

More of the same old compromise

A review of
More Than a Theory
by Hugh Ross Baker Books,
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In *More Than a Theory*, Hugh Ross claims to set forward a testable model for creation, and he claims that this makes creation scientific. However, as those who are familiar with Ross' previous works should know, Ross' brand of creationism accepts the evolutionary time scale of billions of years and its order of events. While arguing that this compromising form of creationism is truly scientific, he paints creationism which accepts the biblical time scale as unscientific and even naïve. But when one examines his actual arguments, they are surprisingly weak, and fail to address criticisms that biblical creationists have raised for years.

Misrepresenting biblical creation

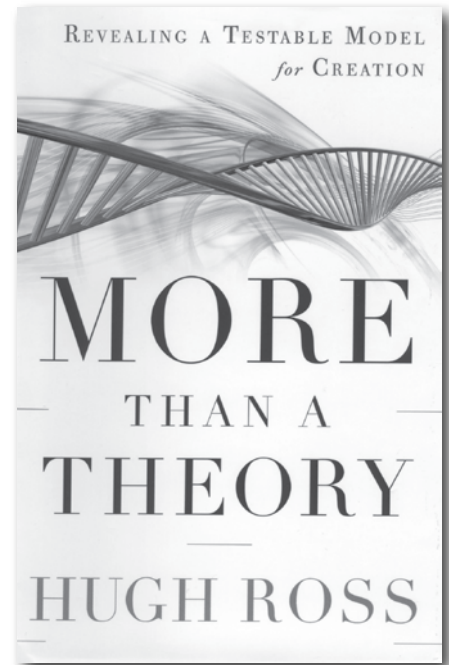
No one who is familiar with Ross' books or website should be surprised that it uses any excuse to criticize biblical creationism as unscientific. He accuses it of having no physical evidence to support its claims (p. 15). In fact, he claims that the scientific evidence is directly against a "young earth" view, because "technological advance provides definitive data on the age of the universe and Earth. There's simply no scientific basis for thinking that the universe and earth are not billions of years old" (p. 17). He argues that "[young earth] explanations, typically rooted in religious dogma, have no flexibility to adapt and self-correct as knowledge increases. Nor has a young-earth explanation proven

very effective in guiding research endeavors" (p. 20). Of course, nearly all scientific endeavours have nothing to do with the age of the earth. There is also an almost-obligatory comparison between biblical creationism and belief in a flat earth (p. 40).¹

But this is simply not true of biblical creationism. Biblical creationists use scientific facts from geology, biology, astronomy, chemistry, and physics, but *interpret* those facts differently. Of course there is a biblical bias (hence the label *biblical* creationism), but this bias does not prevent adaptation to new discoveries. Nor does it mean gullible acceptance of arguments simply because they purport to show a young earth, as is demonstrated by CMI's list of arguments creationists should not use.²

Ross also says that young earth creationists object to billions of years because "God didn't need all that time, so six twenty-four-hour creation days a few thousand years ago makes more sense" (p. 82). But this is a serious mischaracterization of the creationist argument. Creationists believe that God *could* have created any way He wanted to; in six microseconds or six billion years. But biblical creationists believe the Bible gives us an accurate account of what He *did* do, which is why we accept a six-day time frame around 6,000 years ago.

As usual, Ross' critiques of biblical creationism often turn into attacks against creationists themselves. He says that "many young-earth creationist leaders consider anyone who disagrees with their particular doctrine as a dangerous enemy that must be strenuously opposed until their credibility is destroyed" (p. 27). But biblical creationists' responses to Ross' brand of creationism focus on the scientific and biblical problems with the view, not personal attacks. True to form, Ross does not give



any examples to back up his attacks on biblical creationism, which often involve plenty of abusive *ad hominem* attacks on his part.³

Young-earth evolutionists?

Ross restates his tired old argument that creationists argue for "the rapid evolution of large-bodied animals after Adam's sin and the flood" (p. 177). Obviously, if creationists believed in evolution, it would not be called creationism. Ross willfully refuses to understand the difference between "goo to you" evolution and the rapid speciation which would have happened in an environment where there were many ecological niches to be filled. The post-Flood environment would be ideal, because most of the land-based life on earth was wiped out, and there would be small, isolated populations spreading out from the Ark.

Creationists believe that natural selection can only work with the genetic information which already exists in an organism, rather than the increase of information required for genuine evolution. But speciation (reproductive isolation) usually involves an information loss, e.g. loss of a protein's ability to recognize "imprinting" marks can result in

the inability to mate successfully.⁴ In plants, polyploidy, or multiplying of the *same* information, can also prevent such individuals mating with the parent population.

This was addressed in CMI's book *Refuting Compromise* (ch. 7).⁵ Ross has no excuse for repeating these mischaracterizations of creationist argument, since he claims to have read the book. Indeed, this was his excuse for refusing to debate its author at the 2007 American Vision conference—the book was allegedly too hurtful so the author needed to apologize.⁶

Ross' use of science

As already noted, Ross promotes "old earth" or "progressive" creationism as a more scientific form of creationism. But Ross' own use of science is highly selective. He argues that it is simply established scientific fact that the earth is billions of years old, yet the same secular scientists who agree with that assertion would *also* argue that evolution is a similarly established scientific fact. One would expect Ross to anticipate this argument and to answer it. But given his failure to respond to criticism which has previously been leveled against his model, it is hardly surprising that he does not respond to this potential argument.

Other than biological and chemical evolution, it is hard to find an evolutionary theory or fad which Ross disagrees with, or does not find in Scripture. From the collision theory of the moon's origin⁷ to the existence of eleven dimensions, Ross not only wholeheartedly accepts them as "scientific", he integrates them into his model and usually "finds" them taught in Scripture. His scientific arguments do not differ substantially from those which are addressed in *Refuting Compromise*, and so they do not merit further discussion in this review.

Ross' anthropology

Hugh Ross also ventures to make broad claims about the origins of

humanity. He claims that humans were created around 50,000 years ago, and that a "reasonable calibration" of the Genesis genealogies can produce this date (apparently one which takes into account anything except the actual ages of the individuals in the genealogies at the birth of the next name in line) (p. 188). To come to this conclusion, he gives a vague reference to "gaps" in the genealogies (p. 189). These gaps would have to be numerous indeed to allow the time to be stretched from around 6,000 years to 50,000 years, along the lines of including only 1/10th of the names in the genealogies. They are certainly not in the text itself.⁸ He also says that Peleg lived 11,000 years ago based on carbon-14, from which he infers that the Bering land bridge was destroyed at that time (p. 190).

Ross' acceptance of carbon-14 dating means that in Ross' model, Neandertals are non-human hominids. He claims that mitochondrial DNA shows that Neandertals and humans are not related. But this research is far from conclusive evidence. CMI has documented research that shows Neandertals cared for their injured, created tools and cultural artifacts, had an opposable thumb and buried their dead.^{9,10} Furthermore, the Neandertal bone structure is well within the human range; there is little basis for calling them soulless non-human hominids.¹¹

A teenager's interpretation of the Bible

Ross has no specialty in any area of biblical exegesis, and it shows. By his own admission, he came up with his views at the tender age of 17, and has apparently not questioned them since (p. 49). He has failed to consult even the most elementary guides to hermeneutics, which would have kept him away from some shocking errors in interpretation. He has the gall to state confidently that "the best biblical interpretations and the best scientific interpretations come from consistent application of the scientific method"

(p. 50). This of course is ludicrous; the best biblical interpretations come from the use of various literary and historical interpretation tools and methods, *not* the scientific method. This does not mean that the scientific method is contrary to Scripture, simply that it is not the proper tool to use in analyzing Scripture, except in a case where Scripture is making a scientific claim (implicit or explicit). Even in that case, literary and historical criticism must come first in order to know exactly what the Bible is claiming.

One of the more troubling aspects of Ross' use of Scripture is his appeal to the Hebrew language. As has been documented elsewhere,¹² Ross has no knowledge of ancient Hebrew, and his appeals to the meaning of the Hebrew words accordingly range from simplistic to misleading. For an example of the former, Ross claims that the Hebrew verb *natah* in the Qal active participle form implies that the universe is continually stretched out, and therefore the Bible teaches an expanding universe long before scientists figured that out (p. 101). But language does not encode meaning at the word level, but at the *phrase* level, so the context must tell whether the action is continuous or not. Someone with more advanced Hebrew knowledge would know that the participle only indicates continuous action when it is used *adverbially*.¹³

Similarly, Ross repeats his old canard that the word *yôm* can mean more than a literal 24-hour day. As creationists have repeated over and over: yes, and so can the English word "day"; but *context* narrows the possible range of meaning in both English and Hebrew. And the context in which *yôm* appears in the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 means that it must be a literal 24-hour period.¹⁴

Illegitimate interpretations of Scripture

Many of Ross' errors of biblical interpretation come from his flawed view of general revelation. Ross claims

that what is revealed in Scripture will never contradict what we find to be true in reality (pp. 72–73). But even he admits that “the disciplines of science involve human interpretation” and “in some instances these interpretations can be faulty and/or incomplete” (p. 73). In other words, nature does not reveal truth in propositional statements.¹⁵ He contends that Scripture is prone to similar misinterpretation, but this ignores the fact that Scripture makes propositional statements that can be said to be true or false, and basic rules of grammar and syntax make it possible to understand what Scripture is saying. But a fossil cannot make a propositional claim about itself; scientists must make assumptions about the properties of a fossil to come to a conclusion about its age, the circumstances of its formation, etc.

At some points, Ross’ interpretations are simply bizarre. He derives from some Scripture (he does not bother to say which) that there will be no thermodynamics or gravity in Heaven, among other things (p. 88). While Scripture does teach that the new heavens and earth will be different from the current creation in many ways, absence of gravity is not one of the clearer teachings of Scripture regarding Heaven!

Ross tends to read modern science into biblical passages where it is very doubtful the original readers would have had such understanding. So he says that Genesis 1:2–5 “implies that the first life created on Earth was simple marine life, and it appeared while Earth was still emerging from extremely hostile-to-life conditions” (p. 83), and Psalm 104:29–30 suggests that “life on earth was seriously disrupted on more than one occasion” (p. 85).

While Ross has no problem illegitimately reading support for all sorts of scientific propositions into the Bible, he is unable to take the Bible at its word regarding plain statements about the origin of death (both physical and spiritual) in Adam, and the global nature of the Flood. He makes no attempt to

answer biblical creationist arguments, choosing to repeat arguments, such as *yôm* being able to mean long periods of time (p. 83), without even acknowledging the objections that have been raised. To succeed in producing sound scholarship, he should have acknowledged these arguments and either dropped the weak arguments or offered a counter-argument in support of his interpretation. But ignoring these arguments outright is the scholarly equivalent of sticking his fingers in his ears and shouting “I can’t hear you!”

Twenty-seven creation accounts?

One of the most curious examples of Ross’ creative biblical exegesis is his assertion that there are 27 creation accounts, which he lists along with the theme of the passage as he sees it (p. 61). But his definition of “creation account” is apparently so broad as to encompass nearly any passage which talks about anything pertaining to creation. He curiously cites Genesis 2 as a “spiritual perspective” of creation, distinct from Genesis 1 which he calls the “physical perspective”. While some people argue that the two are distinct accounts, it is hard to see what is especially spiritual about the second compared to the first. He divides Genesis 1–11 into five distinct creation accounts. Ross also includes passages in the Psalms which praise God’s power in creation also merit inclusion, as does Revelation 20–22 which talks about the new heavens and earth, and a host of other passages with no obvious claim to be a creation account.

Downplaying the Fall

A biblical creationist view recognizes that the current creation is cursed because of the Fall, and takes that into account when talking about the problem of evil, “bad” designs, and other issues. But Ross downplays this because his view requires that suffering and death precede Adam’s sin. He says that “Adam and Eve defied God’s authority, thereby introducing



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Ross’s acceptance of the evolutionary time scale forces him to categorize Neandertals as non-human.

sin (and the evil it produces) into the earthly environment,” and that this disobedience was the reason for human death. But nowhere does he address the effects of the Fall on creation as a whole. In fact, he seems to say in argument that animal death before the Fall was a *good* thing, because it supposedly helped prepare the earth for human civilization (p. 85). To which the intelligent atheist would immediately reply that a god who had to use such barbaric means to prepare the earth for humanity is certainly not worth worshipping! Even more spurious is when he refers to Psalm 104:27–30, which he claims supports this, but is actually about God’s gracious provision in a post-Fall, cursed creation.

Ross argues that the Fall only applies to humans, and his prooftext of choice is Romans 5:12. Because it says “death came to all men” because of Adam’s sin, Ross argues that it excludes the rest of creation. This, of course, is an argument from silence; in the context, Paul is talking about

the effects of sin *on humans* so it is reasonable he would talk about death coming to men and not to all of creation in *this* particular verse.¹⁶ In any case, even with this limitation, the Fall is fatal to Ross' compromise view, because of all the undoubted *Homo sapiens* fossils "dated" (by methods he accepts as reliable) to well before any possible biblical date for Adam.^{17,18}

Furthermore, Romans 8:20–22 speaks of the *whole creation* (πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις *pasa hē ktisis*) being subjected to futility and enslaved to corruption. Thus it is evidence that *all* of creation was affected by the Curse, not just humanity.¹⁹

Ross argues against the biblical view that animals were originally created vegetarian.²⁰ He claims that ecological systems could not survive for sustained periods without animal death. He even goes so far as to say that predators *help* the populations they hunt by removing weak or injured individuals, making the population as a whole more fit. But he does not stop there. He says that parasites protect their hosts:

"Parasite-induced diarrhea has been virtually eradicated from the world's more advanced nations. The cost, however, has been high rates of colon cancer. Meanwhile, people who experience frequent bouts of such diarrhea rarely, if ever, die from colon cancer" (p. 199).

But even granting this questionable proposition,²¹ and overlooking the immense suffering and frequent death from diseases caused by supposedly "beneficial" parasites, couldn't an omnipotent Creator prevent colon cancer from existing in the first place? He goes on to say that some parasites keep their hosts from overeating, which seems a ridiculous argument for its beneficial nature when a significant proportion of the world's population suffers from starvation rather than overeating.

Creationists believe that the entire world was once free of all forms of death, disease, and suffering and

see the presence of these things in both humans and "soulish" animals (Hebrew נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּיָה *nephesh chayyāh*) as the devastating effects of a creation-wide Curse which cut the world off from God. Ross, however, thinks God created the world full of suffering and pointless death millions of years before there was a single human to do anything good or bad. This viewpoint is very nearly calling God either sadistic or incompetent, though Ross paints his argument as actually glorifying God.

Conclusion

A thorough rebuttal of this book would require a book of its own. Fortunately that book has already been written; there is very little in *More Than a Theory* that was not addressed in *Refuting Compromise*. Ross states that, "any weaknesses in RTB's model are assumed to come from human error, *not from the source material itself*" (p. 61). This may be the only sentence in the book with which the biblical creationist can wholeheartedly agree. Ross' book compounds egregious scientific errors with even more horrific errors of biblical interpretation. And it adds saccharine personal anecdotes to the beginning of each chapter to produce a monstrosity of a text which will, sadly, in all likelihood become very popular among compromising creationists.

References

1. See Bergman, J., The flat-earth myth and creationism, *J. Creation* 22(2):114–120.
2. Arguments we think that creationists should NOT use, <creation.com/dontuse>, which is the seventh most accessed article on the CMI site.
3. See documentation in Sarfati, J., <creation.com/critique-of-intro-chapter-of-hugh-ross-new-book-a-matter-of-days>, 31 May 2004.
4. Jerlström, P., Genomic imprinting, *TJ* (now *J. Creation*) 13(2):6–8, 1999.
5. Sarfati, J., *Refuting Compromise*, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, pp. 67–71, 2004.
6. Ross was asked point blank by a CMI supporter about his cowardice, and this was the gist of his answer. Another debater was substituted. Then Ross proceeded to tell the audience that YECs were reluctant to debate him!

7. See Oard, M., Problems for "giant impact" origin of moon, *J. Creation* 14(1):6–7, 2000.
8. Freeman, T.R., The Genesis 5 and 11 fluidity question, *J. Creation* 19(2):83–90, 2005; Sarfati, J., Biblical chronogenealogies, *J. Creation* 17(3):14–18, 2003; <creation.com/chronogenealogy>.
9. Sarfati, ref. 5, pp. 313–318.
10. Carter, R.W., Mitochondrial diversity within modern human populations, *Nucleic Acids Research* 35(9):3039–3045, 2007; < creation.com/taking-a-crack-at-the-neandertal-mitochondrial-genome>, 16 September 2008.
11. Wood, B. and Collard, M., The human genus, *Science* 284(5411):65–71, 1999; Woodmorappe, J., The non-transitions in "human evolution"—on evolutionists' terms, *J. Creation* 13(2):10–13, 1999; <creation.com/non-transitions>.
12. See Sarfati, ref. 5, pp. 254–255. And in a meeting with Dr Ross on 12 April 1999, Dr Russell Humphreys asked Ross in *Hebrew*: "Do you speak Hebrew?" and Ross was clearly uncomprehending. Humphreys then said (in English): "You must respond in Hebrew", to which Ross admitted his inability by responding (also in English) "I can't." Humphreys doesn't claim to be a Hebrew expert, but Ross clearly lacked even elementary knowledge.
13. See Sarfati, J., Hugh Ross lays down the gauntlet!, <creation.com/hugh-ross-lays-down-the-gauntlet>, 21 November 2000.
14. Sarfati, ref. 5, pp. 67–71.
15. See Sarfati, ref. 5, ch 1.
16. Cosner, L., Romans 5:12–21: Paul's view of a literal Adam, *J. Creation* 22(2):105–107, 2008; <creation.com/romans5>.
17. See Sarfati, J., The Fall: a cosmic catastrophe: Hugh Ross's blunders on plant death in the Bible, *J. Creation* 19(3):60–64, 2005; <creation.com/plant_death>.
18. Lubenow, M.L., Pre-Adamites, sin, death and human fossils, *J. Creation* 12(2), 1998.
19. Smith, H., Cosmic and universal death from Adam's Fall: an exegesis of Romans 8:19–23a, *J. Creation* 21(1):75–85, 2007; <creation.com/romans8>.
20. Gurney, R.J.M., The carnivorous nature and suffering of animals, *J. Creation* 18(3):70–75, 2004; <creation.com/carniv>.
21. Increasing westernization also tends to bring with it a reduction in dietary fibre intake, which has been linked to higher rates of colon cancer.