

Book Review - In the Beginning... We Misunderstood

The following is a review of the book *In the Beginning... We Misunderstood*, written by Dr. Johnny Miller and Dr. John Soden. This book presents an "Old-Earth Creationist" view of origins, contrary to ISBR's "Young-Earth Creationist" view. We regard the book as a "fuzzy" theology of beginnings, where the word "fuzzy" applies to the conclusions of the book, not to the facts which the authors cite. We welcome your email comments.

Introduction

In 1859, a book appeared which shook the foundation of the Christian church. Its topic was the appearance of life on planet earth by naturalistic means, in antithesis of the Genesis account of creation, whereby God spoke life into existence super-naturally. That book, of course, was entitled *The Origin of Species* and its author was Charles Darwin. An ongoing debate has ensued over the past 150 years, with "creationists" appealing to the supernatural Biblical account and "evolutionists" appealing to the naturalistic account. However, it is not quite that simple because a spectrum of ideas has emerged, in which these two views are "mixed-and-matched" and terms such as "Young-Earth Creation," "Old-Earth Creation," "Theistic Evolution," "Evolutionary Creation," "Progressive Creation" and others have led to a most confusing picture of origins. Not all of these can be true, so what is the truth?

In an attempt to bring clarity to this issue from a Biblical perspective, by looking at the creation account as the original audience of Genesis would have interpreted it, Dr. Johnny Miller, former Senior Pastor at Calvary Church in Lancaster, PA and current professor emeritus at Columbia International University and Dr. John Soden, professor at Lancaster Bible College and Graduate School, teaching the Old Testament, have written a book entitled *In the Beginning ... We Misunderstood - Interpreting Genesis 1 in its Original Context*.

The Institute for Scientific and Biblical Research (ISBR) is a Christian ministry in Lancaster, PA, which, for Scriptural and scientific reasons, holds to a recent creation account (i.e., around 6000 years ago), occurring over a period of six ordinary days. This is the "Young Earth" view mentioned above and reflects a straightforward interpretation of the Genesis creation account. The Miller-Soden book is about Scripture and not science, so I will focus on the former in this article.

As current ISBR president, I am addressing several issues raised by the book. Unfortunately, the topic of origins has polarized Christian believers into the "literal" and "figurative" camps and the issue has exploded into one not just about origins but about faith and science, in general, and about which one drives beliefs about the other. As a consequence, some believers use this issue as a litmus test for salvation. That is, if you are in the figurative camp, you are simply not saved. Period. This is an unfortunate by-product, because believers differ on many issues (e.g., predestination, methods of baptism, etc) but it seems like the topic of origins has risen to a more heightened level of sensitivity. Why is this?

Nobody wants to be wrong about an issue, especially one as fundamental as the creation of our very existence. God was not obligated to give us any details, but did so anyway. Some people claim that God did not give us enough details for us to take the account literally. However, I would claim we are still responsible for understanding the details he did give us. These people claim that Scripture tells us that God created, but not how God created. Is this a valid point?

Although Christians are *in* the world and not *of* the world, they can still be influenced *by* the world. In many minds and in the vast majority of media presentations, science is equated with truth and faith is equated with opinion (or nonsense!). As a result, many Christians are persuaded to choose faith when science does not dispute it but will choose science, otherwise. If science has said that the earth is 4.3 billion years old, then we must be misunderstanding Scripture when we say the earth is only thousands of years old. If science has said that macroevolution over billions of years has resulted in all of the life forms on earth, then we must be misunderstanding Scripture when it says that God spoke the basic "kinds" into existence over a six-day period. And the list goes on. One caution in reading material about this subject, not only in this book but in any book or article. When you encounter the phrase "allows for," as opposed to "proves," recognize that this opens up all sorts of possible interpretations. Remember, Mary's giving birth "allows for" the possibility that she was impregnated by natural means rather than through the supernatural means presented in Scripture. Slippery slope ?

One note before getting to the details. My purpose in this article is not to be confrontational or argumentative. However, Christians should be able, without fear of reproach by other Christians, to criticize each other when making offerings in the marketplace of ideas, provided this is not done in a hostile way. I hope the reader will not view my comments this way, because this is not my intent. Let us now see what the Miller-Soden book says about our understanding (or rather mis-understanding) of beginnings.

War or Peace?

In its website advertisement for the book, Kregel Publications presents the following description:

"For years, the evangelical church and its members have debated whether the Bible should be interpreted literally or symbolically in regards to the age of the earth. In their groundbreaking new book, *'In the Beginning . . . We Misunderstood,'* authors Johnny V. Miller and John M. Soden say that all these arguments have missed the point. Rather, what Christians really need to know is how to interpret the Bible in its original context. Exposing the fallacies of trying to make the biblical text fit a specific scientific presupposition, Miller and Soden offer a new approach to interpreting Genesis 1 that explores the creation account based on how the original audience would have understood its teaching. First, the authors present a clear explanation of the past and present issues in interpreting the first chapter of the Bible. Second, Miller and Soden break down the creation account according to its historical and cultural context by comparing and distinguishing both the Egyptian and Mesopotamian settings. Finally, they explore common objections to help readers understand the significance that the creation account has for theology today. Christians need not look any further than Genesis 1 to find clues to its meaning. Both irenic and bathed in Scripture, *'In the Beginning . . . We Misunderstood'* will equip every believer to navigate the creation wars armed with biblically sound explanations." (emphasis added)

Creation *wars? Really?* If this is a war, might we ask who the combatants are? The book makes very clear that it is not about science, but about interpreting Scripture. Thus, it is not a creation/evolution war, but a war between believers over how they interpret Genesis 1. But why a war? Maybe a theological disagreement, but a *war??* Why use such a provocative and inflammatory term for a disagreement between believers?

On the other hand, the book is characterized as "irenic," meaning that it tends to promote peace or reconciliation. This reflects a growing narrative in the evangelical church related to origins. Why has this narrative developed in the church over this issue? I think that Chapter 1 of the book might shed some light on this question. Chapter 1 begins with a description of Johnny Miller's encounter over the years with young earth creationism. Clearly evident is the turmoil he has faced with judgmental Christians who have claimed that a non-literal interpretation of Genesis 1 is tantamount to not really being a Christian.

Institute for Scientific and Biblical Research

He apparently went through a young-earth-creation phase followed by his current old-earth-creation phase, initiated about fifteen years ago when he started looking at young-age proofs which he deemed to be inadequate. As a non-scientist, Dr. Miller relied upon the opinion of scientists, including a PhD in geology from Johns Hopkins University (presumably a Christian who believes in the "absolute truthfulness of Scripture"), who "confirmed" Dr. Miller's new belief in an "ancient creation." On the other hand, he also quotes an email he received from a retired Cornell geneticist, who was formerly an atheist, then a theistic evolutionist and then a creationist. With respect to this opinion, Dr. Miller writes "... he implies that reading Genesis 1 as science is equivalent to believing God for salvation and that anyone who does not read it this way is actually compromising his or her faith." So, apparently he has received professional scientific opinions on both sides of the issue.

Quite coincidentally, in the midst of these communications in 2007, I wrote Dr. Miller, who was then Senior Pastor at Calvary, where I am a member. I said that I had just joined ISBR's Board and had a special interest in the subject of creation. I said that I noticed that many of the hymns and praise songs used during the service had the theme of or reference to creation and I wondered what he believed about it. I received an email reply:

Dear Bob,

Thanks for the inquiry.

When I came to Calvary Church, I let it be known publicly that I was not convinced of recent creationism. I know that God created, and I know that when we have perfect understanding that we will see it is in perfect accord with the inerrant Scripture. I do not believe that Genesis 1, understood within the context of Hebrew language, genre and culture, teaches recent creation. I know I still have lots to learn on the subject, but I believe that Christians can affirm different views on the subject and still be completely loyal to Scripture.

Johnny

I hope that Dr. Miller did not think that I was trying to fan the flames of any internal controversy in the church by simply asking what he believed, because I was totally unaware that he (or anyone at Calvary) had any heightened sensitivity over the subject. I was simply asking a question. However, in the light of this new book, I now see that his encounters with others that disagree with his position may not have been completely civil.

Along with this book, we note that in January 2011, three talks on Origins were presented as part of Lancaster's Garden Spot Village's ALIVE (Active Lifelong Learners in Vital Engagements) program. The first talk, given by ISBR Founder and President Dr. Bill Curtis, was entitled "The Age of the Earth," and presented evidence for ISBR's young-earth position. The second talk, entitled "What Genesis 1 Meant to the Ancients," was presented by Dr. Soden and offered an alternative view to ISBR's literal view of the Genesis 1 origins account, as an introduction to the forthcoming book. The third talk was entitled "Evolutionary Creation," by Dr. Rick Schaeffer, Professor of Chemistry at Messiah College. Dr. Schaeffer presented evidence which he interpreted as showing that God used evolution as the mechanism for creation.

Two years later, in January 2013, after the book was released, Dr. Soden conducted two more talks, again at Garden Spot Village. The first was a description of the book and the second was a question-and-answer session. At the first talk, Dr. Soden suggested emailing questions which he would address at the second talk. I did this and most of the questions he addressed at the second talk were mine. Some of his responses are addressed below at the appropriate places.

In March 2013, an additional talk was provided, this time by both authors. It took place at Lancaster Bible College, where, as mentioned above, Dr. Soden is on the faculty. After reading the book and listening to all of these talks, I think I have a good handle on what the authors believe about this subject.

Why this book?

One basic question for any author is simply: "Why did you write this book?" In the introduction to his first 2011 talk, Dr. Soden referred to the forthcoming book, saying

"We are trying to explain and help folks understand why people see Genesis 1 in different ways."

To me, that seemed more of a "what" than a "why." That is, why did the authors believe that the book was needed at all, and then why it was needed now? My guess is that a growing concern within the church is the aging population of its members and how to evangelize and keep young people living for Christ. If "science," as presented by the mainstream media (Scientific American and Discover magazines, NOVA, the Discovery Channel and a host of others) disputes the Bible and young people are inundated with just this "science," the simple answer is to bend the former to accommodate the latter. We wholeheartedly agree with the spirit of the desire to raise a Christian generation, but if Scripture is being compromised to accomplish it, we have to ask whether this is the proverbial "slippery slope." That is, if the events of the creation account in Genesis 1 are dismissed as not actually occurring in history, then what about original sin *via* Adam and Eve, Noah's flood or the virgin birth? It turns out that other Christian authors, such as Dr. Denis Lamoureux, in his book *Evolutionary Creation*, have descended even further down this slope, denying the historicity of all events in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, including Noah's global flood, as well as the very existence of Adam, Eve and Noah themselves. Dr. Miller and Dr. Soden are not that extreme but nothing in principle would prevent this extrapolation, since, according to Dr. Soden during his talk, the Genesis account was written for a:

"different time, different language, different culture, ..."

which also characterizes the environment surrounding the birth of Jesus. How long will it take to descend to the bottom of the slope?

Dr. Miller opened the March 2013 talk with the following words:

"John and I are admittedly both old earth creationists, but the point of our book is that if Genesis 1 is interpreted correctly, then it doesn't mandate either an old earth or a young earth. In fact, it's not about science at all."

But then why concatenate science with Scripture in the label they give to themselves ("old-earth creationists")? The age of the earth is a topic in science (geology), while creation is a topic in Scripture. Why not simply use the term "Biblical Creationist" if their beliefs are driven solely by the words and context of Scripture? The rejection of a "recent" creation (see email above) leaves them no alternative but a "non-recent" (i.e., old) creation or no creation at all. The latter (evolution), however, is not what they believe. In fact, as a reference to what he believes, Dr. Miller gave the book *Creation and Time*, by astronomer Dr. Hugh Ross. Dr. Ross is a "progressive creationist" who rejects the Biblical account of creation and advocates an old-earth view. The book by Dr. Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*, is a stunning refutation of Dr. Ross' position, arguing against Ross' understanding of Scripture as well as his understanding of science.

I now briefly summarize the book by commenting on several quotes from representative passages. I mention at the outset that although a large part of the book is devoted to comparing and contrasting the

pagan creation accounts of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Canaan with the Genesis creation account, I will have no comments about the details of those sections. I credit the authors with faithfully reporting these details and I take no issue with the facts, only with the conclusions reached based on those facts.

A Principle and a Model

At a high level, it can be said that the book presents a principle and a model. The principle is demonstrated with the following quotes:

“The meaning that we must start with when we read any part of Scripture is the author’s meaning. The Bible is God’s word to us, but it wasn’t given directly to us - it was written to other people in other languages in other times. Certainly God intended it to speak to us (1 Cor. 10:11), but our understanding of God’s revelation must be understood through the original written and historical context. It cannot mean something different from what it meant to the original audience.” (emphasis added) (Page 34)

“The most vital question for the interpreters of any literature (and especially the Bible) to ask is, what did the human author (and ultimately the divine Author, God the Holy Spirit) intend for His original audience to understand when they read this passage.” (emphasis added) (Page 35)

“Historical and cultural backgrounds are crucial to the correct interpretation of the narrative. What do we need to understand about the text’s background to help us interpret it accurately? What questions help to understand what Moses (and God) intended to say? How can we hear what Israel would have heard? This is the most crucial question. What did the account mean to the Israelites coming out of Egypt?” (emphasis added) (Page 69)

The principle is thus: We must understand Scripture the way God intended it to be understood by the original audience. This is one area of “fuzziness” in the book. The above quotes bounce back and forth between our need to understand Scripture as the original audience did understand it and our need to understand how God intended the original audience to understand it. I found this confusing and asked Dr. Soden for clarification during the January 2013 talk. He elaborated by saying that the original audience did not necessarily get all of it right, but since, according to Dr. Soden, “God is a good communicator,” even if they didn’t understand it, God used their language and context, implying that they could understand it. But where does that leave our analysis? We can’t ask God directly what His intent was, so our only data is the Scriptural record itself. The authors impose symbolism and a figurative interpretation on this Scriptural record of Genesis 1, but the record itself does not persuade us to do so. To me, this is a very fuzzy imposition, as elaborated on below.

At the March 2013 talk, I asked Dr. Soden to apply this principle to Moses’ description of the days of creation. If we need to understand the account the way the original audience understood it, this would include Moses, himself. So we can justly ask what Moses himself understood days to mean when he wrote about them. From a straightforward reading we would certainly conclude that Moses meant ordinary days with which he was familiar, certainly not billions of years. However, Dr. Soden believes that Moses meant neither, although Dr. Soden is a proponent of the billions-of-years view. In his view, God intended Moses to understand the day (actually, the entire creation week) “symbolically” and not to refer to a real period of time at all. But how do we know that? The obvious answer is that we don’t and the statement is simply an assertion, based on other unrelated passages of Scripture.

As I see it, the fuzziness of this issue in the book results from, if I may use an analogy, "running the tape backwards." The authors look at Exodus 20:11, giving the command for the Sabbath, in which the Hebrews are required to work six days and rest on the seventh:

"For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath and made it holy."
Ex 20:11 (NASB)

They claim that God wanted a seven-day framework for the week and then symbolically imputed the seven days backwards to the creation "week," as well. This contrasts with a straightforward reading, in which the tape runs forward, from Genesis to Exodus, rather than the other way around. But what about the preposition "For" at the beginning of Ex. 20:11? It signifies a causal relationship from Genesis to Exodus. That is, because God created in six ordinary days terminated by a seventh day on which He ceased, therefore we pattern the week of seven ordinary days after that. Dr. Miller and Dr. Soden view it the other way around based on their belief that the number seven is symbolic in Genesis 1, as it potentially is in other parts of Scripture. We note that equating Scripture with Scripture is not the same as interpreting Scripture with Scripture. The latter is the basis of hermeneutics, while the former is simply an act of assertion. We also note that if the number seven is symbolic in Genesis 1, why couldn't it be symbolic in Ex 20:11, as well, making the work-week figurative? Some people might love a figurative work-week until they receive their figurative paycheck! To me, there is a subjective fuzziness at work in this logic of playing the tape backwards.

They also write:

"we reject the specious argument that because we don't see the term day with a number used figuratively elsewhere in Scripture, then it cannot have been used that way in Genesis 1. However, while the Hebrew word for day in Genesis 1 could have been meant figuratively, whether it was or not must be argued from the context." (page 164)

I would also reject such an argument, if that were the argument being made, but it is not, at least not by me. The real question is whether there is any need at all to interpret day figuratively in Genesis 1. I would argue that if this "need" is driven by the "need" to play the tape backwards, then this is a fuzzy need, indeed!

(As a side note, whether intentional or not, in Chapter 12 the language in the book suddenly gets more confrontational, using terms like "specious argument" and "flawed reasoning" applied to fellow believers. *Irenic?*)

The second aspect of the book consists of what I would call a "model," simply meaning a framework of thought. Although I am not addressing specifics of the Egyptian-Mesopotamian-Canaanite "connection" to Genesis 1, I will draw a distinction between the model proposed in the book and a model proposed in the 1930's, which I believe has great merit.

Figure 1 illustrates the authors' view of Genesis 1. They see many striking similarities between the events presented in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian creation stories (and to a lesser extent the Canaanite one). But they also point out the vast difference in the theologies of these events from the theology in Genesis 1. Because Moses was raised and educated in Egypt, he certainly was aware of and well-trained in the Egyptian beliefs. Drs. Miller and Soden claim that Moses, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, presented the same events but replaced the theology with that of the true God, giving rise to Genesis 1.

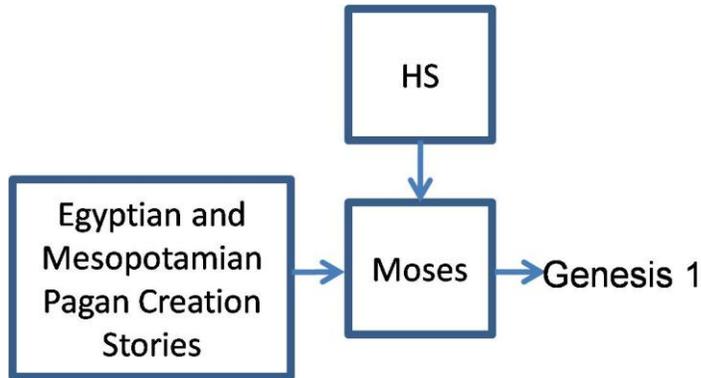


Figure 1 – Miller-Soden Model of Genesis 1

Figure 2 illustrates a theory presented in 1936 by Commodore Percy Wiseman, of the British Military, while stationed in the Middle East. Wiseman had an interest in archaeology and was fascinated by certain Mesopotamian clay tablets discovered with cuneiform (“wedge”) writing and in a very similar structure to the “toledoth” passages in Genesis. These passages refer to “generations” of various biblical figures (Adam, Seth, Noah, etc) and Wiseman saw the similarity between these and the “colophon” phrases on the clay tablets, identifying the owner, the subject and a date reference. For more information, please see the Associates for Biblical Research webpage: <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/10/11/The-Tablet-Theory-of-Genesis-Authorship.aspx>.

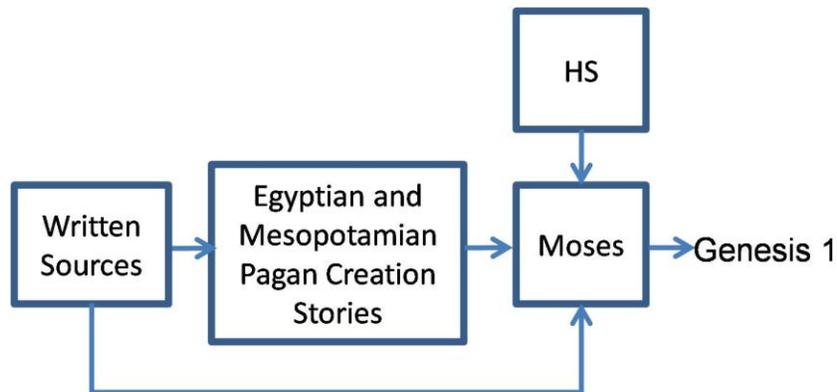


Figure 2 – Wiseman Tablet Model of Genesis 1

Wiseman theorized that Genesis was compiled by Moses using sources in the form of tablets, actually written by the people that experienced the events and preserved over the years. In particular, the

creation account would have been witnessed by God alone and recorded in tablets by God, or by Adam, as directed by God. Of course, this idea is familiar to us because of God's direct writing of the Ten Commandments on tablets, as recorded later in the book of Exodus. Also, human writing has been traced as far back as 5000-6000 years ago, as reported in Ralph Linton's 1935 book entitled *The Tree of Culture*, as well as in other more recent references.

The book is silent about the Wiseman hypothesis. The authors do mention the toledoth passages, but in the context of the structure of Genesis and Hebrew history. Curiously, clay tablets do appear in their discussion of the Mesopotamian creation story, Enuma Elish. So why do they omit the Wiseman hypothesis? I asked Dr. Soden about this at the January 2013 talk. He pointed out that of the toledoth passages, only the one in Genesis 5:1 refers to an actual "book:"

"This is the book of the generations of Adam..." (Genesis 5:1)

His point was that if this is the only toledoth reference to an actual "book," then this discounts the argument of the Wiseman hypothesis that original records from the people who experienced the events were preserved. Instead, they maintain, the account came from Egypt. The problem with this answer is that, in at least the NASB version of the Bible (the version which Dr. Soden said in his 2011 talk that he favors), several other toledoth passages are in the following form (for example):

"These are the records of the generations of Noah..." (Genesis 6:9)

In Hebrew, the words "records of the generations" in Genesis 6:9 and "generations" in Genesis 5:1 are both translations of "toledoth." The words "the records of" in the NASB version of Genesis 6:9 are in italics, so that they are implied by the translators in order to clarify the meaning. The distinction between "record" and "book" seems like a fuzzy one, especially in light of the translators' attempt to capture the true meaning by inserting "records."

The fact that even one verse (Genesis 5:1) has the Hebrew word "cephar" (book) means that an actual book is in mind, unless Drs. Miller and Soden believe that this is a figurative reference, but there is no reason to do so. When referring to books of the Bible, don't you sometimes refer to "a verse in Genesis," or "a chapter in Ezekiel," where you really mean "a verse in the book of Genesis" and a "chapter in the book of Ezekiel?" That is, don't you ever use the word "book" implicitly? I think it is rather hasty to discard the Wiseman hypothesis simply because the word "book" did not appear in all of the toledoth passages, when, at least for some of the passages, even the NASB translators thought it was implicit and supplemented the text with "records."

In the Wiseman model, Moses would have had access to the written sources, which he compiled under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would have caused Moses to discern between revealed truth and pagan beliefs, so that the Genesis account would be a correct report. In this model, the Egyptians and Mesopotamians would also have access to the truth but through their paganism would have distorted this truth, giving rise to the striking similarities in the events but not in the theology.

Dr. Soden was asked about this at the 2011 talk. The question was essentially, why couldn't God have provided the truth initially, which was then distorted into the pagan creation stories, followed by a

compilation of the truth by Moses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? This is essentially the Wiseman model, without specific reference to the tablets. The following detailed answer is worth including here:

"Maybe. The problem with that, however, is that God does not correct the misunderstandings that are clearly still there, or at least allowed for in the Genesis 1 text. So, for example, 'the earth was formless and void and darkness was over the surface of the deep' is where we begin with creation, which is almost identical with where Egypt begins with creation, with this watery, chaotic mass that's everywhere. He doesn't correct that. He doesn't say, well it really wasn't that way. He has light coming first. Well light first is pretty well across the ancient near east. Egypt had light first and the sun later. Mesopotamia had light first and the sun later. That's consistent. Did God do it that way? Maybe, but he is clearly not correcting the misunderstandings that they had at the same time. So to say that some things he corrected and some things he didn't seems a little arbitrary to me. Whereas, on the other hand, to simply say God is using their perceptions which most of their understanding of how the material world functions is really a result of their perceptions of how things work. Whether it's the windows in the heavens or the various levels of the heavens or the storehouses for the snow or the sun sailing across the waters of the sky, separating the waters from the waters. All those seem to be perceptions which he doesn't challenge. On the other hand, he clearly challenges and he is very strong in what we often call 'polemic' in terms of arguing against their wrong theological perceptions of who God is and what God is all about. And so he clearly and very strongly - in fact there's a really good book that I would highly recommend, John Oswalt wrote called *The Bible Among the Myths* and he really lays out how the Genesis accounts are so significantly and strikingly different theologically from all the rest of the ancient near eastern mythologies. Not in the events but in the understanding of God and how God is so different from all the other gods, particularly looking at the transcendence and the uniqueness in the sovereign working of God over all creation, as opposed to being part of creation which all the other societies believed and accepted."

Here is the thread of Dr. Soden's argument: 1) The events are similar. 2) The events are wrong. 3) God did not correct the events in Moses' writing but allowed him to dwell on his incorrect perceptions. 4) God did correct the theology.

So, after this long, fuzzy answer, we are still left with the question of whether or not Egypt distorted the truth and Moses re-established it. In a sort of "guilt-by-association" logic, Drs. Miller and Soden discount the literal truth of the events in Genesis 1 because Egypt had similar events. What is fuzzy in their analysis is that they don't only view the events to be similar to the events in Genesis 1, but rather they view them to be the same. Since the events in the Egyptian account are nonsensical, the events of Genesis 1 must also be wrong. It is tacitly assumed that it was not God's intent to have correct details recorded about nature, just about theology. Therefore, in terms of the events of nature, why should God bother to present the straightforward, literal truth? In the minds of Drs. Miller and Soden, he didn't. When Dr. Soden said: "He [God] doesn't correct that. He doesn't say, well it really wasn't that way," the obvious question is why would he have to say that if the events as recorded by Moses were correct and the events as told by Egypt were a distortion? In other words, if the events recorded by Moses were correct, no correction would have been needed. Note also that in point 4), the assertion that God "corrected" their theology implies that that is where he started. That is, they view Genesis 1 as a correction of something else, not a work that stood alone on its own merits.

Chronological or Theological Creation Days?

One thing that struck me as I was reading the book was the need to keep the main theme clearly in focus. In contrast to the general Kregel description ("whether the Bible should be interpreted literally or symbolically in regards to the age of the earth"), it is not the earth's age that is the specific focus, but rather the understanding by the original audience of the six days of creation described in Genesis 1. That is, how long were they and where did they occur along the historical timeline of history? The reason for keeping this in focus is that the book draws in many verses from other Biblical passages that have figurative interpretations and attempts to persuade the reader that Genesis 1 should be taken figuratively, as well. I certainly agree that we should interpret Scripture with Scripture, but, again, interpreting Scripture with Scripture is not the same thing as equating Scripture with Scripture. For instance, just because the Hebrew word "yom," meaning a "day" is used elsewhere in Scripture to indicate a general period of time that can be longer than 24 hours, that does not mean it should be interpreted that way in Genesis 1. The authors would certainly agree that interpretation is based on context, so their arguments are centered on the context of Genesis 1. It turns out that "yom" is used over 2,300 times in the Old Testament and whenever it is used with a number it means an ordinary 24-hour period. Nowhere else in Scripture is this use (of "yom" with a number meaning ordinary days) questioned except in Genesis 1. Why is this?

Having decided that the days are symbolic, the authors claim that the sequence of these days in Genesis 1 is not a chronological one, but rather a theological one. They liken them to static photos on the wall, connected to each other by theme and telling a story but not connected by time. They say that the Hebrew in these verses is very unusual if simply presenting a list of days. The numbers attached to the days come in both flavors of counting numbers: cardinal (one, two, three, ...) and ordinal (giving "order" like first, second, third, ...). The "first" day, as it is translated in, say, the NIV, is incorrect, as the Hebrew says "yom echad," meaning "day one," as correctly translated in the NASB. Days two through seven, however, use the ordinals. Also, the indefinite article ("a") is used with Day 1 but the definite article ("the") is used with Day 6 and 7.

What all of this boils down to in the authors' view is that although there is clearly a sequence of days, it does not mean what it appears to mean to us and that Moses somehow knew that he was not conveying a chronological sequence, despite using the familiar language with numbers attached to his familiar knowledge of days. So what about the unusual Hebrew? Dr. Andrew Steinmann at Concordia University claims (as quoted in *Refuting Compromise*, page 77) that the Hebrew offers strong support for the 24-hour sequential days because of the presence of "evening and morning" in these verses. He says that the list is unusual not because it is not chronological, but because the list is providing definitions for this new concept "day," effectively giving the formula "evening + morning = day" and then saying what aspect of creation occurred during that day. In our view, claiming that the list is "unusual in Hebrew" does not discount its meaning as chronological. So, bottom line is that there is no reason from the Hebrew to interpret a non-chronological sequence. Again, it is simply an assertion, equating passages outside of the current context with those inside.

Before leaving this section, I'll mention one thing related to Egypt and the days of creation. The authors point out that the Egyptian creation story is a story of daily "re-creation," in which the sun sets each evening, the sun god fights a battle against the darkness and emerges victorious the next day. The cycle repeats every sunset. Drs. Miller and Soden claim that Moses wrote that creation happened in six days only once as a polemic against the one-day every-day Egyptian account. But think about what that means. The Egyptian account took place over 24-hours. If Moses wrote about *six* periods of time as a polemic against the Egyptian *one* period of time, then Moses certainly had a 24-hour day in mind or else

the polemic would be nonsensical. He certainly was not thinking of six billion years compared to one 24-hour day, and his comparison would have also been nonsensical if he meant the *six* days to be symbolic because the *one*-day was not symbolic.

What About the Seventh Day?

The seventh day raises two issues of concern. First, the authors ask why there is no "evening and morning" mentioned for this day as there is for the other six. I would argue that nothing happened during the seventh day, but it rather served as an endpoint marking the termination of the creation week, so no reference to an evening and morning was needed. That is, nothing occurred during an evening and morning on Day 7. Also, they are saying if evening and morning make a 24-hour day, and if no evening and morning are stated for Day 7, then Day 7 is not a 24-hour day and if Day 7 is not a 24-hour day then maybe neither are the other six. It is easy to get lost in the assumptions and drop down to the conclusion, but we must keep both clearly in sight to understand God's meaning. Day 7 could certainly consist of an evening and morning even if not stated in this verse. An old adage is that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

For the second issue regarding Day 7, the authors appeal to Hebrews 4:1-11. They doubt that Day 7 was 24 hours by claiming that the seventh day still continues and further, they claim that the other six days are not literal, either. They say:

"The point is that if the seventh day is not a literal twenty-four-hour day, then the first six days probably are not literal days, either." (page 53)

"It is an endless day, with the offer of unlimited fellowship to all who desire it."(page 177)

They equate the fact that God rested on the seventh day and is still resting, with the notion that the seventh day is still continuing. However, as Dr. Jonathan Sarfati points out in *Refuting Compromise* (page 83)

"If someone says on Monday that he rested on Saturday and is still resting, it in no way implies that Saturday lasted until Monday."

In parallel with Ex. 20:11, the authors refer to Ex. 31:17:

"...for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor and was refreshed."

They focus on the word "refreshed," which has the meaning in Hebrew of "taking a breath" when weary and ceasing from work. How can God be weary and need refreshment? They claim that "refreshed" is figurative when applied to God so that the seventh day must be figurative as well, because it appears together with "refreshed." So the point seems to be that a figurative reference in a sentence makes the entire sentence figurative. However, suppose I say "I just cut four cords of wood, and man, I am dead!" Well, I am still alive standing next to my literal firewood despite being figuratively dead. God was not weary after his six-day creation but was simply indicating that man would be weary after his six-day work-week (weariness brought about by sin in Genesis 3:19) and needed a day to take a breath. Another

meaning that has been proposed for “refreshed” in this context is the idea that God (in the previous verse - Genesis 1:31) said, not only that his creation was “good,” but was “very good,” and that his heart was “refreshed” to see it.

Light Before the Sun?

The authors cite the creation of light on Day 1 as a conflict with the creation of the sun on Day 4. This, they say, contradicts our common notion that the sun was needed to provide light, so how could they possibly have been created in the reverse order? This, of course, is not a new question. Neither is the answer. Emphasizing the source of light in the New Jerusalem, the apostle John says:

“And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed.” (Rev. 21:23-25, NASB)

“And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.” (Rev 22:5, NASB)

In these verses, it is as clear as day (pardon the pun), that God is the source of light to the new city and the repeated day-night comparison drives home the point that what is in view is actual, physical, eye-sensitive light, with which we are commonly familiar. So, in the book of Revelation, God tells us that he is the source of light for the newly-created city and in the book of Genesis he tells us that he is the source of light for the newly-created earth.

Also, the idea of light before the sun should pose no problem to a Big-Bang enthusiast, as most old-earth creationists are. The theory postulates that in the first 10 seconds after the Big Bang, the universe was dominated by elementary particles called photons. Well, light consists of - you guessed it - photons! The sun was nowhere to be found 10 seconds after the Big Bang, but rather supposedly appeared roughly 10 billion years later. That certainly sounds like light before the sun, even by the old-earth creationist standards.

Finally, don't you think that when Moses assembled these verses he would have noticed an obvious contradiction and fixed it? Drs. Miller and Soden would say that no, since they view the account to be symbolic, with a theological message only, God did not see fit to correct Moses' misinterpretation of nature. But what about Moses' “common sense” that the sun would need to precede light if this were merely a natural occurrence? Moses was well-educated, so let's give him some credit to have recognized a contradiction and re-arranged this narrative if he thought it needed to be re-arranged.

Creation Order Conflict?

The argument is made that the creation account in Genesis 2 contradicts the creation account in Genesis 1 by presenting a different order of events. This notion assumes, first of all, that the account in Genesis 2 is a creation account, at all. The authors claim that if the account in Genesis 2 is not chronological, then maybe the account in Genesis 1 is not chronological either.

To this argument, I would reject the initial assumption that the account in Genesis 2 is a creation account. It rather is an expansion of the events on Day 6 from the perspective of the Garden of Eden, describing the Garden and why and how God created Eve. It does not even describe the same events, let alone the same order. For instance, no mention is made of the creation of sea creatures in Genesis 2.

The authors also point out that Genesis 2:19 seems to contradict Genesis 1:20, with regard to the origin of birds. In Genesis 1:20, it says "let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens," while in Genesis 2:19 it says "Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky..." In their view, the birds arising out of the ground contradicts their appearance from God "letting" them fly. However, it seems obvious that "flying" would occur after "forming," so we do not see a contradiction at all, but rather an elaboration of the details.

Death Before Adam?

We are told by the apostle Paul that

"... just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." (Rom. 5:12, NASB)

The raging controversy over the years has been how to interpret the appearance of physical death (if that, in fact, is what is meant by "death" in this verse, as opposed to "spiritual" death) before Adam sinned, which many believe is demonstrated by the fossil record. If physical death occurred before Adam, then how could God say that the creation was "very good?" That is, how could a good God view suffering and death in a positive light? The authors say that "this depends on what we mean by good" (page 168). They cite the account of Joseph in Genesis 50, where God meant the ordeal for "good." The argument is that since bad things can happen to good people for a Godly reason, therefore bad things (i.e., suffering and death) can also happen to animals, and that they did happen prior to the appearance of Adam and Eve. That is, the authors resolve the paradox by claiming that the death prior to Adam was not human death but rather animal death.

Young-earth creationists agree that the Romans passage refers to human death only. But ... so what? Saying that human death resulted from human sin says nothing at all about when and why animal death began, just about when and why human death began. That is, simply because the Romans passage refers to human death after Adam, it is fuzzy reasoning to think that it means animal death happened before Adam.

What about non-animal death? The authors include death of plants also:

"It [death] was also part of preparing the earth for man's habitation: we'd be unlikely to have oil reserves today if it hadn't been for the death of plants and animals in our geological history." (page 169)

In a footnote to this sentence, they point out:

"At least some Young Earth Creationists, such as Jonathan Sarfati, allow death before the fall for plants and invertebrates, arguing that the curse only affected the 'nephesh chayyah' (breath of life), which Sarfati assumes refers to only vertebrates (*Refuting Compromise*, 205)." (emphasis added) (page 210)

Why would they limit this statement to "some" Young Earth Creationists, when plants were clearly given by God for food before the Fall in Genesis 1:29? How would plants be food if they did not die in the process? I don't know any Young Earth Creationists who do not recognize this fact.

Drs. Miller and Soden posit:

"If the earth is old and the creation of humanity in Adam and Eve is relatively recent, then the clear implication is that there was death before Adam and Eve's sin." (page 166-167).

Notice the tacit assumption in this scenario that the earth was not simply aging until Adam and Eve's appearance, but that things were dying along the way. Why not just assume that at some point in the earth's long (their view) history, God decided to create life and that death appeared after the Fall? Their "clear" implication is fuzzy because on the one hand, the only reason for assuming animal death before Adam is their view that this is what the fossil record shows, through the evolutionary struggle for existence, while on the other hand, at least Dr. Soden does not believe in evolution. A question and answer at the 2011 talk was:

"So you're not saying these things to accommodate theistic evolution?" "I don't hold to evolution. I don't understand it, to be honest."

So how can he claim such clarity about when dead animals died? If death came before Adam and Eve, exactly who or what was dying and where did the dying things come from without evolution? Again, they accept the mainstream scientific story without question.

They continue:

"One alternative suggestion is that the earth is geologically ancient but all biological life is recent. However, the same evidence that points to an old earth - geology and radiometric dating - also point to ancient forms of biological life in fossils. Thus, the data would suggest that there was death before Adam." (page 167)

What about the evidence that does not point to an old earth? Like soft dinosaur tissue, carbon-14 in diamonds, polystrate fossilized trees, helium diffusion in zircon crystals, smoothly folded rock strata and a host of others including results from The Institute for Creation Research (ICR) project known as RATE (Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth). If they are appealing to "the data," to "suggest" that death came before Adam, they should certainly not ignore the strong data that suggests otherwise.

In case there is any doubt about the authors' position on origins, they clarify it, as follows:

" We believe that God may have intervened often in the history of creation to produce exactly the forms of plant and animal life that he wanted on the earth, leading up to the climax of creation, human beings, and we believe that he specifically intervened in the creation of human beings (Adam and Eve)" (emphasis added). (page 167)

Notice that they do not view creation as an event over six ordinary days, but as a process occurring over a long "history." This is the Hugh Ross position (progressive creation), which, as stated earlier was completely refuted in Dr. Jonathan Sarfati's book *Refuting Compromise*.

Literal, Figurative or Both?

At the January 2013 talk, I asked Dr. Soden a question about literal interpretations. He replied that when he talks about a literal interpretation, he's talking about an interpretation of Scripture that understands what God intended, which may include figurative language, symbolism and metaphors. We certainly agree that figurative language, symbolism and metaphors are used in Scripture, but including these as "literal" seems to add another degree of fuzziness to the analysis. Didn't you always think that "literal" and "figurative" stood in sharp contrast? But having lumped "figurative" into the "literal" category to express God's intended truth, the authors then say:

"...a number of exegetical details allow for and even point to a broadly figurative approach to Genesis 1 rather than a 'literal' chronological approach" (page 148),

leaving the reader somewhat puzzled as to the distinction. Remember in the Introduction that we cautioned the reader about the phrase "allows for," as opposed to "proves."

Perception is not Reality?

The book makes frequent reference to the ancient perspective that the sun goes around the earth. Of course we now know that the earth goes around the sun, so what shall we say about the "ancient" perspective? The book refers to the Galileo affair, in which rejection of the ancient perspective landed Galileo in hot water with the Catholic Church and resulted in his recanting and repenting and spending the last years of his life under house arrest for heresy. The church position was that Scripture taught that the earth does not move and the simple point that the authors make is that the Scripture has the ancient perspective and we should not impose our 21st century understanding of science upon it.

Regarding such observations, they say

"We agree they are anthropocentric, that is, human-centered, and they report the perspective of the observer from the earth; they are not scientifically binding. So we take them as figurative, as observational speech, and not 'literally' true." (page 29-30)

But wait. Why do the authors decouple truth from observation? If I observe the sun going up in the sky, it is because the sun is, literally, going up in the sky. This is called "relative motion." All motion is relative to a reference frame. In my professional work, I write mathematical algorithms to track ballistic missiles. Ballistic missiles are launched from a point on the earth, go up in the sky and land on another point on the earth (assuming they are not intercepted and destroyed before landing). Suppose I came in one day and announced to my colleagues that because the earth goes around the sun, I am going to write my tracking algorithms with a reference frame at the center of the sun, rather than the usual reference frame at the center of the earth. How long do you think it would take them to recommend that I use some sick days to recover from this lunacy? Is a sun-centered reference frame wrong? As far as the math is concerned, I could write the algorithm in either reference frame, but the earth-centered one is much

more natural and useful to convey information. Is one frame "figurative" and one frame "literal?" Not at all. Both are literally true. That is, I can observe a missile flight in either frame and my observations are literally true and scientifically binding in either frame because the math works. Simply describing motion relative to the observer does not make the description figurative in missile launches or in Scripture.

Other Noteworthy Quotes

With regard to scientists:

"... they generally are willing to admit when they have been wrong or incomplete in their understanding of the world. There is no benefit in holding out against the scientific mainstream, which discards error as quickly as possible so it can move on to more profitable pursuits." (page 35)

I would point out two glaring exceptions: Man-made global warming and biological evolution. Today's mainstream scientists have bought into both of these, hook, line and sinker and are certainly not discarding their error, precisely because of how profitable (financially) their pursuits are. These are not topics for this review but are included only to show the mindset of the authors, placing a great deal of confidence in what they are being told by "mainstream" scientists. Of note is the following comment by a premier mainstream scientist of our day (Stephen Hawking in *A Briefer History of Time*, p. 44), with regard to the 1919 measurement of light deflection by the sun to verify general relativity:

"Their measurement had been sheer luck, or perhaps a case of knowing the result they wanted to get - not an uncommon occurrence in science. The light deflection has, however, been accurately confirmed by a number of later observations." (emphasis added).

This revealing admission that even scientists can have an agenda should cause the reader to perform his due diligence on any proposition set forth.

With regard to the earth:

"...it does appear that the earth has evidence of eons of existence, including the light of stars from millions of light-years away, millions of layers of sediment, and enormous varieties of fossils that go far beyond any Noahic flood." (page 38)

We would simply ask how the authors could possibly estimate the number of fossil varieties that would be too great to have formed from "any" Noahic flood. Remember, this was a world-wide, cataclysmic event. How *would* they, how *could* they possibly know how many is *too* many? The answer is, as with other statements in this book, that they don't know this. Again, it is an assertion.

Why was Genesis written?

"It was written for the people of God after their exodus from Egypt to (re)acquaint them with the God of their fathers- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - and with his calling on their national life, giving them a purpose (to bring blessing to the nations) and a future in a land. ... He was the creator God who had made the land and all that was in it." (page 64)

In other words, Genesis was not written to tell us how things were created but to simply tell the original audience (the Hebrews leaving Egypt) that God did create the land and all that was in it and that He was going to give it to them. This view, by the way, is not limited to Drs. Miller and Soden. Scholars generally divide the book of Genesis into two portions, one including Genesis 1-11 and the other including Genesis 12-50. The first portion deals with "universal" events like creation, the Fall and the Flood, while the second deals with "local" events, like the history of the Hebrew people. While the latter is certainly one of the themes of the book of Genesis, even maybe the main theme, it is fuzzy reasoning to simply assert that the beginning portion of the book is there mainly as figurative background for the rest of the book, not to be taken literally in its description of events. The title "Genesis" was given to the book by the Greek translators in writing the Septuagint, but the ancient Hebrew title of the book was "Bereshith," literally meaning "In Beginning," the first word of the entire Bible. But what is it that happened in the beginning? The first verse tells us that it is was creation and not the beginning of the history of the Hebrew people. The latter comes after the beginning, not in the beginning.

Conclusion and Recommendation

So does it matter what you believe about Genesis 1? Can you be a believing Christian even if you don't take the account as historical? After all, the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 10:9 "that if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Therefore, this is not a matter of salvation but one of the ongoing struggle, as mentioned in the Introduction, of the interrelationship of faith and science in society and which one drives beliefs about the other. I don't hold to the "NOMA" ("No Overlapping Magisteria") philosophy that there is no relationship between the two, teaching that "religion tells man how to go to heaven, while science tells man how the heavens go." God is the God of both realms. I believe that the Christian faith starts with God's explanation of how he brought things about, not just that he brought things about, simply because that is what he told us, using ordinary, familiar language, albeit describing super-natural events. If we discount a description of events simply because they are beyond natural, then we are, indeed on that slippery slope. While *In the Beginning ... We Misunderstood* attempts to bring clarity to the issue from the historical context, I believe it introduces what I have been calling "fuzziness," by building into their conclusions the underlying "old-earth" assumptions and assertions.

If you have read all the way through to this point, you may be surprised that I wholeheartedly recommend the book to be read and understood. I give you the admonition from Acts 17:11 and ask that you do not simply take my word about these matters, but do your own research. This is what we attempt to do at ISBR, where we observe that the "R" in ISBR stands for research. I believe that the relationship between faith and science is headed along a dangerous trajectory of compromise and a critical analysis of the assumptions and assertions underlying books such this must be performed in order to understand the ideas presented. When I read this book, I read it in concert with the Bible and with the website www.blueletterbible.org, as well as with Dr. Jonathan Sarfati's *Refuting Compromise*. I recommend this approach to correlate these issues and decide for yourselves.

Finally, I take you back to the Introduction, where I emphasized that I do not question the faith of the authors or any other professing believer. I question only the conclusions drawn from the facts presented and believe that non-hostile criticism of fellow believers is perfectly acceptable and also necessary to live out the spirit of Acts 17:11.

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