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Unraveling Our Origins

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Is the universe 13.7 billion years old or 6,000? For those who question how to reconcile the biblical account of the beginnings of the universe with the scientific theory of the Big Bang, Daniel Friedmann's *The Genesis One Code* (Park East Press, Ltd. 2011) will be a welcome read, especially as we witness the origins debate seep into the public's political, social, educational and theological conversations.

By placing the two accounts side by side, Friedmann examines the timelines provided in the Book of Genesis (6,000) and the Big Bang theory (13.7 billion), and finds a great deal of overlap. Once Friedmann clarifies and outlines the various types of time measurement at stake (including fossil records, creation time, Divine time and human time), Friedmann provides a compelling case that cosmological answers can be found in both science books and religious scriptures, which often appear at odds with one another. For the religious, he writes, the scientific "body of information is inadequate, or even inaccurate. For them, God is the architect of creation as revealed through His inspired Word in the Holy Scriptures known as the Bible." For the scientist, however, "natural explanations alone are sufficient to explain origins," he notes. And, even though the creation-evolution divide is great, "reconciliation," Friedmann suggests, "is not out of the question."

"The central nugget of the book," Friedmann told the Independent, "is that (1) Genesis clearly states that God made most of the universe and life using the powers of nature and, as such, we should not be surprised that we are able to understand most things through the scientific method; (2) the answers that science has recently found have been in our scriptures/sources for thousands/hundreds of years; and (3) we are told in Genesis exactly where events outside of nature occurred and, therefore, where the scientific method will fail – and that is where it has failed so far! For example, science has failed to explain the beginning of the Big Bang, or the nature and source for the human soul."

An engineer by trade, Friedmann has been studying Jewish mysticism for more than a dozen years, a process that, he said, spurred his interest in reconciling the two accounts of the world's beginnings. His motivation to write the book was further peaked when his younger relatives started to ask tough questions.

“To become an engineer, I studied engineering physics, which had a large physics and cosmology component,” he said. “I realized then that some answers were missing in science, and continued to search for them both in science and in kabbalah, which I began studying 13 years ago.

“Once my nephews entered high school and university, I found they had similar questions and, in discussions with them, I became motivated to work harder on the issues. At the same time, I read the Age of the Universe (by the late Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan), which got me started on what’s in my book.”

The Genesis One Code reads a little bit like a textbook and is well-documented, so it should come as no surprise that Friedmann anticipates that younger readers will make up the bulk of his audience, even as he has seen interest from all ages. “My main target audience is the 15- to 30-year-olds that come out of our secular system believing science has all the answers and the Bible has become somewhat irrelevant at explaining our origins. I wanted them to know that the Bible actually has answers to questions that remain unanswered by science.”

Knowing from which elements of religion and which from science to draw was “pretty straightforward,” he said. “On the science side, there are three bodies of knowledge that contain what happened and when it happened, from the beginning until now: the Big Bang theory, the solar system studies and the fossil record.

“In terms of the scripture side,” he continued, “I searched for answers in the Genesis text, Talmud and best-known commentaries. In terms of the unconventional part of the book, which is the time conversion, I was at first guided by the work of Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan and then just kept on following that trail until an answer emerged.”

He added, “The chronology of Genesis and science agree for almost everything, so it was straightforward to compare everything. The points of comparison focused on the events described in Genesis. Although science has a more detailed chronology, Genesis contains the key highlights.”

The process of writing the book, once he got the go ahead from the publishers, took 18 months, he said, as the “bulk of the writing occurred in parallel with the research, as I tried to rigorously document what I was finding.”

The term intelligent design comes up only once in The Genesis One Code, but, Friedmann explained, his primary intention was to deal with the what and when of the origins debate.

“I purposely try to avoid the how [of] things ... and focus on showing that science and the Bible agree on what happened and when it happened,” he clarified. “I leave the how it happened decision to the reader to decide on once the biblical and scientific time scale and events have been reconciled.

“To help the reader, in Chapter 2, I explain the various general ways people have looked at the how question, including intelligent design, [which] is a general concept defined in Wikipedia as ‘the proposition that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection.’ I don’t think it leaves out science. I think it

studies science and says science has many answers but it's missing some that are hard to explain by natural means and are best explained by a super-natural cause.”

The reception to *The Genesis One Code* has been warm from the religious community, in particular. “The book is being well received by much of the religious world – although some of those that hold to a literal six-day interpretation of Genesis have issues with it,” said Friedmann. “The scientific community has not really engaged yet, although a number of scientists have read it and found it thought-provoking.”

Friedmann hopes that members of the scientific community will more fully engage with the material. “My main hope is that they will look at the science presented in the book, take it seriously, not dismiss it, then feel a need to reconcile it with the Bible, and explain that reconciliation to our young adults. In this way, young adults will see the Torah in agreement with [the] observation of the creation made via the scientific method.”

Though “most items reconcile,” he added, there is an exception. “The one exception is the age of the earth. The biblical timeline predicts a much older earth than science currently holds. The book discusses this in detail.”

Friedmann has plans to continue bridging the creation-evolution gap with another book.

“The whole history of *Homo sapiens* is not dealt with in the book and is the subject of my next book, *Adam and the Homo sapiens*. I am happy to report that, here, too, there is good agreement between our religious sources and the latest science.”