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Answering Your Question: Tension Between Science and Genesis

Abstract

"Before we can meaningfully engage with interpretations of Genesis, it may be helpful to think more about the nature of Biblical authority: how is the Bible authoritative, and what does it mean to be obedient to that authority?"

Posting about the issue of origins and the age of the earth from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/answering-your-question-tension-between-science-and-genesis/>

Keywords

In All Things, creationism, science, Bible, hermeneutics

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Answering Your Question: Tension between Science and Genesis

 inallthings.org/answering-your-question-tension-between-science-and-genesis/

Neal DeRoo

Over the last several months I've grown away from believing that the Earth was created in 6 literal 24-hour days. I understand most of the scientific reasoning for the age of the universe, and I don't believe that an "Old Earth" diminishes the Glory of God at all, but I'm more curious how we as Christians should/can reconcile the Genesis account with what science tells us about our origins? Joseph

This is a very important and timely topic, Joseph. A lot of people raised as Christians have felt a tension between science and Genesis on the issue of origins and the age of the earth. This perceived tension often causes a great deal of anxiety. To dispel that anxiety, many people turn right away to the question of how best to interpret Genesis 1-2: how can we understand Genesis 1-2 in a way that fits with what science is telling us? But this, too, can cause anxiety: by going this route, am I merely making the Bible fit what science tells me? Have I submitted the Bible to the authority of science?

Focusing right away on the interpretation question, then, and trying to determine what the Bible does or does not teach about the age of the earth, the origin of humanity, etc., skips over another, perhaps even more important question: does the Bible claim to be an authority in matters of science? What type of authority does the Bible claim to have, vis-à-vis science?

Before we can meaningfully engage with interpretations of Genesis, it may be helpful to think more about the nature of Biblical authority: how is the Bible authoritative, and what does it mean to be obedient to that authority? There is a continuum of possible relationships between Biblical authority and scientific claims. Looking at three possible views on that continuum gives a sense of the range of approaches that Christians have adopted on this issue.

VIEW 1: The Bible claims *no scientific authority*.

On this view, the Bible's authority is exclusively over matters pertaining to theology and so-called "personal ethics." In this case, to be obedient to the authority of the Bible is to agree with correct theological claims and doctrines, and act in accordance with the ethical guidelines laid out in the Bible. In regards to the Genesis account, a proponent of this view would argue that the first chapters of Genesis articulate theological claims about God as the sole Creator of everything that exists and God's sovereignty over all creation. According to this view, every Christian must affirm these principles—but once they do, they would be relatively free to pursue scientific inquiry to determine how God created. On this account, Genesis is making claims only about the truth that God created, and makes no truth claims regarding how God created.

VIEW 2: The Bible claims *indirect authority over science*.

On this view, the Bible exercises direct authority over something (such as the heart of the scientist, or the presuppositions of science), which in turn holds some authority in regards to science. One popular version of this view holds that the Bible has direct authority over the key tenets that define one's life. In this case, being obedient to Biblical authority requires living according to the right tenets. This will have

consequences for how one engages in the scientific enterprise, most notably in the 'presuppositions' that guide one's scientific inquiry. In regards to the Genesis account, a proponent of this view would argue that the first three chapters offer us an account of the right tenets through which to view the world (the world was created and sustained by God's design, will and Law; it has been tainted by sin, and so stands in need of redemption through the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit). According to this view, these presuppositions must shape how a person views scientific evidence, and might cause one to question the presuppositions underlying certain accepted claims regarding origins in the scientific community.

VIEW 3: The Bible claims *direct authority over science*.

On this view, the Bible is directly authoritative over all aspects of a person's life. In this case, being obedient to the authority of the Bible requires one to affirm every claim made in the Bible. In regards to the Genesis account, a proponent of this view would argue that the Bible clearly teaches that God created everything in the world 'according to its kind,' and did so in seven days. According to this view, any scientific claims contrary to this assertion are anti-Biblical; agreeing with them is a fundamental rejection of Biblical authority.

Where one falls on this continuum will likely predispose them to one way of [interpreting Genesis 1-2](#) over others: [evolutionary creationists](#), for example, tend to be on the end of the spectrum near the first view, [young earth people](#) tend to be nearer the third view, and others occupy [various points](#) in between.

But all three views agree that: 1) the Bible is the authoritative Word of God; 2) God is the Creator of everything that exists; and 3) obedience to God and God's Word is central to the life of the Christian. We need not understand the origins issue as forcing a Christian to choose whether the Bible or science is authoritative for our lives. Rather, at issue is how a Christian understands the authority of the Bible and its implications for various elements of our lives, including scientific inquiry.