

Book Review - Battle for the Beginning
Introduction
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MacArthur starts his battle for creation by launching a tirade against naturalism and Carl Sagan. While naturalism is something that should be combated by the church, arguing against it has no real impact upon old earth creationist beliefs. Naturalism may have its most visible roots in Sagan; however, the roots actually go deeper...into young earth creationism as well.

Naturalism is the belief that the world we live in evolved, free of any intelligence guiding its development. The theory of evolution is a large part of the naturalist beliefs. Although naturalists have been around since the introduction of evolution, it has really exploded in the latter half of the twentieth century, thanks in large part to the efforts of young earth creationists. Beginning in 1960, with the publication of *The Genesis Flood*, by Institute for Creation Research (ICR) founder Henry Morris, the church has been fed false information...namely that the earth is only 6,000 years old. In order to reach this conclusion, you have to deny science, and the truths we see through scientific observations and experiments. To one who is presented with this information, they have had to make a choice...to accept the teachings of the church, and thus reject science, or accept the cold hard facts of science, and reject the church. Unfortunately, many have chosen the latter. Many have been driven from the church, when faced with this "either/or" decision.

As time passed, the young earth movement gained momentum, and numerous organizations cropped up supporting a young earth. In many cases, they even have PhD scientists supporting their cause. In most cases, these PhD's were trained by their parents that the earth was young, thus they approach the subject of creationism with a closed mind.

There is a startling parallel here. The same time we see an increase in young earth creationism, is the same time we see an increase in naturalism. In essence, people are being forced to one side or the other, and we are losing the "middle ground," the place where science and the Bible can agree.

While I agree that Carl Sagan is responsible in part for the rise of naturalism, young earth creationist organizations are equally to blame, as they eagerly drove thinking people from the church, right into the path of Sagan. How different would it have been, if instead we had an old earth creationist movement with the same energy? Perhaps millions would have been saved, instead of being lost to naturalism.

Next (page 13), MacArthur turns his attention to Darwin. For too long, Darwin has been made the scapegoat of evolution. Christians blame him for damaging Christianity, for causing millions to fall away from the faith. I cannot jump on the Darwin-hating bandwagon. Darwin was a scientist, who was reporting on his findings, and postulating theories for what he observed. It is not Darwin who is to blame. We in the church, in our reaction to his works, are the true culprits. Suppose the church embraced evolution when

Darwin proposed it? Church fathers could have formulated the belief of "theistic evolution" and in the process they could have kept millions from falling away from the faith. It is the "either/or" approach of our response to evolution that has caused so much grief, and not evolution itself.

As an old earth believer, and a progressive creationist, I do not believe in evolution. Science has come a long way since Darwin, and many problems have been identified with the theory of evolution. However, am I 100% certain that evolution is false? No, I'm not. For all the arguments creationists propose against evolution, a simple check of the internet reveals that evolutionists have answers for them. Who is right? It really doesn't matter, since you can be a Christian and hold either position on evolution.

On page 17, he makes the statement, "Many in the church are too intimidated or too embarrassed to affirm the literal truth of the biblical account of creation." This statement rings true for many people. However, it need not be so. He is referring to the fact that since people don't want to be seen as religious zealots, and ridiculed for believing in a young earth, they don't speak up to defend their position as they should. This is only a problem for young earth creationists, however. Old earth creationists have no problem affirming the literal truth of creation, within an old earth framework. We can identify with the naturalists, who also believe the universe is billions of years old, and reach them for Christ.

In the next paragraph, MacArthur launches an attack against theistic evolutionists. In short, he says they claim to be bible-believing Christians, but in reality they have to reinterpret Genesis in order to make evolution fit into the Bible. Does the Christian have to reinterpret Genesis? What is reinterpreted? On the next page, he says, "...old earth creationists end up explaining away rather than honestly exegeting the biblical account of creation." Is this true?

Let's take a quick look at what is reinterpreted, and what is explained away. Our list of reinterpreted items is rather short...only one. The meaning of the word "day" is interpreted as a long period of time. The word "yom" is used in many ways in the Old Testament, representing a time of period anywhere from 12 hours to eternity.

You may be saying, "But what about the order of creation, or the lack of rainfall prior to the Flood, or especially death before sin." (see <http://www.answersincreation.org/death.htm>) All these are a result of how you interpret the word Yom. For instance, nowhere in the Bible is the issue of animal death before sin taught. It is a necessary addition to the Bible, however, if you believe in a young earth. This teaching did not arise from the Bible, but from young earth creationists. The same thing can be said of rain. And concerning the creation order, young earth creationists say the order of the fossil record does not match the order of creation in Genesis. However, it does, if one examines it closely (see <http://www.answersincreation.org/genesis1.htm>).

What about the claim we explain away creation? I believe in an inerrant Bible, and that you can literally accept the creation account in Genesis. I haven't "explained away" a single word in Genesis! What have I really "explained away?" I've explained away the false teaching of young earth creationism. I've explained away MacArthur's belief in a young earth. I still believe in an inerrant, literal Bible. No matter how loudly the young earth community protests, I've done nothing wrong Biblically.

"The main thrust of the passage (Genesis 1-3) simply cannot be reconciled with the notion that creation occurred via natural evolutionary processes over long periods of

time." Yes, it can, and I know many people who have done it. What he really means is that he cannot reconcile it with his preconceived idea of a young earth. From a young age, he has probably been taught that the earth is young. Despite writing this book, he has never seriously considered the point of view of the scientific community, nor does he intend to. He has, and will continue to be, influenced by Morton's Demon (see <http://www.answersincreation.org/mortond.htm>).

Consider this...the church is divided on this issue, some believing in a young earth, and some in an old earth. The secular community is not divided. Do you know any non-Christians, free of any prior knowledge of religion, who actually believe in a young earth? There are none! NOBODY has examined the earth, come to the conclusion it is young, and then went and found Christianity and believed. NOBODY! Instead, those who are pre-disposed to believe in a young earth were all taught that in their youth, or prior to being exposed to unbiased science, fell under the influence of another young earth creationist. Thus, there are no young earth creationists who "came by it honestly."

On page 19, MacArthur takes direct aim at old earth creationists who are literalists. He claims that it involves a hermeneutical shift at Genesis 1:26-27, and in Genesis 2:7, and that our belief in a historical Adam is inconsistent with our exegesis of the rest of the creation account. What he is referring to, I believe, is theistic evolution. If Adam was descended from prior non-soulful, animal-like hominids, then how could he be in the image of God? And, if so, why does the Bible say he was formed from the dust of the ground, when he clearly had a mother and father, who did not have eternal souls? In either case, this presents no problem for the theistic evolutionist. In God's image refers to an eternal soul, and not physical looks (God is spirit, so how could we be in God's physical image?). The only issue in Genesis 2:7 is time. God made man out of dust...whether he did it instantly, or he took billions of years, is of no consequence to the truthfulness of the Scripture...either way, man came from dust.

On page 20, he writes, "Evangelicals who accept an old-earth interpretation of Genesis have embraced a hermeneutic that is hostile to a high view of Scripture." This is not the case. How can believing in an inerrant, literal Bible be construed as being "hostile to a high view of Scripture?" It is only hostile to a young earth interpretation of Scripture. He goes on to call it "anti-evangelical." Such vitreous words are unfounded, and should not be directed at fellow believers.

Next, he launches an attack on the "framework hypothesis." Although the framework hypothesis is treated differently by most people, the basics of it are the same as Progressive Creation, or the Analogical Days interpretation. In each, the days of creation are long periods of time. Framework believers see the creation week as a whole, broken into days for man's benefit of understanding. They lean more toward a non-literal view than the Progressive Creationist...but the end results are the same. On page 22, he makes the statement "Those who embrace such a view have in effect made science an authority over Scripture." This statement equally applies to all old-earth believers, not just "frameworkers." However, it is patently false.

Science is a set of observations and experiments, that gives us data points, and then we interpret them. From these, we get "scientific truth." For Christians, the Bible is truth. Since God created our universe, what we see in science must be true. When you compare these two truths (science and Bible), it's not an issue of which is right...both are. Two truths, when examined, will not disagree with each other. Thus, I see science, which

proclaims a billions of years old universe, as correct, and I view the Bible as correct. The real issue is how to merge the two truths. It's not a matter of elevating science over the Bible...both are truths that must be dealt with. (On the other hand, young earth creationists choose to ignore the scientific truth, and reinterpret it to fit their own needs. No such reinterpreting is necessary.)

He goes on to state "Modern scientific opinion is not a valid hermeneutic for interpreting Genesis." Why not? If I were in a court of law, that would be like a judge not admitting all the evidence for consideration by the jury. Science is a tool to be used, not ignored. Unfortunately, young earth creationists choose the route of ignorance as displayed here by Dr. MacArthur. It is like hitting someone over the head with a 2x4 and knocking them to the ground, and then the person who got hit denying the existence of the 2x4.

It isn't a matter of modern scientists being more authoritative than the Bible...it is a matter of examining all the evidence before reaching a conclusion.

At the bottom of page 24, he writes, "Evolution was devised to explain away the God of the Bible..." Evolution is a scientific theory, and has no agenda. Nor did Charles Darwin have an agenda to rid the world of the Bible. This type of unfounded, undocumented rhetoric is reminiscent of the words of young earth creationist Kent Hovind, who claims evolution was invented by the devil long before Darwin came along! Even if Dr. MacArthur remains a young earth creationist, he would do well to steer clear of Hovind, as other young earth creationists do (answersingenesis.org/docs2002/1011hovind.asp). The source that Dr. MacArthur uses, a book by Marvin Lubenow, is even worse in its denouncement of evolution. Again, nothing to support this idea except vitreous words which fuel emotions in the young earth creationist, but which have no basis in fact.

At this point, MacArthur charges headlong into evolution, and then into theistic evolutionists. The tone of this section, and the emptiness of his claims, makes it almost laughable. He is apparently writing on pure emotion, devoid of any consideration for scientific facts or reason. Young earth creationism is fueled by this emotion. It reminds me of the Pixar movie, *Monsters Inc*. If it were not for emotions, young earth creationism would cease to exist.

For the remainder of this section, he explains his approach in writing this book. My overall impressions of this introduction is that MacArthur is fueled by emotions on the subject of creation. He is so vitreous against evolution and long ages that he cannot objectively look at creation and reach a proper conclusion. His own presuppositions (having been raised and taught for years that the earth is young) is too much for him to overcome to give the study of creation a fair examination, and one would do wise not to trust him in his conclusions in this matter. Overall, this section is all emotion and no substance.