

Dismissing biblical creation without engaging creationist arguments

Baby Dinosaurs on the Ark

Janet Ray

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids MI, 2021

Joel Tay

Baby dinosaurs on the Ark is one of several new books that is claimed to have been written by an ex-creationist who now embraces evolution. Belief in biblical creation is presented as anti-science, although there is very little interaction with actual creationist arguments. The book comes recommended by several big names in the theistic evolution community, such as Dennis Venema, Karl Giberson, John Walton, Thomas Oord, and the current President of *BioLogos*, Deborah Haarsma. Unfortunately, despite the high praises by notable theistic evolutionists and the claim to have been written by an ex-creationist, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the author isn't well informed about what creationists actually believe.

Whenever I write book reviews, I try to list some of the strengths of a book even if I disagree with the author's conclusion. This was exceedingly difficult to do with *Baby Dinosaurs on the Ark*. While there are significant errors throughout the book, the biggest issue I had was the author's inability to interact with arguments from biblical creationists. The uninformed reader is left hanging with the impression that biblical creationists do not have any answers to her objections.

This book consists of a collection of short, disjointed topics on what evolutionists believe, often skimming through a whole multitude of arguments without any significant depth. Topics range from genetics, geology, paleontology, human evolution, intelligent design, astronomy, and biochemistry.

Each topic follows a similar structure. Janet Ray starts off with a short story. She then explains what evolutionists believe and why they believe those things. This is followed by a very brief paragraph or two of what creationists believe, but the author almost always leaves out the reason *why* creationists believe those things. Biblical creation is then dismissed in one of these four ways:

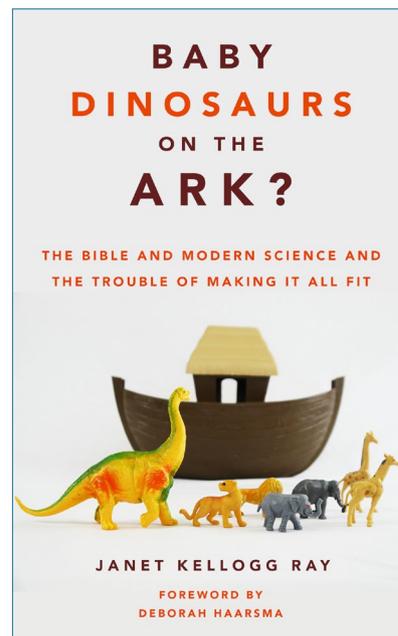
First: Assert that evolution is science. Therefore, if you deny evolution, you are antisience.

Second: An appeal to authority. Most scientists believe in evolution, therefore biblical creation has to be wrong; or biblical creationists don't publish in peer-reviewed secular journals.

Third: There is no mention of *why* biblical creationists believe what they do, leaving the reader with the impression that biblical creationists have never addressed the issue on hand.

Fourth: Creationists are dismissed as trying to 'fit the science into the Bible'. Biblical creation is then dismissed in a mocking tone without pointing to any actual contradiction in their worldview, nor does she engage with their arguments.

It came to a point where I wondered whether the author was really ignorant of creationist literature, or whether



she was going out of her way to avoid interacting with creationist arguments. (As Proverbs 18:17 says, "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.") This is especially unfortunate since most of her objections are really basic, such that anyone vaguely familiar with basic creationist literature would have been able to answer them.

Consider the following as examples of what I mean by 'basic'. Distant starlight is stated as a problem for creationists (pp. 64–68). Typical of the touch-and-go nature of her writings, she doesn't mention that creationists have several workable creation models, nor does she mention that the big bang itself faces a distant starlight problem (i.e. the horizon problem).

She does the same for other topics such as radiometric dating, the claim that micro-evolution over time leads to macro-evolution, that human and chimp DNA are 99% similar (a thoroughly discredited claim), homology, apemen, objections against a global Flood, rock layers, continental drift, ice core and radiometric dating. And she doesn't stop there: how all the animals could have fitted on Noah's Ark, why human fossils are never found with

dinosaur fossils in the same layers, the Ice Age, how animals got to Australia, and marsupials, dinosaur artifacts, and dinosaur soft tissue.

There are many other topics covered in the book, but this is just a sampling of the type of ‘basic’ apologetic questions that you would not expect an evolutionist to raise if they were even vaguely well-versed in creationist literature. Unfortunately, an uninformed reader is likely to come away thinking that creationists have no answers to these questions, since she hardly begins to explain why creationists believe what they do. Any attempt to write a comprehensive rebuttal of all her mistakes would probably result in a book three times as long as hers. For this reason, I will only engage with a few selected examples of what she has written to give the reader an overall feel of the book.

P. fluorescens

The only example in the book where the author engaged an issue beyond what most could consider to be ‘elementary’ creation apologetics, was when she brought up the example of *P. fluorescens*. Ray acknowledges that natural selection only selects from genes already present (p. 37). Nevertheless, she claims that “microevolution events, over time, result in macroevolution” (p. 73). So, for evolution to happen, species must tinker with new combinations of genes. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, Ray assumes that advantageous mutations are evidence for evolution (p. 35).

P. fluorescens is a nitrogen-fixing bacterium found in soil. Scientists knocked out a gene responsible for growing a flagellum. This caused the bacteria to lose their ability to swim. These immobile bacteria colonies had to be fed regularly, or they would have starved to death. When a graduate student forgot to feed the bacteria for a few days, most of the bacteria died. However, a few colonies survived.

These bacteria were later found to have regrown a smaller but less efficient flagellum.

It turns out that *P. fluorescens* has a nitrogen-regulating protein that is around 30% similar to the protein for flagellum growth. A mutation resulted in the over-expression of this protein, allowing the bacteria to compensate for the missing flagellar protein. These mutants were able to reconstruct a small but functional flagellum. Ray took this as proof that environmental pressures drive evolution, and that this is an excellent example of how genes can be repurposed, or recombined, resulting in dramatic changes in a species.

Biblical creationists have no problems with such examples. Creationists have often argued that God has robustly engineered creatures to be able to adapt to new environmental niches. Moreover, most creationists believe that natural selection is an important part of the biblical model.¹ But if natural selection and the role of environmental pressures are consistent with both biblical creation and evolution, how can they be cited as proof for evolution?

What Ray does not tell us, however, is that the original research paper raises some interesting issues. For example, this ‘repurposed protein’ is supposed to have occurred randomly, yet for the noted phenomenon to have occurred, there had to be two different mutations occurring together in less than four days. Even if we assume that this is a chance mutation and not a design feature, we see that the resultant mutant now overproduces a protein involved in nitrogen regulation. The resultant mutant is not only described as less fit compared to original bacterium, but because the flagellum is tied to its excessive nitrogen production, the bacterium is no longer able to regulate nitrogen properly—if the protein production drops, it stops forming the flagellum and it dies. If it retains this overproduction and

makes the flagellum, it survives, but it is severely handicapped without its ability to properly regulate nitrogen. The bacterium has ‘devolved’ in order to survive and has now lost its ability to regulate nitrogen! As the paper concludes, “Trans-acting mutations can contribute to gene network evolution, but as predicted, such mutations bear severe pleiotropic cost.”² In addition, while homologous proteins may substitute for an existing function, they cannot be used to explain the origin of irreducibly complex biochemical pathways. Simply put, Ray’s best argument for evolution turns out to be a case of ‘devolution’.

Strawman and errors

Unfortunately, Ray takes the example of *P. fluorescens* as proof that common environmental pressures drive evolution (p. 39). This is extended to explain how the ichthyosaur, dolphin, and shark could have evolved so many similar traits despite being a reptile, mammal, and fish (p. 41). She uses this to explain how environmental pressures have caused similar-looking counterparts among both marsupials and mammals. E.g. Australia is home to many marsupials while the rest of the world is populated with placental mammals. Yet Australian marsupials do look similar to many placental mammals. Marsupial sugar gliders, for example, resemble placental flying squirrels (p. 41).

While she doesn’t think that the look-alikes between marsupials and placental mammals are a problem for evolution, she claims that the dominance of marsupials in Australia is a problem for creationists. She writes:

“Only one type of marsupial is found anywhere outside of Australia: the opossums of South and North America ... Australian mammals pose a difficult problem for creationists ... in less than 4,000 years post-flood, one generic marsupial pair and one generic

monotreme pair made their way across a vast ocean to repopulate Australia, including diversifying into the many species living today” (p. 102).

She then mocks the possibility that non-flying mammals could have spread to Australia by floating forests (figure 1) after the Flood, or that a post-Flood ice age could have lowered the sea levels, forming land bridges (pp. 102–103). Typical of her dismissal of biblical creationists, she concludes:

“Consequently, the race to Australia was won by kangaroos in kayaks with their built-in baby wraps, while placentals were left behind dragging their tired and whiny toddlers” (p. 103)

As it is with all the rest of the book, she doesn’t explain why creationists’ explanations are wrong. Creationists are just brushed aside and ridiculed.³

Despite Ray’s claim that biogeography is consistent with evolutionary theory, it is actually problematic for evolution. This problem is called *disjunct distributions*, and evolutionists have themselves appealed to floating forests and a lower sea level during the ice age(s) to rescue evolution.⁴ Thus, Ray’s dismissal of biblical creationists shines a spotlight on her lack of knowledge of both creationary and evolutionary scientific literature. Unlike evolutionists, creationists have an additional argument that evolutionists cannot employ—these creatures could also have been introduced by humans in the past.⁵ As it turns out, Ray’s mockery of biblical creation backfires on her.

Ray is also wrong to say that apart from opossums, all other extant marsupials are found in Australia. Extant marsupial creatures inhabit Indonesia, New Guinea, New Zealand, and even the remote Solomon Islands (E.g. the Northern common cuscus (figure 2), and the Sulawesi bear cuscus, and possums)—some introduced by humans. Furthermore, when we look at the fossil record, we find that marsupials used to be far more widespread.



Image: Piero "Positivo" Quadri/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

Figure 1. Floating island La Rota in Posta Fibreno Lake, Italy

The remains of extinct marsupials have also been found in Africa (*Peratherium africanus*), Asia,⁶ South America (*Thylacosmilus*, *Borhyaena*, *Cladosictis*), and North America (*Stagodontidae*). In fact, this is a problem for evolutionists:

“Living marsupials are restricted to Australia and South America In contrast, metatherian fossils from the Late Cretaceous are exclusively from Eurasia and North America This geographical switch remains unexplained.”⁷

I am not aware of any reputable creationist who claims that all marsupials and monotremes in Australia came from one generic pair of each. It appears that for all the talk, Ray isn’t familiar with biblical creation at all! Yet many such strawman arguments become the basis for ridicule in Ray’s book. This is especially telling, since undergirding her narrative in her book is that she was an ex-creationist who became an evolutionist after seeing the light. In reality, the book demonstrates that her knowledge of creationist literature is astonishingly lacking.

Ray also wrongly asserts that Darwin was the first to propose a mechanism for evolution: natural selection (p. 34). She wrongly asserts that Darwin was the first to incorporate the idea of evolution over deep time, and claims

that he was the first to propose a tree of life. This exposes Ray’s unfamiliarity with the literature.⁸

She dismisses creationist illustrations depicting dinosaurs and people together, and likewise dismisses dinosaur stone figurines and artifacts from ancient human cultures. Instead, she points out that human fossils are never found with those of dinosaurs, and that this is a problem for creationists.⁹ Claiming that there is no way to house 100 to 120 enormous dinosaurs for a year on the Ark together with food and water, she mocks the idea that baby dinosaurs or eggs could have been taken on the Ark (pp. 16–18). Creationists who use Behemoth, Leviathan, and dragons as examples of dinosaurs are likewise dismissed. We are not told what is wrong with having young dinosaurs on the Ark, before they went through their adolescent growth spurt. The whole thing is just mocked as yet another failed attempt to fit the science into the Bible.

Naïve philosophy of science

Ray claims that when scientists speak of evolution as a theory, they do not mean that evolution is an untested hypothesis. Rather, “if we are to make a science term hierarchy, *theory* is at



Image: Daderot/Wikimedia, CCO

Figure 2. *Phalanger orientalis*

the top. Scientific theories rank *above* laws and facts because theories make sense of laws and facts” (p. 29). One can debate whether theory is higher than law, but indeed “evolution is just a theory” has long been on our list of *Arguments creationists should not use*—for that very reason.¹⁰ That is, it is far too complimentary! Unfortunately, Ray asserts that the phrase “theory of evolution” means that evolution is foundational to understanding all of biology. “You may have questions about evolution, you may doubt or reject it, but you cannot validly label it as ‘just a theory’” (p. 29). Throughout her book, science and evolution are lumped together as if they are synonymous, and creationists are portrayed as anti-scientific simpletons (p. 17).

Ray also rejects the idea that “facts must be interpreted and that the Bible is the only lens through which all facts should be filtered” (p. 45). Neither does she recognize that there is a crucial difference between historical science and empirical science. She writes: “Insisting on a young universe and a young earth requires dismissing chemical and physical principles routinely used in modern science and technology for purposes other than determining age. Is it reasonable to trust the physics, chemistry,

and mathematics in aeronautics and space travel and in every field of modern engineering, but disbelieve the exact same science when it tells us the age of the earth and universe? Insisting on a young earth discredits the fossil record, modern physical sciences, and archaeology, all in one fell swoop” (p. 75).

She claims that to deny evolution is to say that “science isn’t just wrong. Science is an enemy” (p. 12).

“While ... the overwhelming majority of biologists accept evolution, there are working biologists (in the extreme minority) who reject it. When biologists reject evolution, however, it is for religious reasons, not a lack of scientific evidence.”

She then quotes Todd Wood as justification:¹¹

“Evolution is not a theory in crisis. It is not teetering on the verge of collapse. ... There is evidence for evolution, gobs and gobs of it. ... There is no conspiracy to hide the truth about the failures of evolution. ... Creationist students, listen to me carefully: There is evidence for evolution, and evolution is an extremely successful scientific theory ... It is my own faith choice to reject evolution” (pp. 45–46).

But why quote Todd Wood rather than Robert Carter, who would be more representative of the creationist movement at large?

Carter writes:

“... most of us were once evolutionists and so we absolutely tested both theories. ... we love science. We love thinking. ... This is the reason we can embrace science and the Bible at the same time and without contradiction. And this is why we reject ... deep-time naturalistic evolutionary theory.”¹²

So why doesn’t Ray quote Carter? Because doing so would undermine the narrative she is trying to push. Namely, that creationists are anti-science, and that Christians who love science also embrace evolution.

Theology

Ray claims that teaching evolution in church gets people talking about God. What she doesn’t tell us, is that it not only gets people talking about God, but it also leads people away from the faith. In fact, Karl Giberson, the former vice-president of *BioLogos*, and one of the endorsers of this book, laments that telling his students that God used evolution caused them to become:

“... so alienated from their home churches that they walked away, taking their enlightenment with them. ... Many of my most talented former students no longer attend any church, and some have completely abandoned their faith traditions.”¹³

Ray claims that she became an evolutionist through Kenneth Miller’s writings.¹⁴ She claims to believe every word of the Apostle’s and Nicene Creed (p. 9), yet she also believes in an ancient universe, evolution, and the common descent of all life, including humans. There is no discussion of original sin, death before sin, or theodicy. Rather, Genesis is dismissed altogether as one of the “Ancient Near East text creation stories, of which there are several” (p. 57).

Ray claims that “a literal Genesis means a stand against the vast majority of modern science and scientists” (p. 182), and a stand against the science trusted for “medical care, disease research, agriculture, aviation, engineering, and energy. ... If creationism is true ... modern science collapses” (p. 182), and it would mean “it is within God’s nature to mislead us” (p. 183). This would have been news to the creationist founders of modern science.

She claims that honouring Genesis requires recognizing its genre and listening to its ancient voice (p. 183). By this, she means that “When we read Genesis, we don’t learn about modern science, but we do learn about God” (p. 184). “... the Bible is not an authority about the facts of modern science, it was never meant to be (p. 184).”

Ray claims that we do not have to “choose science or choose God” (p. 178). Why? Because, “Evolution theory says nothing about God or religion or any other world view” (p. 1). Ray rejects “all arguments of a universal flood, ‘flood geology’, or the descent of all life (humans and others) from a few on the ark” (p. 58). Even though she admits that “adding up the genealogies in Genesis” gives us an earth around 6,000 years old (p. 65), she asserts that Genesis is a theological story that says nothing directly about the age of the earth and universe (p. 64). Rather, Christians ought to “revisit the way we read Genesis” (p. 183). The Bible teaches us about “theology, not as science or a literal historical account” (p. 57). “The Bible gives us the answers to the *who and why* of creation; science answers the *how and when*” (p. 184). But Genesis actually goes out of its way to explain when (c. 6,000 years ago) and how (by God’s command), and even in what order, contradicting evolutionary orders.

We see that Ray’s attempt to address the conflicts between the Bible and evolution, always ends up dismissing Genesis as a mere story. Any attempt to reconcile biblical creation and science is ridiculed as ‘fitting the science into the Bible’. In fact, the title of her book, *Baby dinosaurs on the Ark?: The Bible and modern science and the trouble of making it all fit*, does just that. It is a thinly veiled attempt at mocking how biblical creationists try to *force* science into the Bible.

The difference between Ray’s approach to the Bible and that of the Apostle Paul shows clearly when she asserts: “What Adam and Eve *cannot* be, however, are the literal, genetic ancestors of all humanity” (p. 169). But even compromisers like William Lane Craig agree that some form of historical Adam, through whom sin entered the human race, is a clear biblical teaching.¹⁵

Despite her claim to be a practising Christian for whom “the Bible is

viewed as authoritative for faith and life” (p. 58), it would seem that the opposite is actually true when it comes to interpreting Genesis.

Her denial of Adam and Eve as the genetic ancestor of all humans means that she has to reject the doctrine of Original Sin, i.e. Pelagianism.¹⁶ While she claims to be a practising Christian, Ray’s treatment of Scripture falls short of the standards of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.¹⁷ That is, she denies the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. Her hermeneutical approach of appealing to the genre of ‘Ancient Near East creation stories’ as a way of rejecting the historicity of Genesis, also falls short of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics.¹⁸

To put it bluntly, evolution, not the Bible, is her foundation for truth. Though this was not her intention of her writing the book, *Baby dinosaurs on the Ark* demonstrates how Ray’s belief in evolution has unwittingly shipwrecked her faith.

References

1. Carter, R., Natural selection in paradise, creation.com/natural-selection-in-paradise, 14 May 2020.
2. Taylor, T. *et al.*, Evolutionary resurrection of flagellar motility via rewiring of the nitrogen regulation system, *Science* 347(6225):1014–1017, 27 Feb 2015.
3. Lawton, G., On a raft and a prayer, *New Scientist* 252(3365–3366):50–52, 18–25 December 2021.
4. Statham, D., Biogeography, *J. Creation* 24(1):82–87, 2010; creation.com/biogeography.
5. In fact, this is how most remote islands are populated by mammals today. E.g. consider the mammals that populate New Zealand or Hawaii today. Evolutionists cannot utilize this explanation since many marsupials are believed to have inhabited Australia prior to the arrival of humans.
6. *Sinodelphys szalayi* in China, though there are some disagreements whether this is a marsupial.
7. Cifelli, R.L. and Davis, B.M., Marsupial origins, *Science* 302(5652):1899–1900, 2003.
8. Bergman, J., Did Darwin plagiarize his evolution theory? *J. Creation* 16(3):58–63, 2002.
9. Yet this is exactly what biblical creationists expect. See: creation.com/cab15.
10. creation.com/arguments-we-think-creationists-should-not-use#just_theory.
11. Wood, T., The Truth about Evolution, toddcwood.blogspot.com/2009/09/truth-about-evolution.html, 30 September 2009.
12. Carter, R., How to think (not what to think), creation.com/how-to-think, 1 November 2016.
13. Sarfati, J., Evolution makes atheists out of people, creation.com/evolution-makes-atheists-out-of-people, 17 February 2015.
14. Woodmorappe demonstrates that Miller is not very well versed in biblical creation, on top of calling Genesis an outdated myth. For a review of Kenneth Miller’s book, see: Woodmorappe, J., and Sarfati, J., Mutilating Miller, *J. Creation* 15(3):29–35, 2001; creation.com/review-finding-darwins-god-by-kenneth-miller.
15. Craig, W.L., *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 2021.
16. As far as evangelical theology is concerned, many theologians consider the historical controversy concerning Pelagianism to be second in importance only to the Trinitarian controversy. The Council of Carthage (418): Canon 1: declares anathema on anyone who denies that Adam, the first man, was created mortal, so that whether he sinned or not, he would have died. See also Fangrad, R., BioLogos, theistic evolution and the Pelagian heresy, creation.com/biologos-pelagian-heresy, 22 Mar 2014.
17. Norman Geisler and R.C. Sproul, the original writers of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, explain what it means to affirm inerrancy: “The ICBI commentary adds, ‘Though the Bible is indeed *redemptive* history, it is also *redemptive history*’ (emphasis in the original), and this means that the acts of salvation wrought by God actually occurred in the space-time world’ (Article XII). With regard to the historicity of the Bible, *Article XIII in the commentary points out that we should not ‘take Adam to be a myth, whereas in Scripture he is presented as a real person.’* ... It adds, ‘We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood’ (Article XII of the ‘Chicago Statement’). *In short, the ICBI framers believed that using genre to deny any part of the historicity of the biblical record was a denial of inerrancy* [emphases added].” Geisler, N.L., *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy: The Chicago Statements on Biblical Inerrancy, hermeneutics, and application with official ICBI commentary*, Bastion Books, Arlington, TX, p. 11, 2013.
18. Article 19 of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics: “We deny that Scripture should be required to fit alien preunderstandings, inconsistent with itself, such as naturalism, *evolutionism*, scientism, secular humanism, and relativism.”; Article 22 writes, “We affirm that Genesis 1–11 is factual, as is the rest of the book. We deny that the teachings of Genesis 1–11 are mythical and that scientific hypotheses about earth history or the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation [emphasis added].”