

The right conclusion from the wrong interpretation

A review of
Creation in Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One
 By James B. Jordan
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James B. Jordan has written other books and is the director of Biblical Horizons Ministries. This book purports to be a defence of the traditional reading of Genesis 1. However, most of the book serves to refute various well-known, non-traditional (old-earth) interpretations. The book includes chapters on the variant framework interpretations of Meredith Kline and Bruce Waltke, C. John Collins' anthropomorphic days theory, and John Sailhamer's limited geography interpretation.¹ He also includes appendices on Paul H. Seely's papers on the waters of Genesis 1,² and Mark D. Futato's paper on Genesis 2:5 and the relationship between Genesis 1 and 2.

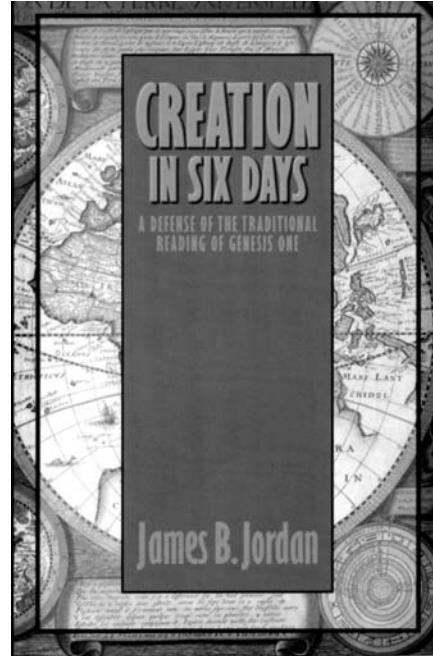
Jordan's refutation of Waltke's view is quite good, but its weakness is that it only addresses Waltke's relatively brief discussion published in *Crux*. He does not discuss Waltke's more detailed and comprehensive papers on the subject, which were published in *Bibliotheca Sacra*.³ In these papers, Waltke goes into greater exegetical detail and offers reasoned critique of opposing views. A proper critique or refutation of Waltke's views must focus on these papers.

Surprisingly, Jordan agrees with Kline regarding the basic idea of the two-register cosmogony! He appears

to accept that 'the heavens' (Gen 1:1) is a reference to the heavenly realm or the upper register, as Kline refers to it (pp. 57–58). He thinks that Kline's view is one way to look at the text and that it has some merit (p. 59) but goes on to point out some of the problems with it. Having studied Kline's view myself and having published a detailed critique of it,⁴ I fail to see any merit whatsoever in Kline's view! It is totally inconsistent—even on its most fundamental elements—and on many points, it is totally absurd!

Jordan also appears to buy into Kline's eschatological spiritualization of the text rather than just reading it as straightforward historical narrative, which is curious, since he includes an interesting chapter entitled 'Gnosticism vs. History', in which he rightly points out the Gnostic tendency to downplay the historical basis of the Scriptures. Thus, God's actions in history are transformed into mere philosophical and theological motifs, and moral principles. This is exactly what the Framework Interpretation aims to do. Jordan rightly points out that if the same hermeneutical principles were applied to the Resurrection account in John 20, then the truth of the gospel—indeed, the whole of Christianity—must be called into question. Jordan, of course, does not buy into the Gnosticism but he does tend to project his own idiosyncratic theological ideas onto the text.

A good example of this is Jordan's claim that the days of creation form a *chiasmus* (or *chiasmus*) and an *inclusio*. In actual fact, it is neither! An *inclusio* is a



rhetorical device which employs the same word or words at the beginning and ending of a sentence or passage.⁵ An example of inclusio can be seen in Genesis 9:3: 'Everything [Heb. כל kol] that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything [Heb. כל].'

A *chiasmus*, on the other hand, is an inverted parallelism; that is, the ideas are arranged in the form ABC-C'B'A' or ABC-D-C'B'A'. There must be a direct correspondence of ideas (and in most cases, actual words and phrases) between the two halves of the chiasmus. In other words, A and A' must have a direct correspondence, B and B', C and C' etc. The central idea (CC' or D) is always the focal point—it is the most important, or key, idea.⁶

Jordan's 'chiasmus' of the days of creation looks like figure 1. Note that Jordan's chiastic arrangement of

'Day 1:	Light
Day 2:	Firmament mediating between earth and God
Day 3:	Sea, land and trees
Day 4:	Light bearers in the firmament
Day 5:	Dwellers of sea, land and trees
Day 6:	Creatures who mediate between earth and God
Day 7:	Sabbath.'

Figure 1. James B. Jordan's 'chiasmus' of the days of creation

- A Noah and his family: the only righteous people on earth (6:9–10)
- B God promises to destroy the earth and its inhabitants by a global flood (6:11–22)
- C God instructs Noah, his family and the animals to enter the Ark (7:1–10)
- D The floodwaters come upon the earth (7:11–16)
 - E The floodwaters rise and cover the earth (7:17–24)
 - F God remembers Noah (8:1a)
 - E' The floodwaters recede from the earth (8:1b–5)
- D' The floodwaters disappear and the earth is dry (8:6–14)
- C' God instructs Noah, his family and the animals to leave the Ark and replenish the earth (8:15–9:7)
- B' God promises to never again destroy the earth and its inhabitants by a global flood (9:8–9:17)
- A' Noah and his family: the only people on earth (9:18–19)

Figure 2. Large-scale chiasmus in the Flood account of Genesis 6:9–19

the days displays none of the defining features of a chiasmus. Jordan has let his imagination run wild in coming up with this contrived nonsense. In Appendix B, Jordan discusses the form and meaning of chiastic arrangements, and although he cites a few valid examples, I think that he would struggle to tell the difference between chiasmus and cantaloupes.

For comparison, an example of a real chiasmus can be seen in the Flood account (Gen 6:9–9:19), which exhibits the large-scale chiasmus in figure 2.

It appears that Jordan does not really know what an anthropomorphism is either. He agrees with C. John Collins that Genesis 1 is anthropomorphic language and the days are anthropomorphic days, but insists that this says nothing one way or the other about the length of the days, or whether or not they are part of a literary framework (pp. 105–108). But, as E.J. Young pointed out long ago, anthropomorphisms always take the form of a body part or body movement in order to describe *God's actions or attributes*. Anthropomorphisms are never employed to describe temporal concepts such as a day.⁷

Jordan also offers his own interpretation of the days of creation, but adds the following disclaimer: 'My

actual interpretation of the details of Genesis 1 is not fully germane to the present book, which is in its bare bones just a defense of the normal six-day reading of the text' (p. 171).

He believes that Joseph was more likely the author of Genesis, although Moses and others later added material. This is despite Luke 24:27 and the fact that both Jewish and Christian traditions attribute authorship of Genesis to Moses—or at least see him and the book's editor.

Jordan believes the firmament is a dividing shell separating Heaven and Earth and serves as a 'type' of

the dividing curtain of the Most Holy Place in the temple/tabernacle (pp. 178–179). This interpretation is really drawing a long bow and goes way beyond what the text itself says. Jordan goes on to explain that the firmament is 'shortly to become a chamber, perhaps another "dimension" between heaven and earth'. The waters above are those that God reached down and brought up into Heaven. He claims this is an eschatological picture: 'We begin on earth, with earthly waters; we enter the final kingdom of God by passing through heavenly waters' (p. 181). There is no exegesis here.



James B. Jordan speculates that the firmament is a dividing shell separating heaven and earth and perhaps even another dimension.

This is pure speculation—if not total imagination—on Jordan’s part. In fact, his interpretation cannot be correct because God will establish His Kingdom (Heaven) on the new earth, not somewhere in outer space or in another dimension.

To confuse the matter even further, Jordan criticizes Paul Seely in Appendix C over Seely’s insistence that the ‘shell’ is made of a hard substance. Jordan suggests that it may in fact be simply made of ‘empty space’. But how, then, can it be regarded as a dividing shell? How can it serve as a type of the temple’s dividing curtain, as Jordan claims?

The book also contains a chapter on the question of science and its role in biblical interpretation. Although brief, it is generally well argued, and correctly points out that creation (the natural world) does not speak for itself—at least in linguistic terms. However, his handling of key passages such as Psalm 19 and Romans 1:20 is very superficial.

In conclusion, the book contains a number of useful refutations of non-traditional old-earth creation interpretations. Jordan generally does a good job of highlighting the logical and exegetical inconsistencies of the views he critiques, but all too often his own explanations push the boundaries or are mere assertions with little or no exegetical support. See, for example, his discussion of Genesis 2:5 (pp. 53–54) and his assertion that the days of creation form a chiasmus (pp. 59–61). Overall, Jordan’s own understanding is very shallow and, in many cases, very odd! He appears to be obsessed with chiasmus and typology and thinks they are everywhere. Thus, he arrives at the right conclusion (24-hour creation days), but from the wrong interpretation.

References

1. See Kulikovsky, A., Unbinding the rules: a review of *Genesis Unbound* by John Sailhamer, *TJ* 14(3):35–38, 2000.
2. See also J.P. Holding’s responses to Seely

papers, Is the *raqiya*‘ (‘firmament’) a solid dome? *TJ* 13(2):44–51, 1999; Is the *’erets* (earth) flat? *TJ* 14(3):51–54, 2000.

3. Waltke, B.K., The creation account in Genesis 1:1–3 Part I, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:25–36, January 1975; The creation account in Genesis 1:1–3 Part II, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:136–144, April 1975; The creation account in Genesis 1:1–3 Part III, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:216–228, July 1975; The creation account in Genesis 1:1–3 Part IV, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:327–342, October 1975; The creation account in Genesis 1:1–3 Part V, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133:28–41, January 1976.
4. Kulikovsky, A.S., A critique of the literary framework view of the days of creation, *CRSQ* 37(4):237–244, 2001.
5. See Bullinger, E.W., *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (reprint), Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 245, 1968.
6. Bullinger, ref. 5, pp. 374–379.
7. Young, E.J., *Studies in Genesis One*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 58, 1964.

Erratum *TJ* 19(1)

1) Fossil evidence for alleged apemen—Part 2: non-Homo hominids: on p. 36, the image caption refers to two references, which were omitted. They should have read:

113 Mehler, A.W., Australopithecines—the extinct southern apes of Africa: a fresh light on their status? *TJ* 14(3):91–99, 2000.

114 Walker, A. and Shipman, P., *The Wisdom of Bones: In Search of Human Origins*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, pp. 192, 1996.

2) The description for the front cover image should have read, ‘An artist’s rendition of a deep view of the cosmos from the Hubble Space Telescope’.

A photograph was taken by Hubble, but was so low in resolution that an STScI artist recreated it in high resolution. At the time of downloading, the source for this image <www.spacetelescope.org/images/html/opo0202a.html> did not specify it was an artist’s rendition.

3) Are ‘defective’ knee joints evidence for Darwinism?: pp. 108, 109 and 110, figures 1–3 should have been credited as follows: Image by Stuart Burgess.