

James P. Needham Joins Those Who Don't Know

Brother James P. Needham has taken a stand on the age of the earth. He says he doesn't know how old the earth is. In a recent electronic article on "Faultering [sic] Faith and Genesis 1" He says that even if "science" could prove the earth is "10 billion years old, it would not conflict with 'In the beginning God...'" To the question, "Do I think the earth is only 10 thousand years old?," he answers "Heavens no!" Read the following paragraph:

Do I think the earth is only 10 thousand years old? Heavens no! I don't know how old it is, nor does anyone else. What may surprise some, I don't care how old it is! The earth is like a woman, it doesn't tell its age! The Bible makes no effort whatsoever to tell us its age. It simply says, "In the beginning God..." That says everything that needs to be said. If science could prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the earth is 10 billion years old, it would not conflict with "In the beginning God..." That expression will fit a young earth, or an old one.

In my speech at the Florida College lectures, Feb. 8, 2000, I gave a few examples of brethren (Foy E. Wallace, Cecil Willis, John Clark) who have taken the same position. I stated that I had handled the issue in a similar way in my teaching and writing. Since then I have added some similar comments by Jere E. Frost and Don Martin at BibleWorld.

(<http://bibleworld.com>).

After this I asked, "How is the Problem of the Age of the Earth Solved?" First I mentioned the two extremes: the answer of the evolutionist and the answer of Ussher's chronology. **Both of these I reject.**

Solving the Problem. How shall we then solve the problem? I mentioned some of the answers brethren have suggested: (1) The Gap Theory. There is a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2; (2) Gaps in the genealogies; (3) Scientific evidence indicates a young earth. (4) Biblical evidence that the "days" of Genesis 1 and 2 *may* be longer than 24 hours, possibly long ages, or understood as revelatory days. How shall we evaluate these views?

The Gap Theory False. The Gap Theory is found in the blank space on the first page of the Bible. Most of us hold to the principle that we should speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. Bert Thompson, Ph.D., in his book *Theistic*

Evolution (Shreveport: Lambert Book House, 1977), says, "***the Gap Theory is absolutely false***" (173).

Genealogical Gaps. In my outline on "The Antiquity of Man" (<http://bibleworld.com>) I have shown that the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 were not intended for chronological purposes and that there are certainly gaps in the genealogies. This evidence, however, will only allow us a few hundred or thousand years at the most.

Problems of interpretation. While it is true that there are some gaps in the genealogical tables, I think that some of those who argue that "day" means "day" will encounter some serious problems in Genesis 5 and 11 if they apply the same hermeneutical principles. (Making fun of the word *hermeneutics*, as some do, while using hermeneutics is like denying the existence of air while breathing it!) Does "year" mean "year"? Does "begat" mean "begat"? Does "father" mean "father"? Does "son" mean "son"?

"Days" of Genesis. I stated my conviction that the evidence leads me to believe the days of Genesis 1 are literal 24-hour days. "Day" is most often used in Scripture of a 24-hour day. A quick concordance search will reveal numerous examples. The other day I got out my faded Genesis and the Law notebook that I compiled at Florida Christian College in 1954. The instructor, brother Clinton D. Hamilton, took the position I have taken, but he also gave us examples of "day" being used of longer periods. For a teacher to do otherwise would be less than honest with the text.

Jehovah's Witnesses can cite many references to show that "soul" (Hebrew, *nephesh*) in Genesis 2:7 means nothing more than animal life. I need show only one reference in which the term describes that part of man which lives beyond death to cast doubt on their interpretation.

Conclusion

There are some things we don't know. All honest students of the Bible admit this. This does not mean that we should not affirm confidently, as both brother Needham and I do, "In the beginning God created..." (Gen. 1:1) and "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day" (Ex. 20:11). May we all have the courage to do this no matter what the opposition may say.

Ferrell Jenkins. July 11, 2000. <http://bibleworld.com>