

# Who is being divisive about creation?

A review of  
*Seven Days that Divide the World*  
by John Lennox  
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The title of John Lennox's *Seven Days that Divide the World* presumes something about the creation/evolution debate that not many would contest—it can be an issue that divides Christians. It's not an uncommon theme for a book to propose that a certain topic causes too much division among people who otherwise have a lot of reasons to be aligned with each other, and to propose a solution that all parties should be able to agree upon.

Lennox seems to have the qualifications to be such an arbiter, at least at first glance. He claims to be a Christian who has spent his life “actively engaged in science” (p. 13). His love of Scripture and science leads him to believe that “there must ultimately be harmony between correct interpretation of the biblical data and the correct interpretation of the scientific data” (p. 13).

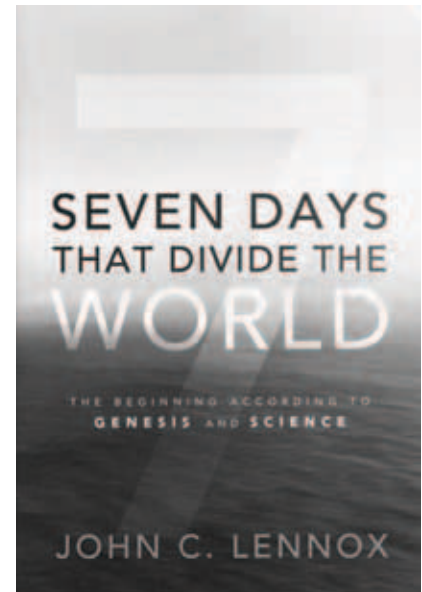
## Science and Scripture—but which should be reinterpreted?

In Chapter 1, Lennox uses the examples of Copernicus and Galileo in the usual mythical way to show how the church has wrongly pitted science and Scripture against each other, and suggests none too subtly that creationists are doing the same thing with the controversy about the age of the earth. Enough has been written in creationist literature about this that it is not necessary to cover it here.<sup>1</sup> It will suffice to say that the major opposition

to Galileo came from the Aristotelian *scientific establishment*, and not from the church—but to be fair, Lennox does mention the academic resistance as well.

The point Lennox tries to make is that as science advanced, we found ways to interpret Scripture which harmonize with our modern understanding of the earth's position in the solar system; perhaps there is such a way to harmonize the creation days with a long-age timescale. But the two are rather different. First, the major texts that were used to defend a geocentric solar system were *poetic*; poetry conveys truth using vivid imagery more often than by using straightforward language. For instance, when David prays “hide me in the shadow of Your wings” (Psalm 17:8) he does not mean to imply that God has feathers. In the same way, saying “Yes, the world is established, it shall never be moved” (Psalm 93:1) in the context isn't saying that the world literally doesn't move—we can tell from the next line: “Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting” (93:2) that the Psalmist is telling us about God's reign. Furthermore, we can tell from Psalm 16:8, “I shall not be moved”, using the same Hebrew verb (מוֹט *môt*)—it's not teaching that the Psalmist is in a strait-jacket. This is therefore a *reductio ad absurdum* of the whole argument.

But the young-earth timescale of creation comes primarily from *historical narrative* passages, which normally communicate via plain, factual language. And there is no reason to believe that Moses is speaking in metaphors when he talks about the six days of creation and God's rest on the seventh day, either within the passage itself, or in the interpretation of that passage in the rest of Scripture (e.g. Exodus 20:8–11).



## How should we understand Scripture?

Lennox helpfully points out: “The first obvious, yet important thing to say about the Bible is that it is literature” (p. 21). He goes on to say that literature should normally be interpreted by its plain meaning when informed by its historical, cultural, and linguistic context, and uses the Gospel as an instance where the plain meaning is meant by Scripture:

“The cross of Christ is not primarily a metaphor. It involved an actual death. The resurrection was not primarily [*sic*] an allegory. It was a physical event: a ‘standing up again’ of a body that had died” (p. 22).

He goes on to talk about how to identify metaphor, and uses as an example everyone recognizes as metaphor the sentence, “The car was flying down the road” (p. 23). But the words in the sentence themselves require that there be some figure of speech involved. Cars do not fly; they roll along the ground. If it was flying for any significant amount of time, it would not be a car (at least as we normally define it), and it would not be going ‘down’ the road because it would be above it.

This is not a helpful example, however, because nothing in Genesis 1



Photo: Tova Teitelbaum

**Figure 1.** Scripture, like any communication using language, has a finite number of valid interpretations.

itself (nor in the broader context of Scripture) requires the days to be metaphorical, or even indicates that they might be. That the creation days are so often interpreted literally by Hebrew specialists (both believers and unbelievers) is perhaps an indication that any metaphorical sense of the days is more obscure than Lennox's example would suggest.<sup>2</sup>

Lennox seems to treat Scripture and science equally, and it is unclear how he decides to go with Scripture regarding the (scientifically 'impossible') Resurrection but with 'science' on the timescale of the universe. He seems to make the common error of believing that science in and of itself can 'tell' us anything. It does not, at least not in propositional statements that can be said to be true or false. To get from data to propositional statement, one must *interpret* the evidence within pre-existing frameworks, which may be flawed to any extent. But Scripture *does* communicate in propositional statements, which by nature means that the extent to which any part of it may be 'reinterpreted' without simply declaring that it is wrong is very limited.

### What does Genesis tell us?

Lennox says:

"'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth' (Gen. 1:1) and 'God created man in his own image' (Gen. 1:27) are statements about the objective

physical universe and the status of human beings, with very far-reaching implications for our understanding of the world and ourselves" (p. 28).

But he also argues that "the Bible was not written in advanced contemporary scientific language" (p. 29). This brings out a bit of a straw man—no-one argues that the Bible primarily intends to communicate science; rather, it's a *historical* document. He argues that the way God inspired Scripture made it accessible to everyone (p. 30).

### A literal six days—and an old earth?

Lennox goes through Jewish and church history to find some examples of people who took the creation days as other than literal to attempt to give a precedent for a metaphorical interpretation of Creation Week, though he admits "the understanding of the days of Genesis as twenty-four-hour days seems to have been the dominant view for many centuries" (p. 42).<sup>3</sup>

He gives the usual pitch about the word 'day' having many possible meanings, and then launches into his proposal for interpreting Genesis 1's creation week. He proposes: the initial creation did not take place on Day 1, but was a long time before that (p. 53). He further offers that the author of Genesis "... did not intend us to think of the first six days as a single earth week, but rather as a sequence of six *creation* days; that is, days of normal length (with evenings and mornings as the text says) in which God acted to create something new, but days that might well have been separated from one another by unspecified periods of time" (p. 54).

At this point, there is a certain sort of impasse, because in a more technical work, one would expect Lennox to go on to prove exegetically that his interpretation was plausible

based on the structure of the Hebrew text and the verb forms used, and so on. But this is not a technical work, and it may be unfair to expect this sort of sophistication in a little book which makes no pretensions of being a scholarly volume. So it must suffice to say that Lennox gives no evidence for this interpretation, let alone argument that it is superior to a literal understanding of the Creation Week, and therefore it may be dismissed with as little argumentation as he gives evidence. Suffice it to say, if it were right, then logically the days of our working week could also have long periods between them, since Exodus 20:8–11 makes an explicit connection between the working week and day of rest with Creation Week.

### No solution for death before the Fall

Lennox says that his theory "... would expect to find what geologists tell us we do find—fossil evidence revealing the sudden appearance of new levels of complexity, followed by periods during which there was no more creation (in the sense of God speaking to inaugurate something new)" (p. 55).

But the fossil record is precisely the problem in a long-age interpretation. Biblical creationists resist any long-age interpretations because the evidence for billions of years of Earth's history is said to be preserved in the rock record. But those rock layers contain fossils of animals that died of sickness, cancers, and predation, as well as thorny plants. A plain interpretation of Scripture puts all predation and the existence of thorns *after* the Fall, requiring us to place the formation of the rock record *after* the Fall, as mostly the result of the global Flood in Noah's day.

Lennox argues that Scripture says that Adam's sin resulted in *human* death and was not necessarily the cause of animal death:

“That makes sense. Humans are moral beings, and human death is the ultimate wages of moral transgression. We do not think of plants and animals in terms of moral categories. We do not accuse the lion of sinning when it kills an antelope or even a human being. Paul’s deliberate and careful statement would appear to leave open the question of death at levels other than human” (p. 78).

But perhaps an overly narrow focus on Romans 5 is misleading here. The lion killing the antelope would appear to be other than God’s ‘very good’ design, as God originally gave all animals vegetation for food (Genesis 1:30) and when God describes the new heavens and earth he will create in Isaiah 65, one thing that distinguishes the new creation is that carnivores like lions and wolves will be herbivorous. So using a ‘wider lens’ clearly depicts the pre-Fall creation as without carnivory.<sup>4</sup>

### Does the timescale matter for Christian doctrine?

Lennox argues:

“No major doctrine of Scripture is affected by whether one believes that the days are analogical days or that each day is a long period of time inaugurated by God speaking, or whether one believes that each of the days is a normal day in which God spoke, followed by a long period of putting into effect the information contained in what God said on that particular day” (p. 58).

But the doctrine of Scripture itself is *very much* affected by how we interpret Genesis. Is it a falsifiable text (in other words, is there a point where we can call it true or false in any meaningful sense regarding what it tells us about historical matters), or is it jelly to be molded to fit with any conceivable model of origins (in which case it ceases to communicate meaningfully at all)?

Furthermore, a God who creates a perfect world and calls it ‘very good’ at

the end of the process is very different from a God who creates over long periods of time during which things are dying and killing each other, and billions of years later looks at what is by now a worldwide fossil graveyard and calls *that* very good.<sup>5</sup>

Third, creation is theocentric, in that God’s creation of the world primarily brings glory to Himself. But it is also *anthropocentric* in that God’s creation is depicted in such a way that a major goal was to give humans a suitable home. But in a long-age timescale, it is difficult to see creation as meaningfully anthropocentric at all when humanity would have only existed during the last few milliseconds on that timescale, and the majority of animals to have ever existed would have already come and gone long before. Jesus Himself confirmed this anthropocentricity when He explicitly said that God created mankind male and female “from the beginning of creation” (Mark 10:6–9, citing Genesis 1:27 and 2:24), not billions of years after the beginning.<sup>6</sup>

These are just three examples of how one’s interpretation of the creation days is important for theology; and more could easily be added if space allowed.

### Lack of interaction with major creationist works

When one is trying to establish a new interpretation, it is customary to show how it is superior to the existing interpretations, and part of that is interacting with existing literature. But the only young-earth creationist writing he cites is a chapter from *Three Views of Creation and Evolution* by Nelson and Reynolds. But neither is well known in the creation community as leading young-earth creationists (in contrast to the other positions represented by leading proponents), nor do they provide a reasonable representation of creationist views.<sup>7</sup> For instance, Lennox quotes them as saying:

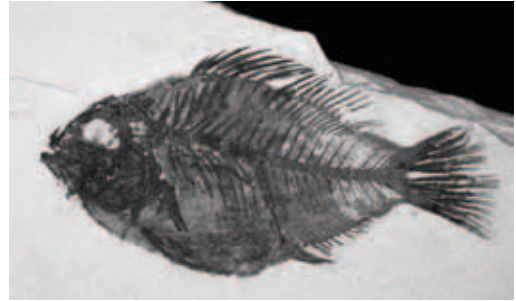


Photo: Didier Descouens

**Figure 2.** Lennox does not offer a convincing solution for death before the Fall.

“In our opinion, old earth creationism combines a less natural textual reading with a much more plausible scientific vision . . . . At the moment this would seem the more rational position to adopt” (p. 62).

One struggles to think of a major proponent of biblical creation who would make such a vast concession. Indeed, there are many creation geologists who believe that the young-earth position is more rational, because if the rock record is actually largely a record of the global Flood, then one of the major ‘evidences’ for long ages is removed. Using such a weak young-earth creationist as representative of the entire group seems out of character with the rest of Lennox’s book, and is difficult to explain without attributing either less-than-honest intentions or irresponsible ignorance of the views he is arguing against (and the rest of the book makes one disinclined to go either route).

### Perplexing inconsistency

Lennox believes that Adam is the literal ancestor of all human beings, and has the same objection to pre-Fall human death that creationists would:

“How, for example, could the sin of the chosen farmer, Adam, cause the death of those humans who had lived before him? Surely it is crucial to the theology of salvation that Adam was the first actual member of a human race physically distinct from all creatures that preceded him?” (p. 73).

He goes on to say:



“In light of the miracle of the incarnation, I find no difficulty in believing that the human race itself began—indeed, had to begin—with a supernatural intervention. Science cannot rule out that possibility either. What science can tell about human beings, though, is what it can tell us about the universe: that they also had a beginning. What the incarnation tells us is that human beings are unique—they are so created that God himself could become one” (p. 74).

So Lennox has no problem accepting the supernatural origin of human beings, the supernatural incarnation, or the supernatural Resurrection—all of which are scientifically ‘impossible’—for theological reasons. But he jettisons the timescale because he believes science demands it. If one is going to embrace the Bible’s teaching on origins and eschew the secular scientific consensus, why not do it wholeheartedly? As it is, it seems rather inconsistent, and one struggles to discern how Lennox chooses his positions.

Also, Lennox seems unaware that there are undoubted *Homo sapiens* fossils, ‘dated’—by methods Lennox implicitly accepts—at 195,000 years old.<sup>8</sup> This is far older than Adam could possibly be,<sup>9</sup> even allowing for the most elastic stretching of the Genesis 5 and 11 genealogies.<sup>10</sup> This consideration alone should be enough to alert Lennox that his system must collapse.

### Is the message of Genesis 1 solely theological?

In Chapter 5, Lennox gives a list of things that we are taught about God in Genesis 1: God exists, He is the eternal Creator, He is distinct from His creation, He has a goal in creation, He creates by His Word, and He is the source of light. He also discussed the goodness of creation and the Sabbath. There is nothing objectionable *per se* in this chapter—but none of these

points make any sense unless one believes something else about God; that He reveals Himself in His acts through history, as recorded in inspired Scripture. A God who has a goal in creation, but took billions of years to get to the goal, would raise questions—why did He take so long, and why did He use such destructive processes to get there? The sort of Creator who would call millions of years of animal death and suffering ‘very good’ is also problematic.

Half of the chapters of Lennox’s book are appendices. The first gives ‘A Brief Background to Genesis’, which is a general overview like one might find in a study Bible or basic textbook, and there’s very little to object to. The next appendix refutes John Walton’s ‘Cosmic Temple’ view, and biblical creationists would agree with this part.<sup>11</sup> The third appendix is “The Beginning to Genesis and Science” and gives the usual compromising support to the big bang idea. The fourth argues against the idea that there are two accounts of creation, and the fifth argues against certain theistic evolutionary ideas, and the notion that invoking a Creator God is always a ‘God of the Gaps’ argument. Space does not permit in-depth coverage of these appendices.

### Conclusion

Lennox writes sincerely, and seems to have a sincere love of Scripture and science. But he mistakenly believes that his compromise results in a coherent reading of Scripture. But *Seven Days that Divide the World* is ultimately unsatisfying precisely because creation *is* divisive, and any convincing argument for a position will come down on one side or the other. Lennox does not fall under any of the established categories, and his book is not long or in-depth enough to even mount a sufficient argument for key portions of it. For this reason, *Seven Days that Divide the World* does not seem like a book that will change anyone’s mind about the creation/evolution debate.

### References

1. For instance, see Schirrmacher, T., The Galileo affair: history of heroic hagiography? *J. Creation* 14(1):91–100, 2000, creation.com/gal-affair; Sarfati, J., Galileo Quadricentennial, *Creation* 31(1):49–51, 2009, Myth vs fact, creation.com/galileo-quadricentennial.
2. For instance, Oxford Hebrew Professor James Barr said: “probably, so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writers of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers that: a. creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience . . . .” Letter to David C.C. Watson, 23 April 1984.
3. For a discussion of the young-earth views of most Church Fathers, see Sarfati, J., *Refuting Compromise*, chapter 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Creation Book Publishers, Atlanta, GA, 2011.
4. Gurney, R.J.M., The carnivorous nature and suffering of animals, *J. Creation* 18(3): 70–75, 2004, creation.com/carniv.
5. For a summary, see Cosner, L. and Bates, G., Did God create over billions of years? And why is it important? creation.com/billions, 6 October 2011.
6. Wieland, C., Jesus on the age of the earth, *Creation* 34(2):51–54, 2012; creation.com/jesus-age-earth.
7. See Kulikovskiy, A.S., A balanced treatment?? A review of *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, *J. Creation* 14(1):23–27, 2000.
8. McDougall, I., Brown, F.H. and Fleagle, J.G., Stratigraphic placement and age of modern humans from Kibish, Ethiopia, *Nature* 433(7027):733–736, 17 February 2005.
9. Sarfati, J., The Fall: a cosmic catastrophe: Hugh Ross’s blunders on plant death in the Bible, *J. Creation* 19(3):60–64, 2005; creation.com/plant\_death.
10. Not that they can be stretched, since they are strict chronologies. See Freeman, T., The Genesis 5 and 11 fluidity question, *J. Creation* 19(2):83–90, 2005, creation.com/fluidity; Sarfati, J., Biblical chronogenealogies, *J. Creation* 17(3):14–18, 2003, creation.com/chronogenealogy; Cosner, L., Can Christians believe ‘dogmatically’ that the earth is 6,000 years old? creation.com/dogmatic-6000-years, 19 December 2009.
11. See Statham, D., Dubious and dangerous exposition: A review of *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, by John H. Walton, *J. Creation* 24(3):24–26, 2010.