over the past 200 years most of the church has trembled at the words of men (whether secular evolutionists or sincere Christians) and used those human ideas to reinterpret God's plain Word. Sadly, Dr Moreland, like 90% of the 100 conservative evangelical seminary professors involved in the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy,[32] has uncritically accepted what some respected OT scholars have said. And many Christians will in turn uncritically accept what the respected Dr Moreland has said in this article, which then will cause them to uncritically accept the many unbiblical ideas propagated on Dr Ross's Reasons to Believe website.[33] So, human authorities are honoured above the clear teaching of Scripture. Most Christians trust the proclamations of brilliant, godly, old-earth scholars instead of reading their Bibles carefully. They also forget the example of the godly and sincere Apostle Peter, who was 'condemned' by the Apostle Paul for his 'hypocrisy', 'fear' of man and not being 'straightforward about the truth of the gospel', thereby unintentionally and unconsciously undermining the gospel (Galatians 2:1–14).[34]

Summary

Genesis 1–11 is not written using metaphorical nor phenomenological language. It is written as historical narrative, and, as such, each word should be examined carefully in context, according to the rules of Hebrew grammar. The arrived-at interpretation should then be cross-checked against other relevant Scriptural passages. When one does this, it is inescapably clear that the creation days were literal, occurred only a few thousand years ago and were followed by a global geologically catastrophic Flood.

Far from applying careful exegesis, Dr Moreland is trying to justify the rejection of six ordinary days of creation for one simple reason; because the majority of the scientists of this age (along with the majority of Bible scholars, who follow the scientific majority) believe the earth is billions of years old.

And why does this matter? Well, if one starts outside of Scripture, using man's fallible interpretations of creation, called 'science', to interpret what the clear Word of God means, there is absolutely no logical reason not to do this with the Resurrection, Virginal Conception, etc. And in fact many theological scholars have made the ultimate slide into unbelief concerning these basic tenets of the Christian faith on precisely these grounds. Listen to the words of Charles Templeton, who, back in the 1940s, was considered by many to be a more powerful evangelist than his contemporary, Billy Graham. Just before his death as an atheist he penned these words:

> 'I believe that there is no supreme being with human attributes—no God in the biblical sense—but that life is the result of timeless evolutionary forces, having reached its present transient state over millions of years.'[35]

No, creationists aren't cornered. But godly scholars like Drs Archer, Kaiser and Moreland need to turn a 'corner' and stand on God's infallible Word instead of man's fallible opinions and theories.

We exhort our fellow Christians, as we exhort ourselves, to not 'bow' before the words of men but to humbly tremble at the Word of God in all that it teaches us, especially that portion which has been under severe attack by godless men for over two centuries: Genesis 1–11.

References

1. For example, *Christianity and the Nature of Science*, *Scaling the Secular City*, *Does God Exist?*, *Immortality: The Other Side of Death*, *The Life and Death Debate: Moral Issues of Our Times*, *Love God with all Your Mind, Body and Soul* (with Scott Rae), and is co-editor (with William Lane Craig) of *Christian Perspectives on Being Human* and *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*.
2. For example, *Christianity Today*, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* and *The American Philosophical Quarterly*.
3. Moreland, J.P., *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, NavPress, Colorado Springs, Colorado, p. 245, 1997.
4. Moreland, J.P., 'The Age of Earth', based upon a lecture at Northshore Church Everett, Washington, on 2 February 2002, <www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/moreland_jp_age_of_earth.shtml?main>, downloaded 29 August 2003.
5. This is the ministry of Dr Hugh Ross, a 'progressive creationist' who promotes billions of years, death and suffering before sin, local Flood, etc.
6. This and all subsequent quotes by Dr Moreland are from his article in Ref. 4.
7. In Revelation 20:8 the KJV gives the translation 'quarters', compared to 'corners' in 7:1. The NAS, NIV and ESV translate both instances of the same Greek word as 'corners'.
8. In his respected 18th-century commentary on Revelation 7 (in his *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, London, 1809, as found on *Online Bible* CD), John Gill wrote: 'Four angels are mentioned, in allusion to the four spirits of the heavens … though the earth is not a plain square with angles, but round and globular, yet it is said to have four corners, with respect to the four points of the heavens; and though there is but one wind, which blows sometimes one way, and sometimes another, yet four are named with regard to the above points, east, west, north, and south, from whence it blows. These are commonly called "the four winds of heaven"… .' In fact, every commentary we consulted, without exception, was emphatic that it was obvious *from the text* that the term 'four corners' was metaphorical and easily understood on the basis of other parts of Scripture.

9. The Old Testament occurrences of the 'four corners of the earth' are in the prophetic texts of Isaiah 11:12 and Ezekiel 7:2 (in this latter verse it refers to the corners of the land of Israel, but at this time, the boundaries had more than four corners and no Israelite would have taken this literally).
10. Pythagoras (c. 530 BC) reasoned that the earth was a globe, Aristarchus (310–230 BC) estimated the relative size of the earth and moon, and Eratosthenes (275–194 BC) made a more exact calculation of the earth's radius and circumference.
11. See Russell, J.B., *Inventing the Flat Earth,* Praeger, New York, 1991. Russell is Professor of History, Emeritus, at University of California–Santa Barbara.
12. It is presumably the convenient division of a circle (representing all directions, i.e. everything around us) by two perpendicular axes which gives all these figures of speech the number 'four'.
13. It should be noted that sound exegesis involves more than simply studying Hebrew grammar and syntax, as Dr Moreland knows but here implies otherwise. It also involves studying the local and larger context and comparing Scripture with Scripture, since the Bible is its own best commentary.
14. Similarly, Jewish readers would have understood 'corners of Moab', in Numbers 24:17, to mean the whole land of Moab. The same can be said about the idiomatic phrase 'end of the earth', which is frequently used in the Old Testament. But there are almost an equal number of verses that speak of the singular *end* of the earth as those which speak of the plural *ends* of the earth. We even find examples of both phrases in the same OT book. 'So how many ends of the earth are there?' a skeptic might ask. The question is ridiculous. No careful student of the Bible would interpret 1 Samuel 2:8 to mean (or that Hannah thought) that the earth was sitting on pillars, like the roof of a building sits on pillars. In context, the pillars are referring to *human leaders*—see <www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/docs/pillars_earth.asp>. But more importantly, the older book of Job (written by Job, living around the time of Abraham, or by Moses) had already stated that the earth is hung on nothing (Job 26:7).
15. During the miracle of Joshua's long day, which presumably involved supernatural interference in the rotation of the earth, the Bible describes exactly what the observers would have seen—the sun and the moon standing still in the sky.
16. Copernicus and Galileo believed that the whole universe revolved around the sun, but now heliocentricity only applies to our solar system.
17. See: Batten, D. (Ed.), *The Answers Book,* Answers in Genesis, Brisbane, 1999; Fields, W.W., *Unformed and Unfilled*, Burgener Enterprises Collinsville, 1976; McIntosh A., *Genesis for Today*, Day One, Epsom, Surrey, 1997; Hall, D. and Pipa, J., *Did God Create in Six Days?* Southern Presbyterian Press, Taylors, South Carolina, 1999; Jordan, J., *Creation in Six Days* Canon Press, Moscow, Idaho, 1999.
18. David Hall <www.capo.org/holdfast0.html> documents from a Protestant perspective that the young-earth view was essentially universal in the church for 18 centuries. See also the section on 'biblical interpretation' in: Mortenson, T., British scriptural geologists in the first half of the nineteenth century—part 1: Historical setting, *TJ* **11**(2):221–252, 1997. Rose, S., *Genesis, Creation and Early Man,* St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, California, 2000, documents this historical fact from an Eastern Orthodox perspective; see review by TM, *TJ* **16**(3):48–53, 2002.
19. Boice, J.M., *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary*, Vol. 1, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, pp. 57–62, 1982.
20. Kline, M., Space and time in the Genesis cosmogony, *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* **48**:15 (footnote 47), 1996.
21. Grudem, W., *Systematic Theology*, IVPress, Downers Grove, pp. 297–298, 1994.
22. Barr in a personal letter to David C.C. Watson on 23 April 1984, quoted in Morris, H., *That Their Words May be Used Against Them*, ICR, San Diego, p. 375, 1997.
23. Archer, G., *A Survey Of Old Testament Introduction*, Moody, Chicago, p. 187, 1985.
24. Kaiser, W.C., Jr *et al., Hard Sayings of the Bible,* IVPress, Downers Grove, p. 104, 1996.
25. As far as we are aware, Dr Kaiser's most extended (but still short) discussion of the duration of Creation Week is in his *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, pp. 72–75, 1978. In neither of Dr Kaiser's writings that we cite does he give any justification for the statement that the sixth day was not long enough for the events mentioned. It is a bald assertion by Dr Kaiser. In both works, he also makes the absolutely false statement that the day-age interpretation dominated church history since the time of Augustine. See the sources in Ref. 17 for the refutation of this notion.
26. Archer, G.L., A response to the trustworthiness of Scripture in areas relating to natural science; in: Radmacher, E.D. and Preus, .R.D. (Eds.), *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible,* Zondervan, Grand Rapids, pp. 326–27, 1994. Dr Archer's argument about the sixth day also appears in his *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, pp. 59–60, 1982.
27. Archer, Ref. 26, pp. 327–28.
28. God brought the animals to Adam, so he did not have to go out collecting them, as Linnaeus did.
29. Archer, Ref. 26, p. 328.
30. Archer, Ref. 26, p. 325.
31. Archer, Ref. 26, p. 327.
32. Dr Walter Bradley wrote this in a private email to Dr Mortenson on 20 April 2000 (on file). Dr Bradley, also an old-earth day-ager, wrote the paper 'The Trustworthiness of the Scriptures in Areas Related to Science', to which Dr Archer's above-mentioned paper was an affirming response. Both papers were presented at ICBI's conference on hermeneutics held in Chicago in 1982 and appear in the book in Ref. 26.
33. Dr Ross is certainly exploiting Dr Moreland's remarks to the full for the link to his article has been on the home page of Reasons to Believe's website at least from 29 August 2003 (when we downloaded it) until 26 September 2003 (when we last checked).
34. See also godly King David's mistake in 2 Samuel 11:1–12:23 and godly King Jehoshaphat's compromises with evil in 2 Chronicles 17:1–37.
35. Templeton, C., *Farewell to God*, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, p. 232, 1996.

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