

‘MILLIONS OF YEARS’ AND THE DOWNFALL OF THE CHRISTIAN WEST

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Most people have heard that:

- the idea of long ages of evolutionary change originated with Charles Darwin.
- Christians started to reject the literal accounts of a worldwide flood and the creation after Darwin.
- no serious scientist today doubts that the earth is millions/billions of years old.

In this brief booklet, we will show that these widely held beliefs are actually wrong. We will reveal that:

1. the idea of a very old earth was popular in scientific circles even before Darwin (and evolutionary ideas of the origin of life go back to the ancient Greeks).
2. many scientists (several who even called themselves Christians) started to reject a

straightforward reading of Genesis many decades before Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published.

3. there are thousands of practicing scientists today who believe in a young age for the earth.

Most people today, including many who attend church, take for granted that the earth and universe are millions and millions (even billions) of years old. But it has not always been that way, and it is important in today's "culture wars" to understand how this change took place and why.

Geology's early beginnings

Geology (the study of rocks and fossils) as a separate field of science¹ is only about 200 years old.

Going back to ancient Greek times, people had noticed fossils in rock layers. Many believed that the fossils were the remains of former living things turned to stone. Many early Christians (including Tertullian, Chrysostom and Augustine) attributed them to Noah's Flood.



Prior to 1750 one of the most important geological thinkers was Nicolaus Steno (1638–1686), a Dutch anatomist and geologist. He

established the principle of “superposition,” that sedimentary rock layers are deposited in a successive, essentially horizontal fashion (that is, a lower stratum was deposited before the one above it).

In his book *Forerunner*, Steno expressed belief in a roughly 6,000-year-old earth and that fossil-bearing rock strata were deposited by Noah’s Flood. Over the next century, several authors wrote books essentially reinforcing that view.

In the latter decades of the 18th century, several prominent Frenchmen contributed to the development of the idea of an earth that is millions of years old. The respected scientist, Comte de Buffon, helped open the door to an earth older than 6,000 years. In his 1779 book

Epochs of Nature, he imagined that the earth was once like a hot molten ball that had cooled to reach its present state over 75,000 years ago (though his unpublished manuscript says about 3,000,000 years).

In Scotland, James Hutton was developing a different theory of earth history. In 1788 he published a journal article and in 1795 a book, both with the title *Theory of the Earth*. He proposed that the continents were being slowly eroded into the oceans. Those sediments were gradually hardened by the internal heat of the earth and then raised by convulsions to become new land masses, which would later be eroded into the oceans, hardened and elevated.

So in Hutton's view, earth history was cyclical, and he stated that he could find no evidence of a beginning in the rock record, making earth history indefinitely long.

The 'catastrophist-uniformitarian' debate

Hutton did not pay much attention to the fossils. However, in 1812 Georges Cuvier,



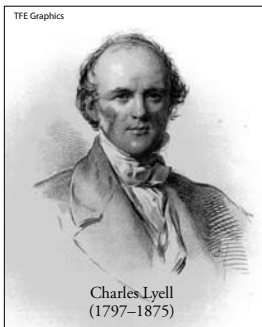
the famous French vertebrate palaeontologist, published his *catastrophist* theory of earth history in his *Discourse on the Revolutions of the Surface of the Globe*.

Cuvier believed that over the course of

untold ages, many catastrophic floods of continental or nearly global extent periodically had destroyed and buried many creatures in sediments. He believed that all but one of these catastrophes occurred before the creation of man.

A massive blow to this idea of catastrophism came during the years 1830 to 1833, when Charles Lyell, a lawyer by training, published his influential three-volume work, *Principles of Geology*. Reviving and expanding on the ideas of Hutton, Lyell explained in *Principles* how he thought geologists should interpret the rocks.

Lyell's theory was radical *uniformitarianism*, in



which he insisted that only present-day processes of sedimentation and erosion at *present-day rates of intensity and magnitude* should be used to interpret the rock record of past geological activity.

Geological processes of change, he said, have been uniform throughout earth history, hence the term uniformitarianism. No continental or global catastrophic floods (like Noah's Flood in the Bible) have ever occurred, insisted Lyell.

In the late 1830s only a few catastrophists remained but they believed Noah's Flood was geologically insignificant. Uniformitarianism became the ruling dogma in geology. By the end of the 19th century, the age of the earth was considered by all geologists to be in the hundreds of millions of years. Radiometric dating methods began to be developed in 1903, and over the course of the 20th century,

the supposed age of the earth expanded to 4.5 billion years.

Christian responses to old-earth geology

During the first half of the 1800s, the church responded in various ways to these old-earth theories of the catastrophists and uniformitarians. A number of writers in Great Britain (and a few in America), who became known as “scriptural geologists,” raised biblical, geological and philosophical arguments against the old-earth theories.

Some of the scriptural geologists were scientists, some were clergy. Some were both ordained and scientifically well informed, as was common in those days. Many of them were geologically very competent by the standards of their day, both by reading and by their own careful observations out among the rocks and fossils.

The scriptural geologists believed that the biblical accounts of creation and Noah’s Flood explained the rock record far better than the old-earth theories.²

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created
the heaven and the earth.

Geologic ages
laid down

Lucifer's
Flood

**THE
GAP?**

Millions or
billions
of years?

Genesis 1:2

And the earth was without form, and
void; and darkness was upon the
face of the deep. And the Spirit of
God moved upon the face of the waters.

Other Christians in the early 1800s quickly accepted the idea of millions of years and tried to fit all this time somewhere into the Bible's book of Genesis, even though the uniformitarians and catastrophists were still debating, and geology was in its infancy as a science.

For example, in 1804 Thomas Chalmers, a young Presbyterian pastor, began to preach that Christians should accept the concept of millions of years, and in an 1814 review of Cuvier's book, he proposed that all the time could fit between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. By that

time, Chalmers was becoming a highly influential evangelical leader and consequently his “gap theory” became very popular. In 1823 the respected Anglican theologian, George Stanley Faber, began to advocate the day-age view, namely that the days of creation were not literal but figurative of long ages.

Looking at the Flood differently

To accept these geological ages, Christians also had to reinterpret Noah’s Flood. In the 1820s, John Fleming, a Presbyterian minister, contended that Noah’s Flood was so peaceful it left no lasting geological evidence. John Pye Smith (1774–1851), a Congregational theologian, preferred to see it as localized flooding in the Mesopotamian valley (modern-day Iraq).

Liberal theology, which by the early 1800s was dominating the church in Europe, was beginning to make inroads in Britain and North America in the 1820s. The liberals considered Genesis 1–11 to be as historically unreliable and unscientific as the creation and flood myths of the ancient Babylonians, Sumerians and Egyptians.



A local flood
just does not
make sense.

In spite of the efforts of the scriptural geologists, these various old-earth reinterpretations of Genesis prevailed so that by about 1845, all the commentaries on Genesis had abandoned the biblical chronology and the global Flood, and by the time of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), the young-earth view had essentially disappeared within the church.

From that time onward, most Christian leaders and scholars of the church have accepted the idea of millions of years and have insisted that the age of the earth is not important. Many

godly men soon accepted evolution also. Space allows us only to mention a few examples.

The Baptist “prince of preachers,” Charles Spurgeon of England, uncritically accepted the old-earth geological theory (though he never explained how to fit the long ages into the Bible). In an 1855 sermon he said,

Can any man tell me when the beginning was? Years ago we thought the beginning of this world was when Adam came upon it; but we have discovered that thousands of years before that God was preparing chaotic matter to make it a fit abode for man, putting races of creatures upon it, who might die and leave behind the marks of his handiwork and marvelous skill, before he tried his hand on man.³

The great Presbyterian theologian at Princeton Seminary in New Jersey, Charles Hodge (1779–1878), insisted that the age of the earth was not important. He favored the gap theory initially and switched to the day-age view later

in life. His compromise contributed to the eventual victory of liberal theology at Princeton about 50 years after his death.⁴

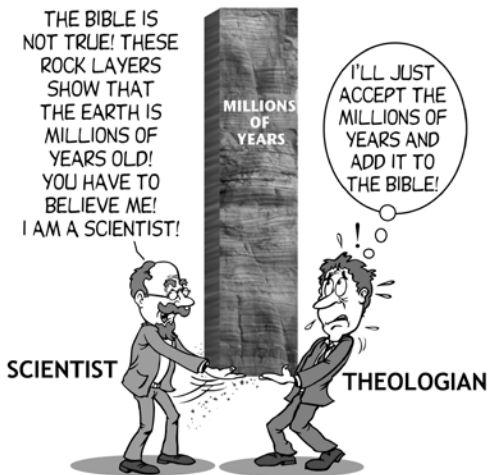
C.I. Scofield put the gap theory in his notes on Genesis 1:2 in his 1909 *Scofield Reference Bible*, which has been used for nearly a hundred years by millions of Christians around the world. More recently, a respected evangelical Old Testament scholar reasoned:

From a superficial reading of Genesis 1, the impression would seem to be that the entire creative process took place in six twenty-four-hour days. If this was the true intent of the Hebrew author ... this seems to run counter to modern scientific research, which indicates that the planet Earth was created several billion years ago⁵

Numerous similar statements from Christian scholars and leaders in the last few decades could be quoted to show that their interpretation of Genesis is controlled by the fact that they *assume* that the geologists have proven

millions of years. As a result, most seminaries and Christian colleges around the world are compromised.

The irony of all this compromise is that in the last half of the 20th century, the truth of Genesis 1–11 was increasingly being vindicated, often unintentionally by the work of evolutionists. Since the 1970s a number of secular “neo-catastrophist” geologists have increasingly



challenged Lyell's "slow-and-gradual" assumptions and argued that much of the rock record shows evidence of rapid catastrophic erosion or sedimentation, drastically reducing the time involved in the formation of many geological deposits.

These neo-catastrophist reinterpretations of the rocks have developed along with a resurgence of "Flood geology," a view of earth history very similar to that of the nineteenth-century scriptural geologists and a key ingredient to young-earth creation (which was essentially launched by the publication of *The Genesis Flood* by Drs. John Whitcomb and Henry Morris in 1961). This movement is now worldwide in scope, and the sophistication of the scientific model is rapidly increasing with time.

Disastrous consequences of compromise

The scriptural geologists of the 19th century opposed old-earth geological theories not only because the theories reflected erroneous scientific reasoning and were contrary to Scripture, but also because they believed that the Christian

compromise with such theories would eventually have a catastrophic effect on the health of the church and her witness to a lost world.

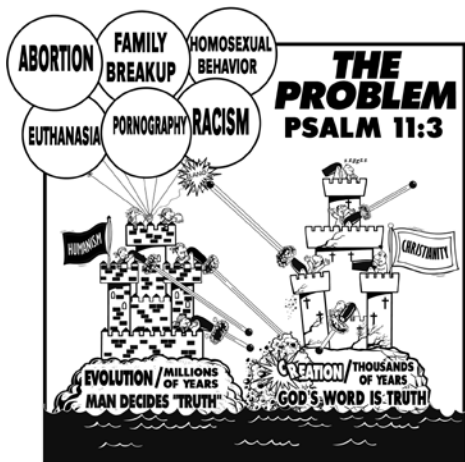
Accordingly, Henry Cole, an Anglican minister, wrote in 1834:

Many reverend Geologists, however, would evince their reverence for the divine Revelation by making a distinction between its *historical* and its *moral* portions; and maintaining, that the latter only is inspired and absolute Truth; but that the former is not so; and therefore is open to any latitude of philosophic and scientific interpretation, modification or denial! ...

What the consequences of such things must be to a revelation-possessing land, time will rapidly and awfully unfold in its opening pages of national skepticism, infidelity, and apostasy, and of God's righteous vengeance on the same!⁶

Cole and other opponents of the old-earth

theories rightly understood that the historical portions of the Bible (including Genesis 1–11) are foundational to the theological and moral teachings of Scripture. Destroy the credibility of the former, and sooner or later you will see rejection of the latter—both inside and outside the church. If the scriptural geologists were alive today and saw the castle diagram below, they would say: “That pictures *exactly* what we were concerned about!”



The history of the once-Christian nations in Europe and North America has confirmed the scriptural geologists' worst fears about the church and society. Abortion, homosexual behavior, divorce, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, pornography, adultery, school violence, etc., have skyrocketed. As a whole, these nations have become more resistant to the gospel and the Bible's authority—and more atheistic in their education and media, which justifies the label of being “post-Christian.”

To be sure, the teaching of evolution and millions of years has not caused these moral and spiritual problems—the cause is the rebellious hearts of men. But evolutionary teaching has powerfully undermined the credibility and authority of the Bible and therefore its cultural influence. And as churches and their educational institutions have compromised on the teachings of Genesis 1–11, they have become increasingly spiritually weak (or dead) and ineffective in taking the gospel to a lost and dying world. In fact, the gospel message itself is undermined if you believe there was death for

millions of years before the Fall of Adam into sin. (See the Appendix on page 23).

It is time for the church, especially her leaders and scholars, to stop ignoring the question about the age of the earth and the scientific evidence that increasingly vindicates the Word of God. The church must repent of her compromise with millions of years and once again believe and preach the literal truth of Genesis 1–11.

At the same time, the idea of a young earth is becoming more widely accepted in many countries. In fact, a respected reporter with the



highly influential *Washington Post* newspaper wrote in 2005 that the young-earth creation movement in America was growing “stronger day by day.”⁷ There are now literally thousands of

scientists (hundreds with earned PhDs from respected secular universities) worldwide who reject evolution and long ages in favor of the teaching of the Word of God, who made the earth and all that is in it about 6,000 years ago.⁸ And their number is growing rapidly.

With ongoing research, like the important RATE project (that has cast serious doubts on radiometric dating methods),⁹ an increasing number of teaching conferences on a literal Genesis, the opening of a major Creation Museum near Cincinnati (2007) and other intensive endeavors by creationists, the controversy over the age of the earth that began before Darwin will only intensify.

What does the question of the age of the earth have to do with the message of Christ and why He came to earth? See pages 20–24.

HERE'S THE GOOD NEWS

Answers in Genesis seeks to give glory and honor to God as Creator, and to affirm the truth of the biblical record of the real origin and history

of the world and mankind.

Part of this real history is the bad news that the rebellion of the first man, Adam, against God's command brought death, suffering and separation from God into this world. We see the results all around us. All of Adam's descendants are sinful from conception (Psalm 51:5) and have themselves entered into this rebellion (sin). They therefore cannot live with a holy God, but are condemned to separation from God. The Bible says that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and that all are therefore subject to "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

But the good news is that God has done something about it. "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Jesus Christ the Creator, though totally sinless, suffered, on behalf of mankind, the penalty of

mankind's sin, which is death and separation from God. He did this to satisfy the righteous demands of the holiness and justice of God, His Father. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice; He died on a cross, but on the third day, He rose again, conquering death, so that all who truly believe in Him, repent of their sin and trust in Him (rather than their own merit), are able to come back to God and live for eternity with their Creator.

Therefore: "He who believes on Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

What a wonderful Savior ... and what a wonderful salvation in Christ our Creator!

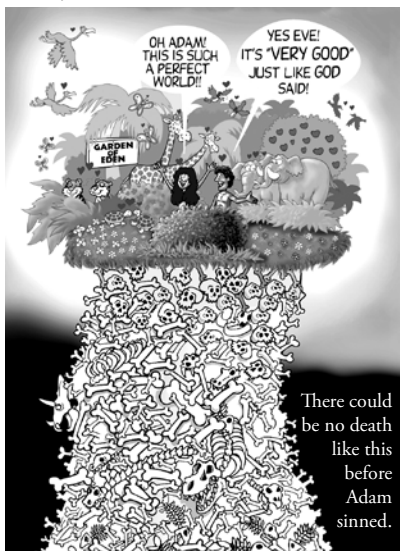
(If you want to know more of what the Bible says about how *you* can receive eternal life, please write or call the *Answers in Genesis* office nearest you—see inside front cover.)

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Geology involves systematic field studies, collection and classification of rocks and fossils, and development of theoretical reconstructions of the historical events that formed those rock layers and fossils of rock. There were students of the rocks and fossils before the 19th century, but that is when geology developed as a branch of science.
- ² See my book, *The Great Turning Point: the Church's Catastrophic Mistake on Geology—before Darwin* (Master Books, 2004) for a full discussion of these men and the battle they fought against these developing old-earth theories and Christian compromises.
- ³ C.H. Spurgeon, "Election" (1855), *The New Park Street Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publ. 1990), vol. 1, p. 318. Spurgeon made other similar concessions to old-earth theory later in life, but never showed evidence of really studying the issue carefully.
- ⁴ See Joseph Pipa and David Hall, eds., *Did God Create in Six Days?* (Whitehall, WV: Tolle Lege Press, 2005), pp. 7–16, for some of the documentation of this sad slide into apostasy.
- ⁵ Gleason Archer, *A Survey Of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 187.
- ⁶ Henry Cole, *Popular Geology Subversive of Divine Revelation* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1834), pp. ix–x, 44–45 footnote.
- ⁷ "In Evolution Debate, Creationists Are Breaking New Ground," Michael Powell (New York City bureau chief with the *Washington Post*), *Washington Post*, September 25, 2005, p. A3.
- ⁸ For example, the Creation Research Society has about 600 member scientists/engineers.
- ⁹ See www.icr.org for details on this monumental, multi-year study conducted by several credentialed scientists.

APPENDIX

If you believe in millions of years of history, then death, disease (e.g., cancer) and suffering occurred before man's existence. However, if you accept the creation account as plainly written in the book of Genesis, then death, disease and suffering of man and animals came after sin; in fact, they are a consequence of sin, and could not have been occurring millions of years before Adam.



It is important to note that at the end of the sixth day of creation, God pronounced everything as “very good” ... it was a perfect world. So for those Christians who believe in millions of years, the fossil record—with diseases like cancer found in this record, including tumors in dinosaur bones—must also be considered “very good.” But such a view makes God responsible for diseases like cancer (meaning, too, that people should accept cancer and other diseases as “very good”). Diseases came after sin, so the fossil record can’t be millions of years old.

Genesis 1:29-30 makes it obvious that originally, animals and man were created to be vegetarian. Then after the Flood, people were allowed to eat animals (Genesis 9:3).

Verses such as Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 make it clear that death came into the world after (and because of) Adam’s sin.

Therefore, an understanding of the biblical doctrine of the atonement shows that there could be no animal death or bloodshed before the Fall, and for that reason right there, the idea of millions of years of earth history is wrong. Animals could not have been dying over millions of years; they started dying after man’s sin about 6,000 years ago. In addition, when Adam sinned, man not only died spiritually (i.e., he was separated from God), but he also began to die physically.