

# Right about Genesis!

## **Right from the Start!**

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David Fouts is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and an expert in Hebrew and Old Testament exegesis, having studied under Bruce Waltke, Allen P. Ross, and Eugene Merrill. He has taught at Yellowstone Baptist College, Dallas Seminary, and Bryan College. In this self-published monograph, Fouts offers a detailed exegesis of the first two chapters of Genesis.

Fouts' motivation to write this book is partly due to the result of a survey that showed so few evangelical academics (44%) chose the simple accounts of Genesis 1–2 as authoritative over evolution regarding the origins of the heavens and the earth, and that 46% believed they could accept the theory of theistic evolution.

According to the author, many recent scholarly works by well-educated Hebrew experts and popular theologians all seem to 'waffle' when it comes to discussing the age of the earth. When recruiting employees for academic positions, or conscripting presidents and vice presidents, many college and seminary administrations have opted for either openly old earth creationists, or do not consider the issue of great importance in their curricula. In addition, many pastors, in an effort to be 'seeker friendly', have simply ignored teaching about the origins of the universe. It appears, the problem is not in understanding the text of Genesis, but in believing it. As Fouts argues, this alarming shift "is not because the text is not clear but rather that it is very clear" (pp. 15–16).

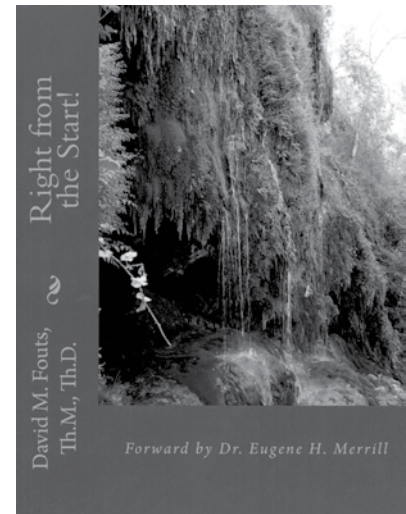
Indeed, Fouts notes that few, if any, Christian colleges, universities, or seminaries now take an official stand on the issue of the age of the earth.

## **Authority of Scripture**

Fouts poses the following key question: "Does the final authority rest in a perfect God, who revealed his truth in the words of the Bible, or in fallible man who fills in the details not revealed by the Bible?" (p. 20). While it is true that creationists also fill in many details that are not revealed in the Bible, we do not hold that our theories and models are equal to biblical revelation, nor do we propose theories and models that clearly contradict what *is* revealed in the Bible.

According to Fouts, evangelicals are faced with a choice to either accept the entire Bible as our authority from God, or none of it. Either we allow what most scientists claim are "assured scientific conclusions" based on empirical observations to be our authority, or we "return to the pages of Scripture for the authority granted to us by our God to proclaim truth in our increasingly secular society" (p. 22). Unfortunately, many have opted for fallible human understanding in preference to scriptural revelation. Indeed, there is little substantial discussion about the authority of the Bible as God's Word to mankind when considering the origins and age of the universe.

To demonstrate his point, Fouts cites Romans 1:20 ("For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.") and then asks if we would interpret the creation in this way if it was not for these words from the Apostle Paul?



Fouts suggests it is doubtful, and if it wasn't for God's special revelation in Scripture, most people would end up believing in nothing more than the Greek or Roman pantheon of man-made gods.

## **Consistency in hermeneutics**

Consistency in hermeneutics is rightly a key issue. Fouts asks:

"If the Bible is in error in Genesis 1–2 (or is simply etiological, allegorical, literary instead of literal, or purely metaphorical), wherein it does clearly state the method of creation (by the divine fiat of God) and the length of time it took (sixty-two four hour days), then why in the world should I believe that the Bible contains any truth at all" (pp. 31–32)?

He then calls for evangelicals to return to a consistent faith position about the infallibility, inerrancy, and the authority of God's Word where it speaks not only to the issues of faith and practice but also to the issues of history and science. Christians must refuse to continue to bow down to the truth claims of fallible scientists who deny the universe's divine origin or deny the plain reading of the biblical account.

Fouts argues that those who avoid the issues of origins or purposely

move away from them do the Church a great disservice because they allow science to dictate our hermeneutical methods with respect to Genesis 1–2. He rightly questions whether the same approach will eventually be applied to the virginal conception, vicarious substitutionary atonement, or the resurrection since they are also scientifically impossible. Indeed, he points out that evangelical scholars rarely turn to the secular scientific community on any other matter apart from the interpretation of the creation account.

The conclusions of science or the opinions of scientific experts are not part of the standard historical-grammatical method of interpretation. Indeed, none of the standard texts on hermeneutics that discuss the process of historical grammatical exegesis include adjusting one’s interpretation of the text in accordance with the current scientific consensus.

Fouts adds:

“Never in the history of the church of which I am aware, have so many allowed data from the scientific world to influence their thinking to the point that they are willing to undermine the clearly stated words of Scripture in an effort to be scholarly acceptable to their nonbelieving peers. This may ostensibly be done in an effort to achieve additional financial support in para-church ministries, greater academic recognition, or to build larger churches” (p. 33).

For Fouts, science should only ever be consulted, if at all, after the proper procedures of biblical exegesis have been completed and the firm grasp of the meaning and message of the text has been obtained.

**Genre**

The author notes that some have taken Genesis 1 to be a prophetic oracle, interpreting the verbal forms in Days 5–6 as future imperfects (“The

waters will teem with fish”) rather than jussives of command (“Let the waters teem with fish”). But he points out that the morphology of the Hebrew verbs in Days 1–4 do not allow this interpretation. The verb forms for Days 1–4 are uniquely jussives of command, so it follows that the verbs in Days 5–6 should be interpreted in the same way.

Moreover, whereas a jussive of request is issued from an inferior to a superior, a jussive of command is issued from a superior to an inferior. Thus, the jussives in Genesis 1 must be understood as jussives of command because the Bible consistently presents God as the supreme power and authority in the universe (cf. Mark 4:39 where Jesus calmed the wind and the waves. And note that when Jesus performed miracles, the results were instantaneous).

In addition, the passage does not fit into any of the understood prophetic subgenres including salvation oracles, damnation oracles, exhortations, covenant lawsuits, disputations, and apocalyptic literature. Each of these are identifiable by content, structure, vocabulary, and, at times, by the figures of speech employed. “The Genesis account of creation does not fit into any of these subcategories so it absolutely cannot be considered prophetic” (pp. 43–44).

Many other exegetes believe the Genesis account is a form of poetry due to its ‘exalted style’ and the presence of symmetry, style, and structure. But this supposed ‘exalted style’ could just as easily be the work of the narrator, who is also a skilled writer, under the inspiration of an infinite God, in order to express the beauty and wonder of creation. The book of Acts also contains patterns of symmetry, style, and structure but no one believes Acts is a poetic work. Nor does the creation account contain the parallelism that is a central characteristic of Hebrew poetry.

Fouts also points out that a secondary characteristic of biblical Hebrew poetry is metrical balance within its lines. Metrical balance relates to the number of syllables counted within each part of a line (called a colon). Two cola comprise a line of poetry, usually having a syllable count of 4:4; 4:5; 5:5; 5:6, or similar, and two lines then form a couplet. However, this type of metrical balance exists only in Genesis 1:27, rather than throughout the entire account (Gen 1:1–2:3) as would be expected if it was indeed a poetic text.

Note also that the presence of figures of speech alone is not determinative of genre. Various figures of speech are found in all three major genres of Scripture: narrative, prophecy, and poetry. Although they are more abundant in poetic literature, they are not uncommon in other historical narratives (e.g. Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 1 Kings 10:27; Deut. 11:10).

Fouts rightly points out that the creation account is clearly identifiable as historical narrative, containing typical narrative features such as sequence, disjuncture, repetition, deletion, description, and dialogue, as well as the typical repeated use of *waw*-consecutive imperfect (or *wayyiqtol*) verb forms. Thus, he concludes that simply declaring the account to be a different genre without any similar examples drawn from other Ancient Near Eastern literature is untenable and nothing more than special pleading.

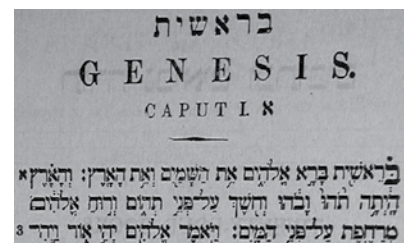


Figure 1. Genesis chapter 1 in Hebrew

### Exegetical observations

Because the first word of Genesis 1, *b<sup>o</sup>rē šît* (figure 1), does not have morphology indicating the presence of a definite article, some exegetes treat it as being ‘in construct’ with the second word *bārā*, which is actually a verb. Although this is unusual syntax, it is not impossible. The verb *bārā* is then revocalised to be in the infinitive construct form, allowing a translation like “In the beginning of God’s creating ...” or “When God began to create ...”.

But this translation is highly dubious as Fouts explains. Firstly, *rē šît* is a temporal noun and adverbial temporal expressions regularly occur in biblical Hebrew without a definite article, yet are still translated as if they were definite (or even absolute) nouns. Anarthrous (i.e. without the article) temporal nouns translated as definite can be found in Proverbs 8:23, Ecclesiastes 3:11, Isaiah 40:21, and Isaiah 41:4, 26. Indeed, most temporal nouns have anarthrous forms in the Hebrew Bible.

In addition, *b<sup>o</sup>rē šît* has Hebrew disjunctive accentuation which indicates it stands as an independent phrase—not in construct but as an absolute. Indeed, no other ancient versions of the Bible understood *rē šît* as being in construct with the following verb. Nor is there any textual support in any extant manuscript for the revocalising of *bārā* as an infinitive construct.<sup>1</sup>

The author understands the use of “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 1:1 as merism (or merismus), conveying the notion of the universe in its entirety. This is a common view but I think it is mistaken because the Israelites regarded the heavens and the earth as two separate entities and did not have a concept of a unified world until much later. Moreover, ‘the earth’ is specifically referred to as a separate entity in a circumstantial clause in the very next sentence. This singling out

of the ‘earth’ distinguishes it from the supposed merism that is meant to refer to the universe as a whole.

Fouts understands the Genesis 1:1 as a ‘topic sentence’ (p. 65) for the account and Genesis 1:2 simply describes the state of things that existed when God began his creative work on Day 1. However, this would mean there is no explanation for the actual origin of the heavens and the earth since verse 2 merely describes their initial state. In addition, Genesis 1:1 cannot be a title because the connective conjunction *w<sup>e</sup>* in verse 2 suggests a grammatical dependency, and taking verse 1 as a topic title also sets up a contradiction: how can it be said that God created the earth when in fact it already existed in some form?

Regarding gap theorists’ claims that *hāy<sup>e</sup>tāh* in verse 2 should be interpreted as a pluperfect (“Now the earth had become”), Fouts points out that, although that interpretation is grammatically possible, the contextual markers are missing: “there must be a main verb in the past tense, in order to indicate that the action of the past perfect chronologically precedes the action of the main verb, i.e., some statement or event to which the past perfect provides a setting” (p. 68). But there is no such verb in this context.

Fouts responds to the claim that Hosea 6:2 is an exception to the rule that *yôm* with a number always indicates a normal 24-hour day. He points out that Hosea 6:2 is a clear instance of a poetic expression well known in Ancient Near Eastern literature and found elsewhere in the Old Testament (Job 40:5; Prov. 6:16; 30:15, 18, 21, 29; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, and many others). Of course, if, as many interpreters believe, Hosea 6:2 is a prophecy about the resurrection of Christ, then 24-hour days are still in view and Hosea 6:2 would not be an exception to the rule.

In any case, Fouts argues that given the presence of the conventional

poetical X/X +1 device, the occurrence of *yôm* in Hosea 6:2 is most likely not relevant in the discussion of the meaning of day in Genesis 1 because Genesis 1 is narrative rather than poetry. Nor does the X/X +1 parallelism exist in Genesis 1 or anywhere else in biblical Hebrew narrative texts. It is found exclusively in poetic and prophetic texts.

Fouts also makes the interesting observation that the use of *yôm* in a construct relationship is a glaring omission within Genesis 1:1–2:3, because outside of Genesis 1 there are many examples of *yôm* in construct with other nouns which may indicate indefinite length of time.

Another interesting observation Fouts makes is that when ‘evening’ proceeds ‘morning’ outside of Genesis 1 (e.g. Exod. 27:21; Lev. 24:3), it refers to a nightly task such as keeping the lamps burning in the tabernacle. Thus, the ordering in Genesis 1 indicates a period of darkness following God’s daytime creative activity.

Fouts notes that the Hebrew clause *wāy<sup>e</sup>hī kēn* (“and it was so”) appears only twice outside of Genesis 1—Judges 6:38 and 2 Kings 15:12—and appears to indicate that something has been completed, i.e. God’s creative commands were completed as soon as He spoke.

Regarding the numbering of the days in Genesis 1, Fouts notes that the ordinally numbered second through fifth days have no article, which suggests a rendering of “a second day”, “a third day” etc. as the NASB renders it.

However, after an analysis of the use of ordinal numbers in Hebrew, Fouts argues that the presence of the ordinal number itself is sufficient to establish definiteness regardless of the presence or absence of an article on the noun ‘day’ or on the ordinal number that qualifies it. In other words, the rendering should be “the second day”, “the third day” etc. The seventh day

alone has *yôm* with the article so Fouts suggests this indicates a difference in quality even though it says nothing about duration.

Fouts points out that the Hebrew word *šēlēm*—usually rendered as ‘image’ in most versions—is normally associated with idols in the Old Testament outside Genesis. He prefers the gloss ‘representative’ and argues that the choice of this word is interesting because idols represent dead gods who have no substance whereas human beings are designed to be representations of the Living God. However, being made in God’s image implies that we are actually a *representation* of God rather than a representative of God.

In the description of God forming Adam from the dust (Gen. 2:7), the verb employed is *yāšār*, which, as Fouts points out, denotes both purpose and design. Indeed, Isaiah 44:2 and 49:5 both speak of God forming the fetus in the womb. The material God used to make man was the dust of the earth he had just created. As the Psalmist declares, God is mindful that we are merely dust (Ps. 103:14). Fouts points out that dust is never attributed with any value in Scripture and is often associated with death (Gen. 3:19; Ps. 22:15; Dan. 12:2). God formed His image bearers from the worthless, inanimate, and lifeless dust of the earth, and gave us life by breathing into the man’s nostrils the breath of life. Only then did man become a living being (Gen. 2:7).

The author asserts that man is distinct and set apart from the rest of the animal kingdom because he has the *nēšāmā* (“breath”) of life, and this gives man understanding (Job 32:8) and enables his conscience (Prov. 20:27). Fouts asserts that it is never used of any living being other than humanity. However, this is not the case. The same term is used in Genesis 7:22 in reference to all living things including both men and animals.

Fouts is firm that Adam and Eve were actual historical individuals rather than mere mythical symbolic or allegorical figures, and notes that there is ample evidence in the Scriptures outside of Genesis where other writers referred to them as such (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22–45; 1 Tim. 2:13–14; Luke.3:34–38 and Jude 14).

The author understands the geographical context of the naming of the animals to be within the confines of the Garden of Eden and therefore suggests Adam may only have named those animals that were present in the garden: “Could it not be that Adam named only that fauna concomitant with the garden itself, i.e. a limited amount of animals in an apparently somewhat confined space, rather than all possible species that would eventually roam the entire globe?” (p. 138). As I have shown elsewhere, there is no need for such limitations, which ultimately sound like special pleading.<sup>2</sup>

### On the framework hypothesis

Fouts notes the rising popularity—even among his friends and colleagues—of the so-called ‘framework hypothesis’ in recent years and his book contains an appendix specifically critiquing this view. There are many other critiques of this view now available, but Fouts believes advocates have subconsciously bowed to uniformitarian science in an attempt to be academically acceptable to the scientific community and to other biblical scholars who have been influenced by it.

One other important observation that I have not seen elsewhere is Fouts’ contention that the literary framework hypothesis does not account for the sequencing of days established by the presence of the Hebrew ordinal numbers. The ordered sequence has no meaning and serves no purpose in a framework where the days do not

correspond to any temporal reality. In fact, the presence of the ordered sequence is evidence *against* the literary framework.

### Conclusion

Fouts rightly notes that bowing to science results in removing God from the creative process, as well as calling into question the historicity of Adam, Eve, the Fall—indeed, the virgin birth of Christ and His resurrection. If there is no Fall, then there is no sin nature, and thus no need for the virginal conception or resurrection. In fact, there is no need for Jesus at all! As Fouts points out, this is a deliberate strategy by Satan to undermine Christianity and the Gospel.

The focus of this book is fairly narrow so it does not cover many of the wider historical and theological issues relating to creation. Its main strength is in hermeneutical principles and the detailed exegesis of the Hebrew text. Fouts makes many significant exegetical observations, some of which I have outlined above. In any case, this work is well worth our attention, and the keen Bible student will learn much from it.

### References

1. Also, it requires a long-winded beginning for Genesis, e.g. as modern JPS: 1 When God began to create heaven and earth—2 the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—3 God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. Even the skeptic Wellhausen said: “Aber diese Konstruktion [*sic*] ist verzweifelt geschmacklos ...” (But this construction is desperately tasteless ... *Geschichte Israels (History of Israel)*, vol. 1, 1878.
2. Kulikovskiy, A.S., How could Adam have named all the animals in a single day? *Creation* 27(3):27, June 2005.