

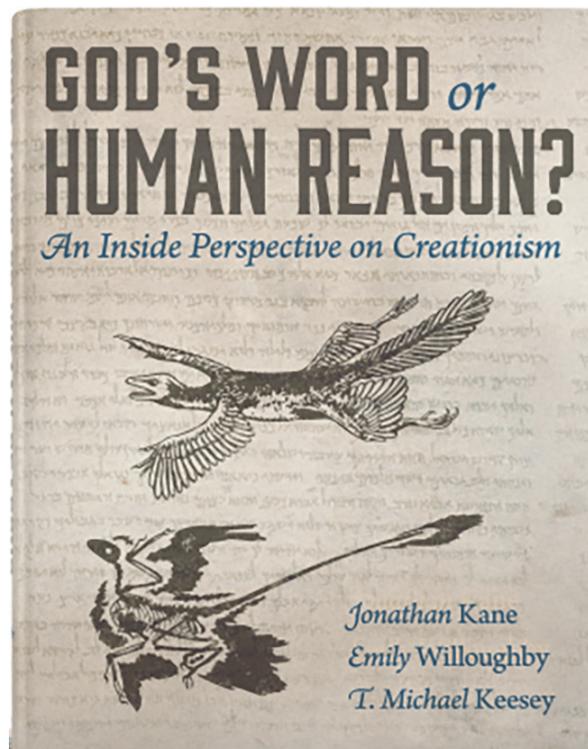


God's Word or Human Reason? An Inside Perspective on Creationism

Review by Philip J. Senter

God's Word or Human Reason? An Inside Perspective on Creationism. 2016. Kane J., Willoughby E., and Keesey T.M. (eds.). Inkwater Press. \$39.95. 389 pages.

The fossil record has long been misrepresented by authors professing the young-Earth creationist (YEC) worldview, who incorrectly insist that fossils support the YEC position (e.g. Baugh and Wilson, 1992; Gish, 1995; Helfinstine and Roth, 2007). In 2007, that insistence was beautifully addressed by two works that magisterially expounded upon the fossil record, pointing out its plethora of contradictions with the YEC position and its voluminous evidence of macroevolution: Donald Prothero's *Evolution: What the Fossils Say and Why It Matters* (Prothero, 2007) and Mark Isaak's *The Counter-Creationism Handbook* (Isaak, 2007). Since then, however, YEC authors have escalated their efforts and have produced a decade's worth of brand-new misrepresentations and misinterpretations of the fossil record and of recent paleontological discoveries (e.g. Lyons and Butt, 2008; Morris, 2009; Oard, 2009, 2011; Snelling, 2009; Isaacs, 2010; Menton, 2013; Thomas, 2013, 2014; Woetzel, 2013; Bergman and Snow, 2015; Clarey, 2015; DeMassa and Boudreaux, 2015; Thomas and Nelson, 2015). The staggering number and popularity of such recent distortions calls for an updated antidote. Enter *God's Word or Human Reason*, an edited volume of academic papers that reviews current YEC misinformation on fossils and counters it with correct information. Teachers, researchers, and others searching for paleontological rebuttals to recent permutations of YEC fossil pseudoscience will welcome this handy



resource, to use as a tool to inoculate students and others against anti-evolution contestations and to have ready answers to such contestations when students and other acquaintances bring them up in class and elsewhere to challenge the fact of macroevolution.

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Of the book's six chapters, three (chapters 2, 4, and 5) explicitly focus on the fossil record. Chapter 2, by Glenn Morton, examines and overturns the alleged geological evidence for the Genesis Flood. Its copious use of the fossil record (e.g. paleobiogeographical data, ichnological data, paleobotanical data, and data on fossil diversity, fossil sorting, and fossil succession) to demonstrate that the Genesis Flood did not happen deftly illustrates how paleontological evidence has tested (and falsified) the hypothesis of a global Flood. Chapter 4, by Jonathan Kane, reviews the plethora of recently discovered fossils that document the dinosaur-to-bird transition, providing several useful twists on typical coverage of macroevolution. One useful twist is a trait-by-trait rundown of how the anatomy of *Archaeopteryx* is intermediate between that of non-avian theropods and birds, to counter the frequent YEC claim that *Archaeopteryx* is just a bird and is not an example of transitional anatomy that links an ancestral group with a descendant group. Another useful twist is that instead of merely pointing out that the broad outlines of fossil succession reveal macroevolution (which is old news from the nineteenth century), Kane focuses on recent fossil discoveries and how they specifically demonstrate the dinosaur-to-bird transition. A third useful twist is his use of the theme of testing the predictions of hypotheses. He uses paleontological studies of the fossils in question to demonstrate that evolutionary hypotheses can be tested with fossil data, and that such testing of hypotheses about the past is no less valid than the use of the same method by the justice system to solve crimes. Chapter 5, by Michael Keesey, is a crash course in physical anthropology and an excellent review of the fossil, anatomical, and genetic evidence of human descent from apes, written in language that a non-specialist can easily understand. Its comprehensive coverage, detailed explanations of anatomical transitions within the hominid family, and lavish illustrations would make it a welcome replacement for the human evolution chapters of introductory biology textbooks, which tend to be inadequate in all three departments. Its explicit listing of synapomorphies that demonstrate the relationships within Hominoidea is a particularly useful feature, and its implicit listing of synapomorphies in its review of fossil hominids is a feature that physical anthropology textbooks should include but sometimes don't.

The book's other three chapters also offer useful counter-arguments to current YEC pseudo-science. Chapter 1, by Jonathan Kane, is on

human reason, its compatibility with evolution, and answers to typical YEC misunderstandings of science. Chapter 3, by Emily Willoughby, explains radiometric dating and describes a plethora of recent YEC attacks upon it. Willoughby expertly counters those attacks, showing that each is unfounded and providing a useful point-by-point refutation of the misinformation that the widely-publicized YEC effort called the RATE (Radioisotopes and the Age of The Earth) project produced. Chapter 6, by James Comer, reviews various problems with taking Genesis literally and answers the question of how to understand it if not as a literal record of events. That is of utmost importance, because to convince a Bible-believer, it is best not to advocate rejection of the Bible. Instead, one must meet the reader where the reader is, and if the reader is in a Bible-believing place, then to convince him or her of the fact of macroevolution one must offer a solution that includes both macroevolution and loyalty to the Bible. Chapter 6 masterfully delineates a solution that is both theologically sound (and as a paleontologist with an M.Theol., I am qualified to make that assessment) and consistent with the physical evidence of macroevolution and an old Earth.

A major strength of the book is that all chapters but one were written by former young-Earth creationists, each of whom has included his or her personal story as a separate piece after the chapter. Each of those personal stories describes how the author became aware of the paleontological and other evidence for evolution and was convinced by it. This personal touch is useful in that it shows that there is sufficient fossil and other evidence to justify rejection of the YEC position. A related weakness is that most of the authors began as Christians but wound up rejecting not just the YEC position but also the Christian faith. This is likely to make readers who are Christians balk, because it demonstrates the possibility that whilst accepting evolution one might lose one's faith, an unacceptable risk for many Christians. Also, people tend to trust experts most readily if those experts are members of the same "community" of shared cultural values (Kahan et al., 2011; Davidson et al., 2018)—in this case the Christian "community"—and the authors who have rejected Christianity have placed themselves outside that circle. On the other hand, the inclusion of Glenn Morton as an author could counter that problem, because Morton remains a Christian after accepting the fact of macroevolution.

Another major strength of the book is its repeated reference to specific falsehoods—paleontological and otherwise—that are endorsed by specific YEC organizations (e.g. Answers In Genesis, Creation Ministries International, and the Institute for Creation Research) in their publications and websites. The authors have done their homework and have produced an excellent compendium of and counter to what “the other side” is actually saying, rather than settling for the erection of straw men to burn. As a result, the book is not only a good repository of arguments against the YEC position but is also an excellent resource for learning what that position actually is. It behooves anyone interested in educating the public about macroevolution to be ready to counter the inevitable barrage of YEC arguments, and to do that one must have at least a basic knowledge of such YEC staples as baraminology, Flood geology, recolonization theory, irreducible complexity, white hole cosmology, and the results of the RATE project. The authors of *God’s Word or Human Reason* have ably reviewed those staples and the fatal flaws of each. The first three are intimately associated with the interpretation of fossils and are therefore of special interest to paleontologists. Additionally, the fossil record can be applied to the addressing of the fourth item, irreducible complexity, as Kane shows in Chapter 4 by using fossil evidence of feather evolution to expose and counter the typical YEC misuse of the concept.

Another strength of the book is its lavish illustrations. All the chapters are thoroughly illustrated with photographs and line drawings that provide

detailed clarification. Chapters 4 and 5 particularly stand out in that regard. Chapter 5 cuts no corners in its inclusion of photographs of fossils that demonstrate the ape-to-human transition. Chapter 4 sports an extensive series of full-color photographs of fossils that document the theropod-to-bird transition. Each is accompanied by a painting by Emily Willoughby that reconstructs the live animal and its environment in full color. This makes for a spectacular central array of astonishing eye candy that is both beautiful and useful.

In sum, this book is an excellent and much-needed antidote to current YEC misrepresentations and misinterpretations of the fossil record, an excellent and much-needed update to the effort to counter such distortions, and an excellent and much-needed resource for anyone wanting to learn both sides of the controversy and how fossils show that one side’s arguments consistently fail. While it is tempting for paleontologists to simply go about their paleontological business and ignore the YEC publication juggernaut and its massive influence upon an alarmingly large percentage of the public, we would be much more useful to that public if we were consistently able to counter YEC arguments that come our way. This book conveniently places current YEC arguments and their paleontological counter-arguments neatly within a single volume, making it a particularly welcome and useful addition to the bookshelf of any paleontologist who gains as much satisfaction by setting the (fossil) record straight for the public as they do by conducting paleontological research.

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