

THE “NON-WORLD VIEW” OF GENESIS 1-11

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I recently heard of a theory—known as the “Non-World View”—which supposedly interprets Genesis 1-11 in a way that permits Bible believers to accept the idea of an ancient Earth. What is the Non-World View? Can a faithful Christian believe it?

Imagine the terrible dilemma of Bible believers who have tried almost everything imaginable to force the evolutionary geologic age-system into the biblical record—yet without any apparent success. Perhaps they initially advocated the Day-Age Theory, but soon realized that it proved to be indefensible from a biblical standpoint. Perhaps they then moved their allegiance to the standard Gap Theory, but recognized that it also was unscriptural. Eventually, perhaps, they attempted a defense of John Clayton’s Modified Gap Theory—until it, too, collapsed under the scrutiny of correct biblical exegesis. What to do? If a Bible believer does not wish to abandon completely his faith in God and simply become an out-and-out evolutionist, yet at the same time abjectly refuses to accept at face value the biblical testimony regarding the age of the Earth, what option is left? There appears to be only one—the so-called “Non-World View.”

The Non-World View dates from the 1972 publication of *A Christian View of Origins* by Donald England, professor of chemistry at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas. In essence, the Non-World View represents a “refusal to get involved” by suggesting:

There is no world view presented in Genesis 1.

I believe the intent of Genesis 1 is far too sublime and spiritual for one to presume that it teaches anything at all about a cosmological world view. We do this profound text a great injustice by insisting that there is inherent within the text an argument for **any** particular world view (England, 1972, p. 124, emp. added).

In other words, this is a compromise for the person who refuses to accept the Genesis account of creation as written, but who cannot seem to find a reasonable alternative. In his book, Dr. England admitted that from a straightforward reading of the Genesis account “one gets the general impression from the Bible that the earth is young,” and that “it is true that Biblical chronology leaves one with the general impression of a relatively recent origin for man” (1972, p. 109). But he likewise made it clear

that he had absolutely no intention of accepting such biblical implications—since they disagree with “science.”

Having painted himself into a theological corner, so to speak, the only way out was simply to throw up his hands and, with a sigh of relief, view Genesis as containing **no world view whatsoever**. As John Clayton (who strongly recommends the Non-World View) suggested:

By “Non-World” we mean that we don’t accept any “God-limiting” position on how we interpret Genesis. We don’t limit our comprehension of time, space, or process in any way Biblically, and do this unlimiting on the basis that that’s what God intended....

If [Genesis] Chapter 1 is not a detailed historical account, how do we fit the fossil record to it? The “Non-World” View says “we don’t.” If we are to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent we won’t succumb to the pressure to make it fit. Since the Bible doesn’t mention dinosaurs, bats, amoeba, bacteria, DNA virus [sic], sea plants, algae, fungus [sic], etc., we won’t attempt to match them. There are a few forms we can match, but only a few out of the millions. The Hebrew words used in Genesis do not cover whole phyla of animals but they are reasonably specific. If we take a “Non-World View,” this doesn’t bother us because we are only interested in God’s message to man, not in satisfying man’s curiosity.

The “Non-World View” also finds no necessity in dealing with men’s arguments on the scientific theories of creation and age. There is no necessity to argue about the “big bang,” “steady state,” or iron theory of origins; nor is there any need to hassle about whether the Earth is 6, 6,000 or 6 billion years old. Genesis 1:1 says only that God did it! That is the purpose. It is **not** the purpose to state how or when (Clayton, 1977, 4[6]:6-8, emp. in orig.).

A RESPONSE AND REFUTATION

The careful observer soon will realize that this is indeed the compromise to end all compromises. With the Non-World View, a person may believe as much, or as little, as he wants in regard to the Genesis account of creation. If the person who holds to this view is challenged with a relevant portion of Scripture, he or she simply re-

plies: “Oh, that particular passage doesn’t have **any** world view in it.” The convenient thing, of course, is that it does not matter how forceful the passage may be, whether it comes from the Old Testament or the New, which biblical writer may have penned it, or even if Christ Himself spoke it. With the Non-World View, **everything** becomes completely subjective.

The beauty of such a position, according to John Clayton, is that it is not “God-limiting” (1977, p. 6). Even though when one reads the creation account he gets the “general impression” that man has been here only a short while and that the Earth is relatively young, and even though the Lord Himself stated in Mark 10:6 that man and woman have been here “from the beginning of the creation,” all of that becomes irrelevant. With a wave of the hand, Genesis 1 means little to nothing. In fact, it might as well not have been written, for it simply has “no world view” in it at all.

Yet God went to great lengths to explain what was accomplished on day one, what was done on day two, and so on. He specifically told Moses that He took **six days** to do it. Then He set the Sabbath day as the Jews’ remembrance of His creative acts on those days. If God said “in the beginning” and “in six days the Lord created,” that is a **time element**. Jesus Himself said that, “**from the beginning of the creation**, male and female made He them” (Mark 10:6). That, too, is a time element. While it may not give an exact day and hour, it says much. It says man was on the Earth “from the beginning.” That automatically rules out both the idea of an ancient Earth and those compromising theories intended to support such an idea (e.g., the Day-Age Theory, Gap Theory, Modified Gap Theory, Multiple Gap Theory, etc.). God has indicated—in a way we can understand—what He wanted us to know about the time element. When He wrote that He created “the heavens, the earth, the seas, and all that in them is” **in six days**, does that sound anything like a “Non-World” view?

Man may not understand completely the “how” of creation, but it is present nevertheless. When the Scriptures say, “And God said, ‘Let there be light’ and there was light”—that is **how**. When the Scriptures say, “And God said, ‘Let the earth put forth grass,’ ” and “the earth brought forth grass”—that is **how**. The “how” is by the power of God (cf. Hebrews 1:3 wherein the writer declared that it is God Who upholds “all things by the word of his power”).

Granted, the text of Genesis 1 is sublime and spiritual. **But it also is historical**. Jesus Christ Himself said so (Matthew 19:4). So did Paul (1 Corinthians 15:45; Romans 8:22; 1 Timothy 2:13). That should settle the matter. God said **that** He did it—“God created.” God said **how** He did it—“by the word of his power.” God said **when** He did it—“in the beginning.” The inquiring reader

eventually will come to realize just how much that **in**-cludes, and just how much it **ex**-cludes. Thus, the only “world view” left is the perfect one—that of Genesis 1.

The Non-World View is a subtly presented yet openly flagrant attack on Genesis 1. It impeaches the testimony of the Old and New Testament writers, and even impugns the integrity of the Lord Himself. And for what purpose? What, ultimately, does it accomplish? It merely compromises the truth while leaving open the way for any and all viewpoints on creation, whether founded in Scripture or not. Furthermore, surely the question begs to be asked: **If Genesis 1 is not God’s world view, then what is?**

REFERENCES

- Clayton, John N. (1977), “The ‘Non-World View’ of Genesis,” *Does God Exist?*, 4[6]:6-8, June.
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Originally Published In
Reason & Revelation
November 1999, 19[12]:93-94

ARTICLE REPRINT

Distributed by
Apologetics Press, Inc.
230 Landmark Drive
Montgomery, AL 36117-2752
(334) 272-8558