A mixed rating

A review of
Faith, Form, and Time
by Kurt P. Wise
Broadman & Holman
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Kurt Wise's book *Faith, Form, and Time* is an overview of biblical creation, the Fall of Adam and Eve, the Noahic Flood, and the measurement of time. It is written in five parts with the educated layman in mind. Wise summarizes a wealth of information that has been published during the past 40 years. It is written in a fresh style with thought-provoking philosophical and theological insights on the nature of God and His creation.

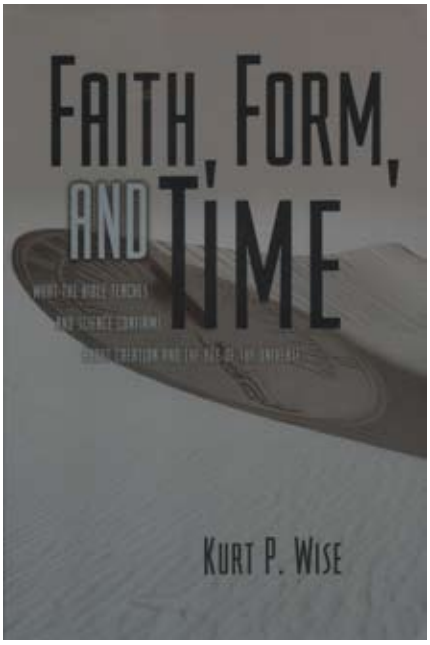
The later chapters of Wise's book add some new information on the Flood, but he runs into trouble with his post-Flood catastrophism theory. Wise often includes a summary of the current chapter and a last paragraph on where he is headed in the next chapter that is helpful and aids in the flow of the book. A glossary is included at the end of the book for readers unfamiliar with some of the terminology. The bibliography is too short, even for a layman's book, and a number of significant creationist works were not listed.

Evidences for the 'young' age of the Earth

Part I clearly states the foundational beliefs of biblical creation with an emphasis on the importance of accepting the straightforward meaning of Scripture. He clearly states that when 'science' challenges the Christian in some area of prehistory, as often occurs, we must learn to hold fast to God's word (1 Thess. 5:21) knowing that it is the truth and that in time the facts will most likely come out.

Part II jumps right into the question of time. This part is appropriately named 'The Dating Game'. It is no secret that the scriptural timescale is very short, and the evolutionary/uniformitarian time scale is very long. Wise takes the chronological information in Scripture, namely the days of Genesis 1 and the genealogies, as real history inspired by the One who was there. He convincingly argues that the Earth and universe are about 6,000 years old, and that the case for large gaps in the genealogies is weak. At the end of chapter 4, Wise summarizes the scriptural evidence against the old-earth interpretation and for the straightforward meaning of a young Earth. I found this list very helpful. He concludes that compromise with old-earth beliefs undermines basic Christian doctrines such as sin, death, salvation, and even marriage (p. 56).

Keeping this in mind he examines the claims for an old earth. Wise considers that the arguments of the evolutionary/uniformitarian paradigm are sometimes powerful. However, the idea that the earth was created with functional maturity is a reasonable deduction and not deceptive, because God tells us in Scripture that all He created was complete at the beginning some 6,000 years ago. Unfortunately, Wise makes a number of questionable statements throughout the book. One of them in chapter 5 is, 'So why does the world, in many ways, look old?' (p. 63). When I first read this, I answered that it depends upon one's paradigm. If the reader is immersed in uniformitarian thinking he sees the world through old-age glasses and of course the world 'looks' old. But from a creationist point of view, the earth looks young when we accept the creation and the Flood, except for a few phenomena such as distant starlight.



Wise goes on to adequately explain this jarring statement within the young-earth framework.

He provides much information in chapter 5 questioning the mainstream dating methods. He also discusses scientific evidence for a young earth and universe and suggests that there was a period of rapid radioactive decay in the past, similar to the belief of a number of other creationists.[1]

The creation

Part III is a theological, philosophical and scientific summary of the days of creation. Wise writes that the universe appears to be purposely designed for man, which is the Anthropic Principle. He shows how creation displays many of God's attributes. Wise does not include the big bang in the creation model, but claims that creationists have not yet provided an adequate explanation for the evidences in support of the big bang although it's outside his field.

Chapter 8 presents the DNA code and the extreme complexity of all life as powerful evidence of a Divine Creator. Wise then provides a primer on the creationist discipline of baraminology. Divisions between created kinds are made partly upon how well and whether animals can cross breed.

I was intrigued especially by the cama, a hybrid between the camel and llama (p. 111). Evolutionary theory states that the camel and llama separated 40 million years ago, but the fact that they can interbreed indicates the 'separation' occurred fairly recently. The chapter also suggests that the Genesis kind is broader than the man-made and arbitrary category called 'species'. It is the goal of baraminology to determine the boundaries of the original created kinds using the scientific data that are now available. In this field we must remember that because the reproductive system fell along with man, one effect is a 'reproductive isolation' within the kinds.

A gem from this long chapter is that the mutation load in an organism is much too small for the amount of time the evolutionists claim, again pointing to a young earth. It is in this chapter that he starts a series of boxed off sections on the 'evidences' for evolution, showing that this evidence is inadequate and actually more favorable for creation.

Chapter 9 is a continuation of chapter 8 but with man as the focus. Wise emphasizes man's special position in creation and his unique attributes. He is made in the image of God, given a dominion mandate to care for creation, provided a language for communication and given the ability for cultural development.

Pre-Flood and Flood history

Part IV chronicles the profound changes that occurred between the Garden of Eden and the Flood. Wise delves into a number of interesting but admittedly speculative pre-Flood topics that are of interest to creationists, such as pre-Flood hydrology, climatology, geography, and oceanography. Wise believes that the oceans must have been about as salty as today, but I believe this is questionable since the Flood would have washed tremendous amounts of salts into the post-Flood ocean. Wise leans towards Russ Humphreys' view that the 'waters above the firmament' are beyond the stars. Wise presents a good case that floating forests existed before the Flood and now make up the late Paleozoic coal beds. Based on the fossil distribution of dinosaurs and other groups of organisms, Wise presents a strong case for ecological zonation before the Flood.

I especially struggled with much of part V, which discusses the Flood and the new earth. He provides a good summary of the strong scriptural evidence for a global Flood rather than a local flood. The 'fountains of the great deep' are interpreted as springs under the continents and oceans. However, this is controversial.[2] Wise is an adamant believer in plate tectonics with catastrophic plate tectonics being the mechanism for the Flood. He presents much evidence in its favor. However, this evidence is a simplification and modern data sets, such as seismic reflection profiles and deep-sea drilling records, make this evidence equivocal.[3] One special concern I have for the catastrophic plate tectonics Flood model is that it seems to accept uniformitarian ages derived from biostratigraphy and radiometric dating in a relative sense. For instance, Wise states:

> 'It also appears that plate tectonic activity is not only active now but has been active in the Earth's past. This is indicated on the ocean floor by rocks of *increasing age* being found away from the mid-ocean ridge' (p. 187, emphasis mine).

These increasing 'ages' with distance away from the mid-ocean ridges are determined by radiometric dating of basalt lavas and microfossil dating of the overlying sediments. Can creationists accept such uniformitarian dating results, even in a relative sense? Evidence against using radiometric dates as relative age indicators in a creation/Flood model is shown by the creationist Grand Canyon research. The basalts on top of the northwest rim of the Grand Canyon are 'dated' older (by radiometric methods) than the Cardenas basalt at the bottom.[4]

Post-Flood history

Chapter 14 on the immediate post-Flood world is especially disappointing. Wise believes the Tertiary period of geologic history contains the record of enormous post-Flood catastrophism. I was happy to see this chapter in one sense, because so little has been published supporting the idea that the Tertiary represents a period of enormous post-Flood catastrophism. It is generally accepted that as the world moved toward homeostasis after the Flood, there was greater volcanism

Photo by Dave and Lynn Jolly

Many species can interbreed and form viable offspring—testimony to the breadth of the original created kind. For example, Genae (above), the offspring from an albino corn snake (Elaphe guttata) *and an albino king snake* (Lampropeltis triangulum), *is a hybrid between two genera.*

than exists today and the Ice Age occurred. However, there is little, if any, evidence to justify the level of post-Flood catastrophism necessary to account for the Tertiary rocks, nor is it necessary to employ this to explain the data. In fact, there are many difficulties with this hypothesis. For instance, uniformitarian geomorphologists Ollier and Pain show that a global planation of folded strata occurred in the mid to late Tertiary followed by a global uplift of most of the mountains of the world in the late Tertiary.[5] How could such super-catastrophic activity have occurred after the Flood? Wise suggests that the global planation was caused by very heavy rain during the 'post-Flood Tertiary period':

> 'If water came down fast enough, it would not channel itself into streams but rather flow in sheets over the Earth's surface. In some areas this would erode sediments and rocks in a planar fashion. This might provide an explanation for the widespread planing off of rocks evidenced in Tertiary sediments' (p. 213).

Many of these planed surfaces have cut igneous and metamorphic rocks, and the planation surfaces can cover hundreds of square kilometres. Planation surface remnants are also found at the tops of mountains and plateaus. It is difficult to believe that runoff from heavy rain is able to plane at all, since in the vast majority of cases heavy rain is observed to form channels. It has been noted by a number of geomorphologists that for water to flow as a sheet, one needs a planed surface *first*. There are several other ideas in this chapter that should have been examined more closely and defended via the standard creationist technical literature before being presented to the layman as if they are widely accepted.

I should note another one of his questionable statements, this time unexplained, from chapter 14. Wise states:

> 'Hip and leg bones that appear in some foetal sperm whales, for example, are vestigial structures. They suggest that modern whales might be descendants of whales in the past that had hind limbs' (p. 219).

This raises all kinds of questions and seems like quite a leap in logic. Further, evolutionists grossly overstate the case, e.g. one urban myth of a whale found with a leg can be traced to a 14 cm bump with a 12 cm bone—miniscule compared to the 19 m sperm whale it was formed in.[6]

In chapter 15, Wise discusses the Babel dispersion, which initiated new languages, new cultures and 'cave men'. He ends chapter 15 with a good summary of the various so-called fossil 'ancestors'. Chapter 16 concludes with a short discussion on the coming judgment and the world that follows.

Summary

I would rate the book as mixed. Wise demonstrates a fresh style and many insights. He unfortunately makes many questionable statements, only some of which are adequately explained afterwards. The book should be read with caution, especially in reading chapters 13 and 14.

References

1. See for example: Vardiman, L., Snelling, A.A. and Chaffin, E.F. (Eds), *Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth,* Institute for Creation Research, El Cajon, and Creation Research Society, St Joseph, 2000.
2. Batten, D. (Ed.), *The Answers Book*, Answers In Genesis, Brisbane, Ch. 12, 1999.
3. Reed, J.K., *Plate Tectonics: A Different View*, Creation Research Society Monograph No. 10, Creation Research Society, St Joseph, 2000.
4. Austin, S.A., Are the Grand Canyon rocks one billion years old? in: Austin, S.A. (Ed.), *Grand Canyon Monument to Catastrophe*, Institute for Creation Research, Santee, pp. 111–131, 1994.
5. Oard, M.J., The mountains rose, *TJ* **16**(3): 40–43, 2002.
6. Wieland, C., The strange tale of a leg on a whale, *Creation* **20**(3):10–13, 1998.

Refuting evolutionary reasoning

C.S. Lewis spoke to The Oxford Socratic Club in 1944 on the topic - "Is Theology Poetry?" The paper is found in the collections of his essays.

'Long before I believed Theology to be true I had already decided that the popular scientific picture at any rate was false. One absolutely central inconsistency ruins it; ... The whole picture professes to depend on inferences from observed facts. Unless inference is valid, the whole picture disappears. Unless we can be sure that reality in the remotest nebula or the remotest part obeys the thought-laws of the human scientist here and now in his laboratory—in other words, unless Reason is an absolute—all is in ruins. Yet those who ask me to believe this world picture also ask me to believe that Reason is simply the unforeseen and unintended by-product of mindless matter at one stage of its endless and aimless becoming. Here is flat contradiction. They ask me at the same moment to accept a conclusion and to discredit the only testimony on which that conclusion can be based.'

Lewis, C.S.
Is Theology Poetry?
THEY ASKED FOR A PAPER.
Papers and Addresses, Geoffrey Bles, London, 1962.