

[2008]: 4–15) offers an approach to inerrancy without concordism, and I think it is commendable that different approaches to biblical interpretation are being considered and discussed. I would encourage others in the ASA and elsewhere to enter into this discussion.

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Response to P. G. Nelson's "Numerology in Genesis"

This is in response to P. G. Nelson's letter to the editor entitled "Numerology in Genesis" (*PSCF* 60, no. 1 [2008]: 70–1). Since I am not a mathematician, I have sought the advice of Iain Strachan, a mathematician who works in statistical pattern recognition. I quote Iain (with his permission):

In the first of Nelson's objections, he assumes the formula you used was $5x + 7y$ —a formula that can represent any number greater than 23, given the correct choices of x and y . However, he does not seem to have taken on board the fact that the values of y in the actual data set are highly constrained. If the numbers (A , B , C) denote age at birth of son, years lived after, and age at death, then for the A and B values, the formula is only ever $5x$ or $5x + 7$; or in other words, y is only ever zero or one. This allows the possibility that for the C value which is always $A + B$, that one can have $5x + 14$, or a value of 2 for y . This means that all of the numbers can only end in 0, 2, 5, 7, or 9, with 9 only possible as the C value. Clearly, then, only half of the possible numbers can be represented, not all of them as Nelson claims. As regards the ages of Nahor, I think his point is irrelevant (that you can use multiples of 6×2 months to produce any age). He has failed to see that it is part of a constrained pattern involving the number 6.

Iain, however, does point out a mistake in my "Making Sense of the Numbers of Genesis" article (*PSCF* 55, no. 4 [2003]: 239–51, Table 2): my claiming odds of one in a billion for the patriarchal numbers before the Flood. These odds were based on 30 numbers (10 patriarchs, 3 ages for each) ending in only half the digits (no numbers end in 1, 3, 4, 6, or 8). Again, quoting Iain:

The third number of each triplet is entirely determined by the sum of the first two and hence can't be treated as independent. Thus, the truly independent calculation has 20 numbers that end in 0, 2, 5, 7, a probability of 1 in 0.4^{20} , which is around one in 90 million. Ninety million to one are also extremely long odds, and this does not affect the end conclusion.

The end conclusion of my Numbers article is that *it is inconceivable that these are real ages*. Surely, if all of the ages listed in Table 2 of my Numbers article are statistically random numbers, as should be expected for real ages, such numerical improbabilities would not exist. The patriarchal ages of Genesis are *not* real numerical ages. They are *sacred* numerological ages, the purpose of which was to impart a spiritual or historical truth to the text, one

that to the ancients surpassed the meaning of pure rational numbers. Thus, these ages cannot be used to construct a 6,000-year-old universe or planet Earth.

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Comments on Ackerman's and Swartzendruber's Articles

The articles by Ackerman and Swartzendruber (*PSCF* 59, no. 4 [2007]: 250–64; 265–7) address the issue of global warming and Christian responses to this subject. Ackerman first admits that controversy on this subject exists among evangelical Christians. Later he labels all who differ from his position on global warming with different names, but asserts that they are "opponents of the science of global warming." In fact, many evangelicals are scientists who are skeptics of the position adopted by Ackerman—for example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) position. Ackerman labels such people as "denialists," a term with negative associations ever since Ellen Goodman, a *Boston Globe* journalist, first coined the term "denier." She applied the term to global warming skeptics, with an analogy to the holocaust deniers. (This prompted some bloggers to propose Nürnberg-type trials and penalties for the leading deniers on global warming.)

Fair-minded Christians should refrain from such name-calling. Even the popular media and some who agree with the IPCC position have reflected this spirit in recent events. An international conference on climate change was held in New York City in March, resulting in a report of the views of skeptics on global warming—the Non-Governmental International Panel on Climate Change or NIPCC. The distinguished scientist, Frederick Seitz, wrote the foreword in the NIPCC report before he passed away. Obituaries, e.g., in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Associated Press* described Seitz as a long-time "skeptical" on global warming and refrained from using terms such as "denialists."

The media also noted the participation in the NIPCC conference by celebrities like John Stossel of ABC-TV and Vaclav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic, without applying any labels like "denialist." In much the same spirit, the magazine *Skeptical Inquirer* (which is in general agreement with the views of Ackerman on global warming) moved away from name-calling by publishing an article by a prominent skeptic, Bjorn Lomborg, entitled "Let's Keep Our Cool about Global Warming" (vol. 37, no. 2 [Mar/Apr 2008]: 42–6).

The article by Swartzendruber is friendlier toward skeptics. His position is basically one of "better safe than sorry" (that is, described by the modern equivalent, the "Precautionary Principle"). Missing, however, is the recognition that overreaction via the precautionary principle to the global warming problem could consume resources better expended elsewhere for the benefit of the poor and underdeveloped countries in the world—compare the writings of Lomborg, for example.

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