

TIM CHAFFEY & JASON LISLE

OLD-EARTH
CREATIONISM
ON TRIAL

THE VERDICT IS IN



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Preface

Young-earth creationists and old-earth creationists have been debating their respective positions for two centuries. The controversy has become one of the major battles in the modern church. In this book, *young-earth creationists* are defined as Christians who believe God created everything during a six-day period of time about six thousand years ago.¹ These days are to be understood as approximately 24 hours in length. *Old-earth creationists* are defined as Christians who believe God created everything during the course of the past several billion years. It is important to understand that young-earth creationists do not necessarily agree with each other on every point and old-earth creationists do not agree with each other on every point.

Both sides appeal to the Scriptures for support. However, as will be demonstrated, many of the arguments used by the old-earth creationists do not stand up to scrutiny. Young-earth creationists have often supplied responses to these arguments, but it seems these responses are often ignored and the poor arguments persist. One of the goals of this book is to call attention to the faulty and sometimes misleading argumentation that exists in this debate.

The young-earth creationists' responses typically take one of two forms. First, brief articles designed to refute a particular claim are published in magazines or on websites. Second, a book is written to respond to the views of a particular old-earth creationist or to seriously critique certain arguments pertaining to one area of research.

1. Some young-earth creationists allow for the possibility of gaps in the Genesis genealogies. By doing this, they allow for an extra four thousand years or so. See *Appendix C* for information on the idea of gaps in the genealogies.

This book is unique in that it provides a thorough biblical, theological, and scientific critique of old-earth creationism while maintaining its readability. Many of the books designed to refute old-earth creationism contain a great deal of technical jargon and remain above the head of the average layperson. We have consciously endeavored to avoid this language as much as possible in this book. To help the reader when these terms do arise, such terms will be defined in text boxes on the first page in which they appear. Also, for those who are looking for more detail on a given subject, this book is documented so that readers can easily find more information. Appendix F is provided for readers looking for specific young-earth scientific arguments that are beyond the scope of this book.

Although the scientific evidence certainly bears weight in the debate between these two camps, this work focuses mainly on biblical and theological arguments. After all, from a Christian perspective, if one side cannot support its view from Scripture, then it cannot be the proper view. Nonetheless, it is important to show that good science does support the biblical time scale. For this reason, we will deal with the philosophy and application of science and how evidence is interpreted in chapters 7 and 8.

To deal with this subject, two major areas must be covered. First and foremost, the age of the earth must be examined. Does the Bible teach a young age (approximately 6,000 years) for the earth (and universe) or does it support the idea that the age of our planet is about 4.5 billion years and that of the universe about 14 billion years? Second, the flood of Noah's day must be studied in detail. If the Flood waters covered the entire earth, then a severe blow is dealt to the old-earth creationism camp. However, the converse is also true. If the Flood only covered a region of the planet, then young-earth creationism has no mechanism to explain the geologic features of the world. Furthermore, if the Flood was a global event, then the young-earth creationists' claim that Genesis 1–11 should be interpreted as straightforward, literal history is strongly supported.

Since this is such an important debate, suggestions for improving the debate are provided for both sides. God will be honored when both

“old-earthers” and “young-earthers” engage in honest debate rather than resorting to misrepresentation, ambiguity, straw-man arguments, and caustic language. It is our hope that this book will serve to clarify the debate by giving an up-to-date defense of the young-earth view and by exposing the many fallacious arguments used in defense of the old-earth views.

Above all, both sides must remember that God’s Word is inspired, inerrant, and authoritative. It is our responsibility to faithfully proclaim His Word to an unbelieving world. God stated in Isaiah 55:11:

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

The primary goal of this work is to call the Church back to the authority of Scripture rather than trusting our own methods and ideas (Ps. 118:8). May God stir you to develop a deeper love and trust for His Word and His Son.

Chapter 1

An Introduction

The early 19th century witnessed a dramatic shift in the Church's hermeneutical approach with respect to the early chapters of Genesis.¹ Prior to this time, the majority of Christians believed the Bible taught that God created the world around six thousand years ago. As the scientific community began promulgating the view of a much older earth, Christians began searching the Bible to see if it permitted one to accept these new dates for the age of the earth. Various theories were proposed, such as the *gap theory* and the *day-age theory*.

*Hermeneutics —
the study of the
methodological
principles of
interpretation (as of
the Bible).*

Throughout the past two centuries, these theories have been tweaked, while others have been created. Some Christians have gone so far as to promote *theistic evolution*, a view that teaches that God used evolution as His means of creation. However, among conservative scholarship, biological evolution is generally denied in favor of views that promote the special creation of man and woman. Today, the

1. See Dr. Terry Mortenson's *The Great Turning Point* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004) for a history of the geological and biblical battles of the early 19th century.

framework hypothesis and *progressive creation* are popular among theologians and Christian scientists. (See Appendix A for a description of these and other views.)

With the resurgence of young-earth creationism in recent decades, the debate over the age of the earth and the proper hermeneutical approach to Genesis has intensified within evangelical circles. Scholars on both sides of the dispute have written at length in an effort to convince the Church, which is largely uninformed on the issue. In their zeal to convince others, many of these scholars have resorted to weak and oftentimes fallacious arguments and reasoning.

For years, Answers in Genesis has been cautioning young-earth creationists to utilize more discretion when promoting arguments that seemingly advance their view. An article on their website lists numerous popular arguments that they suggest should not be used.² This opened the door for criticism from fellow young-earthers who had used these arguments or supported ministries that did. Nevertheless, this article was sorely needed and demonstrated how important it is for believers to be more interested in truth than winning the public's approval.

All ideas and theories should be subjected to rigorous self-examination, yet a similar self-critique is long overdue from the old-earth creationists. Since such a critique is not forthcoming from the old-earthers, one will be offered here.

The following chapters will loosely follow the procedures of a court case. First, the prosecution (young-earthers) will make its case regarding the age of the earth from a biblical perspective. Here, a summary of young-earth creationists' biblical and theological arguments will be listed to illustrate what the old-earth creationists are responding to. Second, the defense will have their say. In this section, the old-earthers' responses to these arguments will be categorized and summarized. Each of these responses will be treated like a witness in court in that they will be immediately cross-examined in light of Scripture. This will serve to illustrate the extremely shaky theological ground occupied by the old-earth position.

2. Available at www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/dont_use.asp; accessed May 27, 2008.

Following the first round of proceedings, the debate over the extent of the flood in Noah's day will be examined in the same manner. The young-earthers' arguments for a worldwide flood will be given followed by the old-earthers' responses and a biblical cross-examination.

Finally, the scientific evidence will be evaluated. This too will be examined in light of the teachings of Scripture. The Bible alone provides the philosophical foundation for logical thought and scientific inquiry. The Bible also provides a strategy for the logical refutation of false claims. Using the biblical strategy, we will explore scientific arguments for a young earth. In the following chapter, scientific arguments used to support an old earth will be examined.

*Why Do Christians Keep Fighting about This Issue
When They Should Be Focused on the Gospel?*

As young-earth creationists, we hear this question often. There are undoubtedly several reasons why this question is being asked. Numerous believers do not understand the importance of this battle and as a result, are turned off by the ongoing debate over the correct interpretation of Genesis 1–11. They see it as a distraction to a church that needs to be focused on leading the lost to Christ. While these believers have good intentions, we believe they have not thought enough about the importance of the debate.

First and foremost, God included these 11 chapters in His Word, so He expects us to know and understand them. Christians do not have the freedom to pick and choose which parts of the Bible are important to know and which are not. It is certainly true that some portions of Scripture have more application to the Christian than other portions, but all Scripture is important.

Second, many people do not understand the foundational nature of this debate. If the young-earth interpretation is the correct one (and this will be demonstrated throughout the remainder of the book), then Christians dare not abandon the proper interpretation. This is especially true when it comes to the study of origins. After all, what a person believes about his or her origins has a drastic impact on the way he or she lives. Moreover, if Genesis 1–11 can be reinterpreted, then all biblical interpretation is suspect since the Bible writers repeatedly

Exegesis — an accurate and critical interpretation of a text. This is contrary to eisegesis, which occurs when a person attempts to fit their thoughts into the text.

treated Genesis 1–11 as real history, as will be shown later.

Third, many Christians (unfortunately) see logical reasoning and careful exegesis as antithetical to faith. To them, it is not important to have answers on these kinds of issues; they seem to prefer having a “blind faith.” We often hear statements like, “Don’t worry about these issues, just trust in Jesus.” Now, don’t misunderstand; of course we should trust in Jesus. But our trust should not be a

“blind faith.” In other words, we should not simply trust for the sake of trusting or because of some emotional experience (otherwise our faith will be no different than any other religion). Rather, we trust in Christ because He proved He is God by rising from the dead. We trust in the Bible because it has demonstrated itself to be reliable time and again.

Our faith is not “blind.” Our trust in God’s Word is not *despite* careful analysis, but rather *because* of it! Scripture is clear that God expects His people to study and think. Paul set the example for us as he went to synagogue after synagogue and reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 17:2–3, 18:4). God challenged His rebellious people to “Come now, and let us reason together” (Isa. 1:18). It is not sinful for Christians to have sincere questions about their faith. God is up to the challenge, and His Word will provide the answers. We should be like the Bereans, who were commended by Luke because they “searched the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11).

Young-earth creationists are often asked why they feel it is necessary to correct fellow believers and refute their ideas about an old earth. First, we care about the old-earth creationists. It would be irresponsible and unloving to ignore serious errors promoted by our brothers and sisters in Christ and allow them to go down a path that is ultimately unbiblical. We Christians must always challenge each other to be faithful to the text of Scripture. We should welcome constructive criticism.

Second, why is this question seldom asked of the old-earther who does the same to the young-earther? We are often labeled as divisive when we talk about the importance of believing in a young earth.

However, it should be remembered that it was the old-earth creationists who divided the Church in the early 19th century by bringing in a concept foreign to the Scriptures and contrary to 18 centuries of orthodox belief. We are simply trying to call the Church back to the authority of God's Word. If this is divisive, then it certainly illustrates how far the Church has come from biblical truth. Our goal is to unite around sound doctrine, not to haggle over minor issues. Jude instructed believers to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3) and this is what we believe young-earthers are attempting to do.

*Orthodox —
teachings historically
accepted as authentic
by the Church.*

*Heterodox —
teachings contrary to
orthodoxy.*

How Should Both Sides Treat Each Other?

This issue, like many in the Church, is emotionally charged. As such, it is very easy for people to have their feelings hurt when someone disagrees with their position. It is a very natural tendency to be defensive when our deeply held views are challenged. But we must all resist this temptation and pursue the truth, and be willing to change our thinking when and where we are shown to be in error.

Christians need to keep in mind that debate, even on emotional and controversial issues, can lead to tremendous spiritual growth for the Church. This concept is hard for many Christians to grasp because they have been raised in a "Can't we all just get along?" atmosphere in the Church. The answer to that question is an emphatic *yes!* We can get along but we do not always agree on everything. When disagreements do arise, we need to handle them with a spirit of gentleness and respect.

Church history is filled with controversial debates, and for that we should be grateful. Many of the heterodox issues that come up from time to time have already been argued and debated. For example, some early Christians were not sure how to handle the person of Jesus Christ. Was He fully God? Was He fully man? If He was God, could He really have been tempted to sin (Matt. 4:1–11)? Why did He not know the timing of His coming (Matt. 24:36)? If He was just a man, then how

could He claim to be one with God (John 10:30)? The early Church debated this issue at the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. A popular teacher named Arius had begun teaching that Jesus was a created being rather than the eternal, omnipotent God that orthodox Christianity had always affirmed. He made some very persuasive arguments to support his case. Thankfully, Athanasius, who defended the deity of Christ, was able to point out the errors in Arius' teachings and the Council overwhelmingly sided with Athanasius. They affirmed the fact that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man, just as the Bible teaches. Nowadays, when teachings similar to Arius' are circulated, such as the doctrine of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christians have confidence that they have the correct view because that battle was already fought and won so many years ago.

Several other examples could be cited. The battles are still going on in various areas, and the old earth versus young earth debate is certainly one of the hottest and most important battles today. Readers must keep in mind two crucial points. First, the doctrine of Arius was extremely dangerous. After all, if Jesus Christ was not really God, then He could not have been the Savior. Arius' views must be considered heretical since they strike at the heart of the person and work of Christ. Second, the old earth versus young earth debate, as portrayed in this book, is a family matter. This is a battle between fellow believers and it bears repeating that both sides need to treat each other with respect.

Christians need to understand that disagreements happen. Sometimes these are private and sometimes they are public. Sometimes the way to handle these differences is in print. Young-earth creationists are often asked, "Why don't you just write to Dr. So-and-so (an old-earth creationist) and work out your differences in private? In Matthew 18, doesn't Jesus tell us to handle our differences with fellow believers in that way?" Yes and no. The pattern set forth in Matthew 18 is applicable when one believer sins against another believer. This is a private matter and should be handled privately — at least the first step. However, when a believer makes public statements, whether in lectures or in print, then these statements should be handled publicly. Our Lord set the example of this type of public critique when He dealt with the

teachings of the Pharisees (see Matt. 23, for example). Also, the apostle Paul publicly confronted Peter (Gal. 2) and provided the names of individuals who were guilty of teaching error (2 Tim. 2:17–18).

As you read this book, keep in mind that several old-earth creationists will be quoted. We will do our best to represent the authors' intentions (and not to pull their comments out of context) so that they are being treated fairly. Also, please understand that neither their Christian commitment nor their motives are in question here. For example, one old-earthier that is frequently cited is Dr. Norman Geisler. We have great respect for this Christian scholar. His writings and lectures have been a wonderful blessing to many. In no way do we wish to demean or attack him as a person or as a Christian; however, we must take issue with some of his teachings on this topic. We plead with the readers to keep these things in mind as they read this book. Also, we truly believe that many old-earthers have a zeal for reaching the lost and that they believe that their methods are the best way to do this. We do not question the sincerity of their zeal.

It's Not about Darwin

A large percentage of Christians have been led to believe that the debate over creation vs. evolution concerns Charles Darwin and natural selection. While it is true that much of the focus has been on whether biological evolution is possible, the real debate for the Church has very little to do with Darwin at all. In fact, the problem for the Church began about half a century before Darwin wrote *Origin of Species*. And today, most evangelical Christians reject Neo-Darwinian evolution.

In the late 18th century and early 19th century, the discipline of geology was in its infancy. During this time, several early geologists began to propose an age of the earth that vastly exceeded the biblical time frame accepted by nearly every Christian and Jew up until that time. One of the key figures in this development was Charles Lyell, whose *Principles of Geology* (1830–33) would have a profound effect on Darwin during his famous five-year voyage on the *H.M.S. Beagle*. As these old-earth ideas gained popularity, certain Christian leaders began to devise theories that they believed would allow them to blend the Bible with the growing opinion of geologists. As a result, the gap

theory, day-age theory, and local flood theory were promoted long before Darwin's book, *Origin of Species* (1859), was ever written.

The importance of these facts cannot be overlooked because it is not Darwin's theorizing that has done the most damage to the Church. The Church has inflicted the most damage on itself by compromising with unbiblical ideas. Because Genesis began to be reinterpreted, more people started to doubt the validity of the rest of God's Word.

Jesus told Nicodemus that if He could not be trusted when He spoke about earthly things, then it would make little sense to trust Him when He spoke about heavenly affairs (John 3:12). The text of Genesis is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). If believers cannot trust God's Word when it comes to the creation account, then they should have no reason to believe it when it speaks of Jesus being the only way to the Father (John 14:6). Millions of people have made this logical connection and sadly refuse to trust in Christ because they do not believe the Bible is true from the very beginning. Ultimately, the issue is not about creation versus evolution or even young earth versus old earth. It really comes down to whether or not a person can trust the Word of God from the very first verse to the very last verse. Old-earth creationists certainly claim that the battle is not over the trustworthiness of Scripture but the interpretation of it. However, the following chapters will show that the battle is truly over the trustworthiness of God's Word.

A Few Comments about Science

We will deal with the philosophy of science in chapters 7 and 8; however, a few preliminary comments are in order. Science is a powerful tool that the Lord has given us, and young-earth creationists love science. Indeed, modern science has confirmed many of the truths taught in Scripture. Some evolutionists have said that creationists reject science because we do not accept the notion of particles-to-people evolution. Likewise, some old-earth creationists accuse young-earthers of rejecting science because we do not accept the big-bang model and the generally accepted dates for the age of the earth and universe. (Please see Appendix E to see why Christians should not accept the big-bang model.) For example, the following argument can be found on a popular old-earth creationist website:

It could also be argued that ALL scientists accept an old earth. I use the word “all” because young earth scientists are not scientists. By definition, a scientist makes observations, then formulates theories about those observations. By contrast, a YEC [young-earth creationist] “scientist” has made the theory first (that the earth is young) and then he looks for observations to confirm it. They are performing science backwards, thus deserve the term “theorist” rather than “scientist.”³

What the writer of this article fails to realize is that scientific evidence does not “speak for itself” — it requires interpretation. We all interpret evidence according to our worldview — we all have preconceived notions. Both young-earthers and old-earthers use their worldview to help them make sense of the data. Old-earth creationists use “old-earth” preconceptions when they interpret all evidence (even biblical) from an old-earth perspective. (We’ll see how this works in detail in chapters 7 and 8.)

In the same article, the writer responded to a question about why he attacks young-earth creationism. He stated it was because “the earth is 4.5 billion years old, and the universe more than 13 billion years old.” This writer has already accepted the opinion of the majority of scientists as true and interprets all data through that framework. Even Albert Einstein, one of the greatest scientific minds of the 20th century, stated:

But on principle, it is quite wrong to try founding a theory on observable magnitudes alone. In reality the very opposite happens. It is the theory which decides what we can observe.⁴

A bias is not always a bad thing. A correct worldview (or bias) will enhance our ability to correctly interpret evidence (just as an incorrect one will hamper our ability). This is why it is so important to base our thinking on God’s infallible Word. Every person has a worldview and

3. http://www.answersincreation.org/bookreview/compromise/refuting_compromise.htm. This comment is repeatedly made on the Answers in Creation website.
4. Quoted in Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond*, Arnold J. Pomerans, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 63.

*Cosmogony — a
theory of the origin
of the universe.*

will inevitably interpret data through that filter whether they realize it or not. Therefore, it is very important to make sure we have the *right* worldview: that we start with correct, biblical assumptions when we approach science — as we will discuss in chapter 7.

In reality, young-earth creationists take issue with the old-earthers' interpretation of the scientific evidence. Both sides study the same evidence. They have the same earth, stars, rocks, trees, fossils, etc. Young-earthers are not anti-science, as evidenced by the number of young-earthers who hold advanced degrees in science. Many of these scientists became young-earth creationists as a result of their scientific research.⁵ The anti-science claim is nothing more than an attempt to shift the focus away from the real debate, which can only be resolved ultimately through a proper understanding of God's inerrant Word.

Moreover, young-earth creationists are not alone in their rejection of the popular scientific theories of the day. Many scientists do not agree with the *status quo* of the scientific community. While the majority may accept the old-earth view, they disagree over the means of how this world came about. For example, 34 secular scientists recently published an open letter calling for the need to research alternative cosmogonies because they believe the big bang is fraught with too many insurmountable scientific problems.⁶ At present, five hundred scientists have signed on, affirming their agreement with the letter. This letter calls for a more balanced allocation of funding, since they believe billions of dollars are being wasted in trying to keep a dying theory alive. The fact of the matter is that the scientific evidence does not necessarily lend as much support for an old earth as old-earthers often imply.

5. A good overview of this topic can be found in John Ashton, *In Six Days* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2003). This book is a compilation of the testimonies of 50 scientists explaining why they are young-earth creationists.

6. E.J. Lerner et al., "An Open Letter to the Scientific Community," *New Scientist* (May 22, 2004), p. 20, also at: <<http://www.cosmologystatement.org>>.