

A very critical review of Dr. Joel Heck's, *Bible on Beginnings*. Lutheran Witness. (April 2014).

When Dr. Heck asserts in his article, *Bible on Beginnings*, that the 24-hour-creation-day view is true because that is what the "inerrant" Word of God "says," he is committing the **logical fallacy** of "**begging the question**." A new question must then logically follow: "*Does the Bible actually convey what he claims?*" His insistence that a legitimate interpretation of Genesis will rest solely on indications within the text demands his own careful scrutiny of, well, that very text, as opposed to focusing on abstract statistics and outsider opinions. And the closer that scrutiny the better! When by analogy the Rocky Mountains of Glacier National Park are approached from the east, at first glimpse miles out onto the Great Plains, they appear as an endless wall of mountains marching directly up from the flat prairie. The beauty of that *long-view* has made strong impressions on many people, including me. Yet they are *first* impressions. The Rockies are in actuality not simple. In reality foothills bunch up against the front of the main range whose endless line of peaks is broken up with intermittent valleys opening onto the lowlands. One needs to journey *into* them in order to gain full appreciation of their beauty and their complexity.

Similarly, the first chapter of Genesis will look different when viewed at a distance (limited to English *translations*) as opposed to being studied up close. This is not to belittle English Bibles, which generally serve readers well. Yet on debated matters of consequence (e.g. the theme of Dr. Heck's article) the Hebrew text must be the final arbiter for the same reason that details of the *United States Constitution* should be analyzed in its original (English) language instead of Hebrew. There is no question that, viewed *superficially*, Genesis 1 gives the impression that the creation days are 24-hour. However, a *thorough* study of that text even in English (provided it correctly reflects the original Hebrew vocabulary and grammar) lays bare a complex narrative that is strikingly at odds with first impressions. Highlighting these exegetical differences is not a matter of criticizing Genesis, but instead of respecting it for what it actually is. My review, then, entails disapproval of those *Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (LCMS) teachers who discourage students from freely considering where the exegetical evidence actually leads. For example, in a recent conversation I had with several LCMS pastors, they refused to entertain any scientific evidence I offered them in support of God's existence that they perceived conflicts with their "traditional" interpretation of Genesis 1. I must ask in reply, "*Why their apparent fear?*"

My six years of experience in the LCMS has led me to expect resistance from colleagues on the grounds of their irritation that I am both divisive and wasting everyone's time since, as they say, our Synod settled these questions long ago. Yet surely there are critical steps that must be taken before such authoritative certainty can be legitimately maintained. Is it not reasonable that one such step must involve the subjection of our Synod's pronouncements to periodic rigorous biblical analysis? Of course not every position statement and Bible passage demands reexamination. Obviously the treasure of identifying the centrality of justification by faith in Christ is joyously secure, and so, not remotely equivalent to the challenge of interpreting Genesis 1, which Martin Luther conceded is "*difficult to understand*" (Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. Luther's Works: Genesis v.1. (Concordia, 1958), p.3). By our Synod's act of circling the wagons in defense of a "traditional" interpretation of Genesis, we are effectively demanding that our society deny virtually everything that can be known for certain about the nature and the history of our universe as a condition for people's full reception into "evangelical" Christianity. Surely Luther's concession (above) undermines our authority to construct such roadblocks (2 Corinthians

6:4) to the Gospel (see my paper, *An 'Elephant' Standing Between Secularists and their Receptivity to the Gospel*, which can be found at www.christianityontheoffense.com). Is such defiant certitude justified by the exegetical evidence? Absolutely not! In any case, it is the insular posture of our Synod that bears the burden of proof. Such resistance to exegetical openness contradicts a fundamental aspect of our heritage. It was after all Luther's persistent agonizing over the term, "*the righteousness of God*," which ushered him into the discovery of exegetical insights which led to the Lutheran Reformation.

Turning directly to Dr. Heck's article on Genesis, I am first of all disappointed to note his perpetuation of the LCMS tradition of binding consciences to the belief that godly exegesis of Genesis demands a 24-hour-day view of creation. Since the official standard of doctrinal authority for our Synod rests ultimately on the infallible Word of God, secondly, on the Lutheran Confessions (which are silent on this matter), and only lastly on either our tradition, or living (or dead) "authorities," one should have expected Heck to have applied rigorous analysis of the creation texts. Yet though he assures readers of his allegiance to biblical inerrancy, he fails to investigate a single passage with care. For example, his employment of Exodus 20:11 in an attempt to delimit the duration of the creation week, relies on a mistranslation in his proof text *at the most relevant point*. His required preposition, *be* (in) is nowhere to be found in the Hebrew. It rather says, "*As like six days the LORD made....*" In my paper, *The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look*, (BD), note 10, my analysis of the *English Standard Version* of the Bible yields ten instances where it too mistranslates creation passages, thereby illegitimately biasing readers toward a faulty perspective on Genesis. In response I wrote *A Hebrew-Faithful Translation of Genesis 1:1-2:4*. In my paper, BD, I also list ten other examples (separate from the previous "ten") where the Hebrew text imply a *day-age* view. Both documents can be downloaded at my website referenced above.

Two examples of Dr. Heck's line of argument likewise are not valid. First, his reference to Mark's Gospel (10:6) fails to support his assertion that the "old-earth" position contradicts Jesus' statement, "*at the beginning of creation*." Regardless of the meaning of the word "day," Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day; not the first. Second, contrary to Heck's assertion, the creation-day refrain, "*and there was evening and there was morning*," doesn't support the notion that the days are 24-hour. A standard Hebrew day was marked off in Leviticus 23:32 "*from evening to evening*" (note "*from*" and "*to*"). As for Genesis 1, while individually the words, "*evening*" and "*morning*," reflect *aspects* of a day, the *grammatical* structure of the refrain doesn't serve to *enclose* a day. It does not function as a bracket for "bounding" days in the manner of front and back covers binding pages of a novel in a book (as the note on Genesis 1:5 argues in the *Lutheran Study Bible* LSB). Ironically, the very attempt to understand the refrain that way is undermined by the order of the terms "*evening*" and "*morning*" for the reason that it would oddly turn the *nighttime*; not *daytime*; into the highlighted portion of each creation day!

Dr. Heck's reference to Professor Barr's skepticism about the "day-age" position calls for three comments. First, by his concession that Barr didn't believe the "straightforward message of Genesis," Heck betrays the reality that Barr and his like-minded associates had no interest in reconciling the "day" question with anything at all. The net effect of his comment was therefore not to protect the veracity of the Bible, but to render it intellectually impossible to treat the Bible as a "scientific" text that *can* harmonize Scripture with the facts of the cosmos. Second, a close reading of his unabridged letter

<http://members.iinet.net.au/~sejones/barrlett.html>) reveals that Barr was not speaking with certainty about scholars of a different stripe than his own. Third, the assertion that all Bible scholars reject the day-age view is rebutted by my list of 15 scholars who embrace inerrancy and also accept the *legitimacy* of the day-age position, even if not all personally *embraced* it (cited in BD above).

In addition, the way Dr. Heck frames his entire article commits the “**black-or-white**” **logical fallacy** (assuming only two options, attacking *an* opposing view of his choice when in fact other options exist; so as to declare victory for his own position). Yet it is not valid to restrict the interpretational choices for Genesis 1 to either “straight-forward history” (in his case limited to 24-hour days), or “poetry, saga, or legend.” Neither does it follow, as he suggests, that the day-age position denies the historicity either of Adam and Eve and/or their fall into sin (I strongly affirm both). There is in fact a third legitimate interpretation of Genesis 1-3 that is embraced by many who hold to the inerrancy of Scripture (as I do). That is, that the historical account of the creation of the heavens and the earth is conveyed in Genesis 1 by a linguistically valid usage of the Hebrew word *yom* (day) as “ages of time” (c.f. Isaiah 2:2 and 2:12).

While I applaud the emphasis of the April 2014 edition of *The Lutheran Witness* for its support of apologetics in our Christian witness, I repeat my judgment from page 2 that Dr. Heck’s article effectively undermines our evangelistic effectiveness. In expansion of concerns already expressed, his stance on the status of nature’s testimony contradicts St. Paul’s argument in Romans 1:18-20. For the same reason it is also at odds with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations document, ***The Natural Knowledge of God in Christian Confession and Christian Witness*** (LCMS, April, 2013). While the position Heck represents dismisses nature’s witness whenever as it conflicts with the young-earth position, St. Paul decries as “*wickedness*” all attempts to demand suppression of the testimony of nature. Nowhere does he single out pagan unbelievers as the sole culprits of the sin of “suppression” as though Christians are exempted from that stricture. We too are commanded to receive nature’s testimony as truthful.

Dr. Heck asserts that “90 percent of [dating] mechanisms...support a young-earth.” I reply: “Turn over your cards so they can be validly counted since they cannot all be of equal weight!” For example, measurements of radioactive half-lives of rocks here on earth pale into irrelevance when compared with our ability to observe the entire 13+ billion light-year history of our universe virtually all the way back to its beginning (Genesis 1:1). Examination of light from its farthest distances gives no hint that its speed has ever changed. For such reasons Heck is faced with the enormous challenge that his interpretation of Genesis contradicts nature. It is one thing for him to insulate Genesis from the (contamination) of external factors so as to secure a pristine interpretation. Yet Genesis refuses such isolation for the reason that it purports to convey the *true* history of the creation of the heavens and the earth. To pronounce the *young-earth* position “correct” in light of that clear intention of Genesis, logically requires that that interpretation harmonize with the *actual* state of affairs of the nature that the Book of Genesis states, God made. Insofar as *young-earth creationism* conflicts with nature’s testimony, in the name of truth (according to the law of non-contradiction), one of the two factors in this equation must yield. So notes **LCMS scientist, the late Dr. John Klotz**, who stated that our faith “cannot go contrary to science and reason and observation...There must be a basic unity between [scientific] facts and truth as it is given to us in revelation” (***Modern Science and the Christian Life*. (Concordia, 1962), p79, note also.137f**).