

## Article

# "The Age of Earth"

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from:

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[On Feb 2, 2002, Dr. Moreland spoke at Northshore Church in Everett, WA about his book, "Love Your God With All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul." During his discussion, he had this to say about the origin of the universe.]

Now we know beyond reasonable doubt that the universe of space-time and matter had a beginning. It is now no longer reasonable to believe that the universe has always been here. That is now an irrational belief. Instead, we now know beyond reasonable doubt that the physical cosmos, of matter, and of space and of time, came into existence some time ago. At this point, it doesn't matter how long ago that was--some estimates are 15 to 20 billion years--that is not relevant to my concerns. What is relevant is that it is now beyond reasonable doubt that the universe came into existence a finite period of time ago.

[Later, during a time for the audience to ask questions, someone asked him how he can believe the six days in Genesis 1 were symbolic of long periods of time, not literally 24-hour days, and still claim the resurrection of Jesus was literal and not symbolic. Here is his response.]

The argument is that if you take the days of Genesis as not being six days and take them as maybe longer periods of time, then where do you draw the line...why wouldn't the same reasoning imply that we'll eventually have to reinterpret the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus. Let me give you a counter-example. I doubt, sir, that you or anybody else in the room takes the biblical passages that say that 'Jesus will call his angels from the four corners of the earth' to teach a flat Earth. I also doubt that anyone in here says that when the sun rises and sets it literally means an earth-centered universe. But you must understand that...there were times when the church interpreted the text that taught that God--Christ will call his angels from the four corners of the world to teach very obviously that the world has four corners. The text says that. There is absolutely no evidence in that text that it means anything other than four corners. You can read it until you're blue in the face, and it says that the Earth has four corners. Similarly, the Bible says the sun rises and sets. Now, that's what it says. You can dance around it all you want. That's what the text says. But there's nobody in here that believes that. No one in here believes the earth has four corners. And so, what we've done is taken that language and interpreted it metaphorically. Similarly, with the rising and the setting of the sun, we treat that...phenomenologically--we say that's the language of description; it is not meant to be taken literally.

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

## Questions

What is the main idea of this paragraph?

What evidence does the speaker provide to support the main idea?

What is the main idea of this paragraph?

handled in any way whatsoever, unless you can show that there's a clear parallel in the way that the two texts are being handled.

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

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

Now...I'm not a Hebrew exegete. But I will tell you that two of the best-known exegetes of the Old Testament in the American evangelical community are Gleason Archer at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Walter Kaiser at Gordon Conwell. Walter Kaiser and Gleason Archer are respected in the entire United States as being faithful expositors of the Old Testament. Both of them know eight to ten Old Testament languages, and they both have spent their entire lives in Hebrew exegesis. Both of them believe the days of Genesis are...vast, unspecified periods of time, and are in no way required to be literal twenty-four hour days.

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

What does "exegesis" mean? What does "exegetically" mean?

What is the main idea of this paragraph?

What does "inerrant" mean? What is an "inerrantist"?

What is the main idea of this paragraph?

Find the names of three books written by Gleason Archer and three by Walter Kaiser.

What is the main idea of this paragraph?

What is the main idea of this paragraph?

What was the main idea the speaker was trying to convey in this passage?

Do you think the author provided a reasonable argument? Explain.