



# Concordism and a Biblical Alternative: An Examination of Hugh Ross's Perspective

Paul Seely

*Unlike the bulk of concordist writings which deal primarily with Genesis 1, Hugh Ross's book The Genesis Question deals with all of Genesis 1-11 and hence presents a rare opportunity to see how a leading concordist deals with the conflicts which these chapters have with modern science. The attempts to harmonize these chapters with modern science are examined and found wanting. After seeing how Ross's explanations, which are typical of the concordist approach, fail to harmonize Creation, Adam, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel with the findings of modern science, an alternative yet fully biblical approach is presented.*

**H**ugh Ross, president of Reasons to Believe, has used his professional knowledge of astronomy to produce some valuable apologetical books supporting biblical Christianity, particularly regarding the Big Bang and the anthropic principle. He supports old earth creationism, and he has a good evangelistic ministry revolving around science and the Bible.

Since some of the most serious conflicts between science and the Bible occur in Genesis 1-11, he wrote *The Genesis Question* to show how Genesis 1-11 agrees with modern science. The book refutes many of the arguments of young earth creationism in a viable way, but since Ross is out of his field of expertise, it is perhaps not surprising that much of what he wrote about Genesis 1-11 does not stand up to close examination.<sup>1</sup> After looking at Ross's attempts to make the major events in these chapters agree with science, I will lay out an alternative which, I think, is a more biblical approach to science and Scripture.

## Ross and Genesis One

I have written earlier showing that Ross and other concordists have removed Genesis 1 from its historical and biblical context and have effectually rewritten it in order to make it agree with modern cosmology. That article, "The First Four Days of Genesis in Concordist Theory and in Biblical Context,"

is available on the ASA website.<sup>2</sup> I will not, therefore, go over Ross's interpretation of Genesis 1 here. It will suffice to point out that there is a virtually unanimous agreement among qualified Old Testament scholars that the sun, moon, and stars were *created* on the fourth day, not just made to *appear* as the concordist interpretation requires.<sup>3</sup> So at the very heart of the concordist interpretation of Genesis 1 is a *private* interpretation. And, as can be seen in the above mentioned article, concordism also takes other verses in Genesis 1 out of context and reinterprets them in a private manner. Concordism's approach to Genesis 1 is thus resting upon a foundation no firmer in principle than that of creation science, which rests upon private interpretations of the scientific data.

## Ross and Adam

Ross recognizes that in the Bible Adam is the first human being on earth; and unlike some concordists he does not attempt to establish a pre-Adamite theory. He admits that hominids go back over a million years and that Neanderthals existed in their usual time slot, but he argues that the Neanderthals were not true human beings nor ancestors of Adam.

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## Dialogue: Article

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Ross rightly discerns that the difference between animals, even bipedal hominids, and Adam is that Adam had a spiritual capacity to be aware of God and converse with him. In order to date Adam, he cites two scientific papers published in 1981 and 1986 which claim that religious relics and altars, which would indicate the presence of truly spiritual beings, date back "twenty-four thousand years at most."

One problem with this is that since 1986, other altars have been found, two of which were made by Neanderthals. One was found at Bruniquel, France, which dates back at least 47,600 years.<sup>4</sup> Similarly there is good evidence of Neanderthals sacrificing a deer in a Mousterian cave shelter in Lebanon.<sup>5</sup> If altars signify the presence of truly spiritual beings, Neanderthals would have to be considered true human beings whether they are ancestral to *Homo sapiens sapiens* or not.

Ross also looks at research done on the Y-chromosome, and concludes from it that *Homo sapiens sapiens* have a common male ancestor at 35,000 to 47,000 BP. On the basis of mitochondrial DNA, he concludes that *Homo sapiens sapiens* have a common female ancestor that dates a few thousand maybe up to tens of thousands of years earlier. In the end, Ross does not explicitly date Adam in the book, but on the basis of the above data and that *Homo sapiens sapiens* have ancestors in Europe c. 30,000 BP, he is certainly concluding that Adam must be dated at least 35,000 years ago. And he seems to be open to a date as early as 50,000 years ago. He has, in fact, a news item on his website which says humans originated c. 50,000 BP.<sup>6</sup>

Anatomically *Homo sapiens sapiens* are usually thought to have originated 100,000 or more years ago; but perhaps a true human corresponding to Adam did not arise until 50,000 BP. Yet even that date for Adam stretches the genealogy in Genesis 5 to unrealistic dimensions as shall be discussed more fully below. A more serious problem with this early date is the culture of Adam. Adam is clearly portrayed as a farmer with domesticated crops (Gen. 2:5, 15; 3:23). In addition, Gen. 4:1, 2 in the light of 4:25 imply that Cain and Abel were contemporaries of Adam, and they raised domesticated crops and domesticated cattle, respectively. Adam's culture is thus clearly Neolithic.

The culture of humans 50,000 or even 35,000 years ago, on the other hand, is clearly Paleolithic, having neither domesticated crops nor domesticated cattle. Indeed, domesticated crops and cattle do not show up in the archaeological record until 9000–10,000 BC at the earliest. Nor did Paleolithic humans build cities in even a reduced sense of the word, yet Cain built a city (Gen. 4:17). If then Genesis is giving us an accurate picture of Adam's culture, there is no way that Adam can be dated before c. 12,000 BP. Adam's culture precludes dating him to 50,000 or even 35,000 years ago as would be necessary to bring concord between the biblical account and the scientific evidence.

In a short article, one of Ross's associates, Fazale Rana, faces this problem but claims that "small-scale agricultural practices were established long before the Neolithic revolution."<sup>7</sup> He based this claim on excavations near the Sea of Galilee which found that humans c. 23,500 BP were preferentially harvesting wild grasses that had larger seeds. They were also grinding the grasses into flour. No one doubts that the origin of agriculture sprang from the harvesting of wild grasses, but the cited evidence only supports the presence of *wild* grasses, not domesticated grasses. The cited evidence, as the authors of the original scientific article indicate, fits a hunting and gathering culture, not one with domesticated crops such as are implied in the biblical narrative of Adam and Cain.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the date of these finds is c. 12,000 years *after* Ross's earliest date for Adam. The finds also do not fit the biblical picture in that there is no evidence of domesticated fruit trees nor of a city at this early date, as the biblical narrative demands.

Ross could argue, as some have, that Adam's Neolithic culture was lost, and Paleolithic culture arose after that and reigned until c. 9000 or 10,000 BC when Neolithic culture was reinvented. Thus Adam can be dated at 50,000 BP. Admittedly, cultures can go backward, but this suggested scenario seems *ad hoc* in that no evidence of a Neolithic culture preceding the Paleolithic has ever been found. Also this scenario ill fits the biblical data. In the Genesis 5 genealogy, the first two persons, Adam and Seth, are clearly contemporaries (Gen. 4:25), and the last two persons, Lamech and Noah, are clearly contemporaries (Gen. 5:29) and date

to c. 5000 BC (see below). That leaves seven generations to cover around 40,000 years of Paleolithic culture.

Not only does this unduly stretch the idea of gaps in the genealogies, it offers a genealogy covering an unparalleled extraordinary length of time. Further, since writing had not been invented, one must believe this genealogy was kept intact for tens of thousands of years by oral transmission. I think this is quite improbable. It seems particularly improbable when we see that Lamech remembers not only the name of Adam but the words God spoke to Adam some supposed 45,000 years earlier (Gen. 3:17; 5:29). Also, the genealogy in Genesis 4 is usually understood to be parallel to the one in Genesis 5, yet because Enoch near the top is Neolithic and so is Lamech at the bottom, only four generations (Gen. 4:18) are left to cover some 40,000 years of Paleolithic culture. And again, we find Lamech, who by means of mere oral transmission can accurately remember the words of God spoken to Cain some 45,000 years earlier! I think we must conclude that this approach is without empirical evidence, contrary to probability, and most probably *ad hoc*.

If Genesis 2–4 is accurate in a literal way, as Ross in fact interprets these chapters, the Bible's Neolithic Adam is in serious chronological discord with the Paleolithic first *homo sapiens* of modern anthropology.<sup>9</sup>

## Ross and the Flood

Ross recognizes that the scientific data from a number of sciences indicate there was no global Flood. He accordingly defines the biblical Flood as a local event. While I fully agree that the Flood was not global, I also recognize that concordist theories of the Flood are less than biblical and not always scientifically sound. The theory which Ross presents illustrates some of the main problems with the concordist approach.

## The Date of the Flood

To accommodate the fact that there were true human beings in Europe c. 30,000 BP, Ross placed the dispersion of humankind mentioned in Gen. 11:1–9 at c. 30,000 BP (cf. p. 187). He, therefore, must date the Flood earlier than 30,000 BP.

This presents the same problem as occurred with his dating of Adam. The culture of 30,000 years ago is Paleolithic. Yet the Bible describes the pre-Flood culture as being even more advanced than in the time of Adam. It not only had agriculture, domesticated cattle, and cities, it had "implements of bronze and iron" (Gen. 4:22). The culture described is late Neolithic or Chalcolithic (c. 4500 BC). In addition, shortly after the Flood, Noah planted a vineyard (Gen. 9:20), yet domesticated grapes do not show up in the archaeological record until c. 4000 BC, thus again dating the Flood to late Neolithic times.<sup>10</sup> If the biblical

data in Genesis 4 and 9 are accepted as accurate, the earliest possible date for the Flood is c. 5000 BC. Ross's date of before 30,000 BP is, therefore, out of the question since he wants to accept the biblical account at face value.

## The Depth of the Flood

Ross says the statement in Gen. 7:19 that "all the high mountains under all the heavens were covered" with water just means that Noah could see nothing but water from his vantage point on the upper deck of the ark. He says, "If the ark were floating anywhere near the middle of the vast Mesopotamian plain on water as deep as two or three hundred feet, no hills or mountains would be visible from it" (pp. 149–50). Ross says the ark landed in the foothills of the Ararat mountains, "a few hundred feet above sea level" probably 20 to 50 miles north of Ninevah's ruins (p. 170).

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The meaning of Gen. 7:19, however, is quite different if it is left in context. The preceding verses paint a picture of the flood waters ever increasing in depth until they covered "all of the high mountains under all the heavens." The phrase "under *all* the heavens" necessarily includes the country of Ararat since that country is part of the context (Gen. 8:4).<sup>11</sup> And, the phrase, "all the high mountains" includes the *high* mountains of Ararat, not just the foothills. Hence, Gen. 7:19 means that the high mountains of Ararat were covered by the flood waters. On average, these mountains are 8,000 feet high and encircle a plateau one mile high. Consequently, the narrator is describing the flood waters as being over one mile high.

Such an extraordinary depth is implied again in the fact that after the ark grounded, it took two and one-half more months of receding flood waters "until the tops of the mountains became visible." The ark is portrayed as landing at a very high elevation. If the ark came to rest on the Ararat foothills, the tops of the mountains in the vicinity would have been visible *before* the waters began to recede, not as a *result* of ten more weeks of the waters receding, as Gen. 8:15 tells us.





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To prevent Gen. 7:19 from referring to the high mountains in the area, Ross ignores the fact that the verse contextually includes the high mountains of Ararat, and he interprets Gen. 7:19 as an observation made by Noah while the ark was floating near the middle of the vast Mesopotamian plain. From there Noah could see neither the high Zagros mountains to the east nor the high Ararat mountains to the north. Ross would thus remove the high mountains in the area from being spoken of in Gen. 7:19. But in order to achieve this result, Ross *assumes* that Gen. 7:19 is based on Noah's observations even though Gen. 8:13 implies that Noah did not see outside the ark until the surface of the ground was completely dried up. Noah would not have needed to send out birds to see if the waters had dried up if he could have seen outside the ark for himself.

Worse still, Ross places the ark in the middle of the Mesopotamian plain, which is well south of the Ararat mountains. He places the ark there at the time of Gen. 7:19, which is close to the peak of the Flood but before the waters began to recede. Because Mesopotamia is topographically an inclined plane sloping to the south, when the waters did begin to recede, they would create a current flowing south which would pull the ark further and further away from the mountains of Ararat. So in Ross's scenario, the ark could never even land on the foothills of Ararat, thus contradicting Scripture.<sup>12</sup>

There is yet another problem with Ross's depth of the Flood. By putting the landing place of the ark twenty miles north of Ninevah, Ross does get the ark just over the border of Assyria into the land of Ararat (ancient Urartu). But at even this low end of the country of Ararat, the ark would be more than a few hundred feet above sea level. Ninevah, modern Mosul, is at an elevation of over 700 feet above sea level, and it would take another several hundred feet of water to get the ark into the foothills of Ararat. Hence Ross's two or three hundred feet of water would not be half high enough to get the ark into the foothills of Ararat.

There is one final problem with Ross's depth of the Flood, a problem which all Mesopotamian flood theories face. Mesopotamia is topographically an inclined plane

with mountains only on the east and north sides. For a flood to reach a depth of several hundred feet, there would have to be a free-standing wall of water or some other such miraculous barrier hundreds of feet high on the south and west sides to keep the water in place for the year of the Flood.<sup>13</sup> Mesopotamian flood theories, therefore, require the same kind of *ad hoc* miracle at this point as creation science invents in order to make its theories work.

### The Extent of the Flood

Genesis 8:9 says, "the water was on the surface of *all the earth*." Other verses make similar statements. But how big is "all the earth"? Since the words "all" and "earth" can have limited meanings, concordists regularly define the extent of the flood as limited to a local area. Ross argues that the "whole world" that was inundated by the Flood refers only to Mesopotamia (p. 146).

The words "all the earth," however, should be defined contextually, not just on the basis that the words "all" and "earth" can refer to a limited area. The author of Gen. 8:9 uses the words "all the earth" again in Gen. 9:19, which is part of the context of the Flood, saying that after the Flood, "all the earth" was populated by the three sons of Noah. In chapter 10, the author delineates the various nations of the earth populated by the three sons of Noah and thereby tells us all of the nations which he included in the phrase "all the earth." The nations of Genesis 10 extend from around Sardinia<sup>14</sup> to Afghanistan and from the Black Sea to the Gulf of Aden. So, contextually, "all the earth" that was flooded encompassed the entire Near East, obviously a much greater area than just Mesopotamia.

Further, although the biblical account is not describing a global flood, it is important for concordists to realize that the consensus of evangelical Old Testament scholars is that the Flood is described in Genesis 6–9 as a cosmic event which returned the earth essentially to its pre-creation state of being completely covered with water as described in Gen. 1:2.<sup>15</sup> The Bible is thus not describing a Flood limited to Mesopotamia but a universal flood, a Flood that was as extensive as the created earth in Genesis 1.

## The Destructiveness of the Flood

To his credit, Ross does not try to make the biblical Flood less than anthropologically universal. He freely admits the Flood is described in the Bible as eradicating all humanity except Noah and his family. But since a global flood has been falsified by science, Ross has the problem of explaining how a local flood could have destroyed all of humanity. His solution is the solution of a century ago, which said that at the time of the Flood, all humanity lived in Mesopotamia (p. 146). Unfortunately, this solution no longer works. If the Flood is dated in accordance with the culture described in Genesis 4 and 9, it occurred no earlier than c. 5000 BC. We know that genuine human beings were spread all over the globe by then. Even if the Flood could be dated at 30,000 BP, true human beings were very probably in Australia long before that.<sup>16</sup>

If Ross is correct that all humanity except Noah and his family were destroyed in the Flood (and this is the historic interpretation of the Church and the consensus of modern biblical scholars), the Flood must have covered all the earth. The "whole earth" of Genesis 6–9 is not a globe, but the greater Near East, as Gen. 9:19 and Genesis 10 show. However, if the mountains of Ararat were covered as Gen. 7:19 and 8:3–5 indicate and a modern knowledge of geography is illegitimately forced into the account in order to include all humanity in it, the Flood would have been global.<sup>17</sup>

If Genesis 6–9 is literally true and the scientific data are taken in a straightforward way, the Flood would have to have covered at least the entire Near East, been over one mile high in depth, and occurred no earlier than c. 5000 BC. This is utterly contrary to the scientific evidence. Since Ross's attempted harmonization fails to harmonize the biblical account with the scientific data, there is strong discord here between science and the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

## Ross and the Tower of Babel

Ross follows the findings of modern anthropology that true human beings were in Europe 30,000 years ago and people were spread all over the earth by 11,000 BC, so he dates the Tower of Babel and the dispersion of humanity from c. 30,000 to 11,000 BP (p. 187). However, as shown above, even the Flood cannot be dated before c. 5000 BC, so the Tower of Babel cannot be as early as 30,000 or even 11,000 years ago. It must, in fact, be subsequent to 5000 BC, and that is exactly what archaeology shows.

Because of its location in Shinar (southern Mesopotamia) and the mention of the top of the tower rising into heaven (Gen. 11:2, 4), which was typically said of ziggurats, most scholars have identified the Tower of Babel as a ziggurat. When do ziggurats first appear in the archaeological record? Not before c. 3500 BC.<sup>19</sup> And building a city with a ziggurat that would bring fame, as was the goal of

the builders in Gen. 11:4, indicates the beginning of monumental architecture, which also did not begin until c. 3500 BC.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, although there are archaeological sites throughout the Near East which from around 10,000 BC on contain the remains of buildings made of sun-dried brick, buildings made of *baked* brick, as specified in Gen. 11:3, do not appear in the archaeological record until c. 3500 BC.<sup>21</sup> Mortar of various kinds is also used with the earlier sun-dried bricks, but asphalt for mortar, as specified in Gen. 11:3, does not appear until c. 3500 BC.<sup>22</sup>

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The ziggurat, the associated city, the baked brick, and the asphalt for mortar all agree archaeologically in telling us that the Tower of Babel did not antedate c. 3500 BC.<sup>23</sup> Yet by 3500 BC, people had been scattered all over the earth for millennia, and the study of historical linguistics tells us they were speaking many different languages by that time.<sup>24</sup>

Ross is again to be commended for not backing off from the biblical statement in Gen. 11:1 that before the Tower of Babel was built *all* people on earth were speaking the same language. Most concordists try to make the statement refer only to a local event, but I have shown elsewhere that their varied explanatory scenarios conflict with each other, with Scripture, and even with some archaeological data.<sup>25</sup> Further, as was the case with the sun being created on the fourth day, there is a strong consensus of



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Old Testament scholars that Gen. 11:1 means that *all of humankind* was speaking the same language.<sup>26</sup> This is also the historic interpretation of the Church.<sup>27</sup>

The Bible is saying that all humanity was speaking the same language at the time the Tower of Babel was built, which archaeology dates as being no earlier than c. 3500 BC. It is quite clear from archaeology and historical linguistics, however, that people were spread all over the world by that time and speaking numerous languages. We have then again discord between the findings of science and the story of the Tower of Babel. Ross tried to make concord by dating the Tower of Babel sometime between 30,000 and 11,000 BP; but as shown above such dating is utterly anachronistic. The Tower of Babel cannot be dated earlier than c. 3500 BC.

We see then that as far as Genesis 1–11 is concerned, Ross's concordism rests upon either a private interpretation of the Bible (Genesis 1), or an anachronistic dating of the events (Genesis 2–4 and 11:1–9), or a combination of both (Genesis 6–9). From the standpoint of either Scripture or science or both, Ross's concordism fails, and it fails not just on the periphery, but with regard to the major events in Genesis 1–11. Looked at from a different perspective and to Ross's credit, his concordism failed because he was either too honest with Scripture or science or both. In any case, a different approach is needed.

### **A Biblical Approach to Science and Scripture**

Many evangelicals expect biblical history to be in accord with the actual facts simply because it is inspired by God. The Scriptures teach, however, that inspiration is not the same thing as revelation, and as far as I know all evangelical theologians acknowledge this. This distinction is particularly relevant to biblical history because biblical historians never claim to have received their historical facts by revelation. Biblical history is always presented as based on human sources, not divine revelation, which is in contrast to the claims of the prophets. Biblical historians often refer to their human sources, such as the Book of Jasher (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18) or The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel or of Judah (1 Kings 14:19, 29). Luke's

preface to his Gospel is a prime example of this (Luke 1:1–4).

Accordingly, if a human source which a biblical historian is using has a mistake in it, such as the Septuagint's mistranslation of *mtth*, "bed," in Gen. 47:31 as "staff," we see from Heb. 11:21 that the resulting historical misrepresentation of the facts will not necessarily be corrected by the inspired writer. The idea that inspiration will correct or avoid all factual errors in a biblical historian's sources is not taught in Scripture nor borne out by the phenomena of Scripture.

In addition, even in the case of revelation, it is usually overlooked by evangelicals that God sometimes accommodated his revelation to culturally pre-ingrained ideas. Jesus taught that the law of divorce given directly by God in Deut. 24:1–4 was accommodated to the Israelites' hardness of heart (Matt. 19:8). A culturally pre-ingrained idea about divorce was incorporated into Scripture by God—even though it was rooted in human hardness of heart and was below God's perfect standards (Matt. 19:8; Mark 10:5). Although God's perfect standard was not to allow divorce except in cases of adultery (Matt. 19:9), Deut. 24:1–4 allowed divorce for other reasons even down to a husband's just "hating" his wife (Deut. 24:3; cf. Deut. 21:14). Calvin and other theologians have seen other Old Testament laws like those regarding slavery as also being accommodations to culturally pre-ingrained ideas.<sup>28</sup>

Why would God accommodate his revelation to things he did not believe in such as easy divorce or the ownership of slaves? The answer is that these things were too deeply rooted in the culture of the times to be suddenly uprooted by fiat. God communicates revelation in a way that is organically related to the people to whom it comes.<sup>29</sup>

In the light of these facts about biblical history and biblical revelation, we can come to some understanding as to why Genesis 1–11 does not agree with the facts of modern science. In the first place, the sources which the writer of Genesis 1–11 had to base his history upon, had come down to him from over one thousand years earlier. The Mesopotamian coloring of all eleven chapters suggests that these sources were Mesopotamian traditions and motifs probably first brought into the Israelite culture by the

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patriarchs. The fact that the second day of creation is much closer to the Babylonian creation story than to any other creation story<sup>30</sup> and that the Flood account is much closer to the Babylonian flood story than to any other flood story<sup>31</sup> make it clear that the writer of Genesis 1-11 was relying at least in part on Mesopotamian sources.<sup>32</sup>

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By the time of the writing of Genesis, the Israelites already had these ideas about creation, the flood, and the post-flood world deeply ingrained in their culture. As with their ingrained beliefs about easy divorce and slavery, these beliefs about early human history were too imbedded to be summarily contradicted. The original false theology in these traditions was radically revised in the light of the revelation given to Abraham and his descendants, and historical details could be altered in part, but the pre-embedded historical outline could not be changed.

### Good Communication Demands Accommodation

It should also not be overlooked that when speaking to people from a different cultural background, the lines of communication can close down if you present ideas too far different from their worldview. When the English school-teacher, Anna Leonowens, tried to tell the children of Siam that water in her country froze and came down from the sky as white flakes of snow, her students would not listen to anything more she had to say.<sup>33</sup> The idea of frozen water falling from the sky as white flakes was so radically different from anything known to the culture of Siam, her students and adult helpers were insulted that she expected them to be so gullible as to believe such far-fetched things. She only regained her authority when the King of Siam, who was educated in England, assured the students that her statement was true.

The effective communication of divine revelation may even require changing facts in order to adapt them to a very different culture. In the Chinese culture, the dragon is associated with good luck and blessing. If a missionary insists on speaking of the "dragon" in the book of Revelation, the cultural background of the hearers will automati-

cally associate good things with Satan. If the missionary adheres strictly to the facts of the text, the message will be distorted. In Korea, white robes are only worn for funerals and mourning. If a missionary sticks strictly to the facts of the text when translating Rev. 7:9, the great multitude of saints in heaven will all be in mourning as far as the Koreans are concerned. In parts of Africa, if you strew branches in the path of an official, it is an insult to the official. If then a missionary translates Matt. 21:8 according to the actual text, the Africans will be very confused about Palm Sunday.

One might ask, Can a missionary be perfectly moral yet make the book of Revelation say "tiger" when it really says "dragon" or say "red robes" when it really says, "white"? If the missionary does, the translation will not be speaking in accord with the facts. Would the missionary be guilty of lying if the translation did not agree with the facts? Must the translation be absolutely true to the facts even if it causes misunderstanding or stumbling? Is that God's will and way? Would it not be perfectly moral for a missionary or God to accommodate the message to the culture of the people to whom he is speaking? Does the Bible not have a supra-cultural message which can be best communicated by departing from the facts and clothing the message in the cultural terms of the people to whom it is given?

### The Discovery of Natural Truth Has Been Delegated to Humankind

I think it is evident that God can morally accommodate his message to the pre-ingrained cultural ideas of the people to whom he is speaking, even when that accommodation does not agree with the actual facts. In addition, there is another factor bearing upon this issue. Scripture was given to make humans wise with regard to salvation, not science (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Neither Jesus nor any of the apostles or prophets ever set forth a teaching aimed to teach science or to correct the science of the times. Genesis 1:26-28 teaches that God has delegated the discovery of natural truth to humankind, to *all* humans, to unbelievers just as much as to believers. This is built into creation, and the history of science corroborates this revelation. It shows that even atheists can make great scientific discoveries, and that believers and unbelievers can build upon each other's work because they have common ground in the realm of natural knowledge.

Because God has delegated the responsibility for the discovery of natural knowledge to humankind, he does not reveal such knowledge. He is not like a foolish executive who delegates responsibility, and then does the job himself. He has delegated this responsibility to humankind, and he leaves it completely in the hands of humankind. Because the delegation of this responsibility has been given to *all* of humankind, when God gives divine revelation in Scripture, he does not reveal scientific truths which would advance the scientific understanding of his chosen people beyond that of the rest of humankind. Rather, in



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## Dialogue: Article

### *Concordism and a Biblical Alternative: An Examination of Hugh Ross's Perspective*

deference to his own commitment to delegate the discovery of scientific truth to all humankind, he accommodates his revelation to the science of the times.<sup>34</sup> God is not lying or erring, therefore, when his Word does not agree with the findings of modern science because the science *per se* which he has incorporated into Scripture is *not a revelation from God* but is simply an accommodation to the science of those times.

We must not forget that the various revelations in the Old Testament did not come to a people whose minds were a *tabula rasa*. Rather, *they came to a people who had cultural ideas which were deeply ingrained before God's revelation in the Old Testament ever came to them*. These pre-ingrained cultural ideas invited and even sometimes demanded adaptations, which, like a missionary's translation, may depart from strict adherence to the facts. In the case of Genesis 1-11, I have shown elsewhere that some of the content is certainly accommodated to the science of the times.<sup>35</sup>

To summarize, divine inspiration does not change the fact that biblical history, according to Scripture, is based on human sources, not divine revelation, and Genesis 1-11 reflects sources of outdated Mesopotamian traditions. This contrasts with the Gospels which are based on eyewitness accounts written down within a generation of the events and hence worthy of high historical credence. The failure of Genesis 1-11 to be reliable history because of its poor sources in no way negates the historicity of other biblical accounts based on better sources.

Secondly, the discovery of natural knowledge has been delegated by God to humankind, and hence God has no intention of revealing such knowledge in Scripture. Consequently, references to science in Scripture are regularly accommodated to the science of the times. Further, this means that the apparent belief of Jesus and the apostles that Genesis 1-11 was actual history means nothing more than does their probable belief that the sun literally moved around the earth and stopped in the time of Joshua. It simply means their scientific knowledge was too limited to make them depart from the beliefs of the times.

Thirdly, God's revelation is organically related to the people to whom it is given and

consequently is sometimes accommodated to culturally pre-ingrained ideas. As a result, Scripture contains accommodations not only to moral standards which were culturally pre-ingrained though contrary to God's perfect standards of righteousness, but also to culturally pre-ingrained traditions about early human history which do not correspond with God's perfect knowledge. Important revelations about faith and morals are given in Genesis 1-11 but for the above reasons as well as for the sake of facilitating communication and preventing the rejection of the message unnecessarily, they are packaged in the science and human traditions of the times.

In light of the above, I think we can see why Ross could not make concord between Genesis 1-11 and modern science. The divine revelation in Genesis 1-11 is packaged in outdated Mesopotamian traditions and the science of the times. We are reading the divine revelation given to a people from a historically distant and far different cultural background. We need to appreciate the cultural context of those first readers and of God's condescension to them. Instead of insisting that God and Scripture live up to *our* expectations that the Bible fit the findings of modern science, we would do better to accept and learn from what God has actually done, read the Bible strictly for the purposes for which it was given, and pursue science with an eye to uncovering the truths of creation to the glory of God. \*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Although I am exposing the inadequacy of the arguments in Hugh Ross's book, *The Genesis Question* (Colorado Springs, CO: Nav Press, 2001), it is concordism in general which I am opposing, not Ross or his ministry, which apart from diversions outside of his area of expertise is a genuine contribution to Christianity. In addition, Ross has consistently displayed an admirable Christian character particularly in his refusal to rail at those who have railed at him. That manifestation of Christ-likeness is a precious evidence of genuine Christianity, which causes me to hold him in the highest esteem.

<sup>2</sup>Paul H. Seely, "The First Four Days of Genesis in Concordist Theory and in Biblical Context," *PSCF* 49, no. 2 (June 1997): 85-95 and [www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1997/PSCF6-97Seely.html](http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1997/PSCF6-97Seely.html)

<sup>3</sup>To cite just evangelical Old Testament (OT) scholars: Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the OT 1* (Reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1951), 51; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1950), 52; John Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 79;



- Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 121; Bruce Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 61; Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 145, 153; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 18.
- <sup>4</sup>G. Bednarick, "Neanderthal News," *The Artefact* 19 (1996):104.
- <sup>5</sup>Alexander Marshack, "Early Hominid Symbol and Evolution of the Human Capacity," in Paul Mellars, *The Emergence of Modern Humans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 481.
- <sup>6</sup>Fuz Rana, "New Y Chromosome Studies Continue to Support a Recent Origin and Spread of Humanity," [www.reasonstobelieve.org](http://www.reasonstobelieve.org). Last accessed January 2007.
- <sup>7</sup>Fazale Rana, "Agriculture's Origin Fits RTB Human Origins Model," *Connections* 7, no. 2 (2005): 2-3.
- <sup>8</sup>Dolores R. Piperno, et. al., "Processing of Wild Cereal Grains in the Upper Paleolithic Revealed by Starch Grain Analysis," *Nature* 430 (2004): 670-3.
- <sup>9</sup>John Jefferson Davis understands the story of Adam not as literally true but as analogically true. See his paper on Adam in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980). As I have argued with regard to matters in Genesis 1, I think the revelation in Genesis 2-4 is accommodated to the scientific knowledge available at the time. Regarding Genesis 1, see Paul H. Seely, "The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I: The Meaning of *Raqia'* in Gen. 1:6-8," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 227-40; "The Firmament and the Water Above, Part II: The Meaning of 'The Water above the Firmament' in Gen. 1:6-8," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992): 31-46; Paul H. Seely, "The Geographical Meaning of 'Earth' and 'Seas' in Gen. 1:10," *Westminster Theological Journal* 59 (1997): 231-55.
- <sup>10</sup>Naomi F. Miller, "Viticulture," *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Ancient Near East* 5, p. 305; Daniel Zohary, "The Domestication of the Grapevine *Vitis Vinifera* L. in the Near East," in *The Origins and Ancient History of Wine*, ed. Patrick McGovern, Stuart Fleming, and Solomon Katz (Amsterdam: Gordon Breach, 1996), 28, 29; Daniel Zohary and Maria Hopf, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World: The Origin and Spread of Cultivated Plants in West Asia, Europe, and the Nile Valley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 148-9.
- <sup>11</sup>The phrase, "under all the heavens" by itself includes all of the known earth. See Paul H. Seely, "Noah's Flood: Its Date, Extent, and Divine Accommodation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 294-5.
- <sup>12</sup>Ross could argue that between the time of Gen. 7:19 and the beginning of the waters receding the ark drifted to the north of the Ararat foothills, but this would entail a water height thousands of feet deep.
- <sup>13</sup>Glenn Morton makes these same points in his "Why the Flood Cannot Be in Mesopotamia" at <http://home.entouch.net/dmd/mflood.htm>
- <sup>14</sup>Although Tarshish may be used later in Scripture to refer to Tartessus in Spain, I believe with a number of other scholars that in Genesis 10, it refers to an area closer to the Aegean.
- <sup>15</sup>To cite only leading modern evangelical scholars: Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 291; Mathews, *Genesis*, 351; cf. 376; Walton, *Genesis*, 331; Waltke, *Genesis*, 139; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 181.
- <sup>16</sup>"Australian Aboriginal," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* 1 (2002): 714.
- <sup>17</sup>The biblical picture of the entire Near East covered with water is portrayed in Genesis as being dependent upon ancient Near Eastern cosmology with its unfathomable ocean above the firmament and below the earth to supply the water (Gen. 7:11). Consequently, our modern knowledge of a global earth cannot be fitted into the account. See notes 9 and 18.
- <sup>18</sup>For a full discussion of all the biblical data bearing on the extent of the Flood, major scientific data bearing on its extent, and the way the extent depends upon ancient cosmology, see my paper, "Noah's Flood: Its Date, Extent, and Divine Accommodation," 291-311.
- <sup>19</sup>H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that Was Babylon* (New York: New American, 1962), 45; *Cambridge Ancient History* 1, 3d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 226, 228; Harriet Crawford, *The Architecture of Iraq in the Third Millennium B.C.* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1977), 27; Singer, *History*, 1:461. Some today would place the beginning of Uruk 5 at 3600 BC.
- <sup>20</sup>Nissen, "Mesopotamia," *OEANE* 3: 478; Hans J. Nissen, *The Early History of the Ancient Near East - 9000-2000 B.C.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 56-9; Jean-Louis Huot, "The First Farmers at Oueili," *Biblical Archaeologist* 55 (1992): 188, 190. Cf. Seton Lloyd, *Ancient Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 12, 13.
- <sup>21</sup>Jack Finegan, *Archaeological History of the Ancient Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1977), 8; Armas Salonen, *Die Ziegeleien im Alten Mesopotamien* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1972), 7; Charles Singer, *The History of Technology* 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), 462; Lloyd, *Ancient Architecture*, 9-13; Pinhas Delougaz and Seton Lloyd, *Pre-Sargonic Temples in the Diyala Region* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 46, 121.
- <sup>22</sup>Maurice Daumas, ed., *A History of Technology and Invention: Progress through the Ages* 1 (New York: Crown, 1969), 117. See also Bertrand Gille, *The History of Techniques* 1 (New York: Gordon & Breach, 1986), 211. Cf. R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology* 1, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 71,72.
- <sup>23</sup>For a more detailed discussion of these points, see Paul H. Seely, "The Date of the Tower of Babel and Some Theological Implications," *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001): 15-38.
- <sup>24</sup>*The Cambridge Ancient History* (p. 133) dates the existence of different languages back to 100,000 BC.
- <sup>25</sup>Seely, "Tower of Babel," 20-5.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup>The story is about the immediate descendants of the eight people who survived the Flood. Everyone else perished in the Flood, so, of course, they were all speaking the same language.
- <sup>28</sup>See David F. Wright, "Accommodation and Barbarity in John Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries" in *Understanding Poets and Prophets*, ed. A. Graeme Auld (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1993), 413-27; David F. Wright, "Calvin's Pentateuchal Criticism: Equity, Hardness of Heart, and Divine Accommodation in the Mosaic Harmony Commentary," *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 37; James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 102-3.
- <sup>29</sup>Cf. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).
- <sup>30</sup>W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (1965): 293.
- <sup>31</sup>Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 96; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 132.
- <sup>32</sup>Some have suggested that the biblical account represents a pure account which came down to Moses while the Babylonian account is a distortion, but the solid sky of the second day with its ocean above is outmoded ancient Babylonian science and since the flood was local, the descriptions of the flood in the Babylonian accounts are closer to the historical truth than in the biblical account. It is the theology of Genesis 1-11 which is pure, not the science or the history.
- <sup>33</sup>Anna Leonowens, *Anna and the King of Siam* (New York: John Day, 1943), 229.
- <sup>34</sup>In all cases where a corresponding knowledge of the times is available, I have found that the science in Scripture always matches the science of the times. I give a number of examples in my book, *Inerrant Wisdom* (Portland, OR: Evangelical Reform, 1989).
- <sup>35</sup>See notes 9, 11, 23.