

A Biblical Case for Old-Earth Creationism

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Introduction

One of the most fundamental doctrines held dear by Christians is God's creation of the world and all living creatures. Yet among evangelicals, an ongoing controversy exists regarding the age of the earth and *when* God created the universe and life. Indeed, the "young-earth" vs. "old-earth" debate is one of the most polarizing and divisive issues within the Christian community.

This paper presents the biblical case for "old-earth creationism" (OEC) and endeavors to clear up theological misconceptions regarding OEC held by many well-intentioned "young-earth creationist" (YEC) believers. The purpose is not to dissuade young-earth believers from their position, but rather to propose OEC as a well-reasoned, Bible-honoring view that has been embraced by scholars such as Francis Schaeffer, James Boice, and Norman Geisler.

Old earth beliefs

Before presenting a more detailed explanation of OEC, here is a brief summary of core beliefs. Old earth creationists contend:

- God miraculously created the universe from nothing (*ex nihilo*), created life from non-life, and progressively intervened in history to supernaturally create new species of life.
- The age of the earth has no bearing on the creation of life. An ancient earth does not equate with Darwinian evolution.
- Darwinian evolution (change through unguided naturalistic processes) is unbiblical, biologically untenable, and not supported by the fossil record. Old-earth creationists adamantly reject the Darwinian concept of *common descent*—the hypothesis that all plant, animal, and human life ultimately evolved from primitive single-celled organisms through unguided mutations and naturalistic processes.
- God miraculously created Adam and Eve, humanity's historical parents, who were new distinct creatures from whom humanity's sin originated.
- Earth's geologic features formed over long ages through both gradual and catastrophic processes.
- Genesis 1 is a literal account of God's creation. After God created the heavens and the earth, He then created life over six successive "days," which in the original Hebrew may be literally interpreted as long epochs of time.

Old-Earth Creationism (AKA "day-age" or "progressive" creationism) is distinct from other types of creationism, namely Gap theory, Framework Hypothesis, and Theistic Evolution. The most prominent 21st century proponent of OEC (progressive creationism) is Reasons to Believe, an international, non-denominational ministry founded by astronomer Hugh Ross, Ph.D. While young-earth believers may regard the OEC view as lacking Biblical authority, many conservative theologians and well-respected Christian apologists embrace the old-earth hermeneutic and vigorously defend Biblical inerrancy, including the following:

- 19th Century Theologians: Charles Hodge (A.D.1797-1878), A.A. Hodge (A.D.1823-1886), John Gresham Machen (A.D.1881-1937), William G.T. Shedd (A.D. 1820-1894), Benjamin B. Warfield (A.D. 1851-1921).¹
- 20th Century Theologians: Gleason Archer and R. Laird Harris (co-authors, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*), James Montgomery Boice (Chairman of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy), Francis Schaeffer (founder of L'Abri Fellowship), R.A. Torrey (Editor, *The Fundamentals* (A.D.1907-1917), Edward J. Young (whose work was regarded as “the epitome of conservative exegetical orthodoxy”).²
- Contemporary Theologians and Apologists: John Ankerberg, Bill Bright (Founder, Campus Crusade for Christ), C. John Collins (Chairman, Old Testament Committee, *ESV Bible*; PhD, Hebrew linguistics), Chuck Colson, Paul Copan, William Lane Craig, Norman Geisler (author of numerous books, including *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*), Wayne Grudem (General editor, *ESV Study Bible*; author, *Systematic Theology*), Hank Hannegraff (Bible Answer Man), Jack Hayford, Walter Kaiser (President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), Phillip E. Johnson (founder of Intelligent Design movement), Greg Koukl (Stand to Reason ministry), J.P. Moreland, J.I. Packer, Nancy Pearcey, Vern Poythress, Earl Radmacher (President Emeritus, Western Seminary), Lee Strobel (author of *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Creation*), and Dallas Willard.³

So what exactly do old-earth creationists believe? In the following pages, I will attempt to present the fundamental beliefs of old-earth (“day-age”) creationism.

The Bible

Proponents of OEC believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God and believe the Genesis creation account to be historical narrative—not myth, allegory, legend or poetic expression. While YECs believe a “plain reading” of the English translation of Genesis 1 necessitates belief that God created the world in six 24-hour days some six to ten thousand years ago, OECs believe that textual and grammatical nuances of the original Hebrew suggest six long epochs of time. Indeed, OECs contend a *literal* reading of the Biblical creation accounts in Hebrew provides certain exegetical clues pointing to prolonged creation “days.”⁴

Creation days

Biblical Hebrew has a very limited vocabulary (approximately 3,100 words) compared to the English vocabulary (estimated to be 1,000,000 words). Hebrew words often have several literal meanings.⁵ Linguistic scholars acknowledge the Hebrew word *yôm* (translated “day”

¹ “Westminster Theological Seminary and the Days of Creation,” www.wts.edu/about/beliefs/statements/creation.html. Also see “Report of the Creation Study Committee,” www.pcahistory.org/creation/report.html.

² Ibid.

³ “Notable Christians Open to an Old Universe Old Earth Perspective,” www.reasons.org/notable-christians-open-old-universe-old-earth-perspective.

⁴ Rodney Whitefield, *Reading Genesis One: Comparing Biblical Hebrew with English Translation* (2003). C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4 -- A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (2006). Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question* (1998). G. Whitefield, *Genesis One and the Age of the Earth*, (2006). (Note: A free downloadable PDF file of this 35 page booklet, which provides a brief explanation of the Hebrew text of Genesis as it relates to the age of the earth, is available at www.creationingenesis.com.)

⁵ David G. Hagopian, Editor, *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation* (2001), 125.

in English) has several *literal* meanings: a period of daylight, 12-hour day, 24-hour day, time, period of time with unspecified duration, and epoch of time.⁶ While modern English has numerous words to describe a long time-span, no word in biblical Hebrew adequately denotes a finite epoch of time other than *yôm*.⁷

Young-earth creationists such as Kenneth Ham, founder of Answers in Genesis, claim “day” (*yôm*) attached to a number or “ordinal” (1st, 2nd, 3rd “day”) necessarily means 24-hour days. However, noted Bible scholars dispute that assertion.⁸

Hebrew linguist Gleason Archer writes, “On the basis of internal evidence, it is this writer’s conviction that *yôm* in Genesis could not have been intended by the Hebrew author to mean a literal twenty-four hour day.”⁹ Dr. Norman Geisler states, “Numbered days need not be solar. Neither is there a rule of Hebrew language demanding that all numbered days in a series refer to twenty-four hour days. Even if there were no exceptions in the Old Testament, it would not mean that ‘day’ in Genesis 1 could not refer to more than one twenty-four-hour period.”¹⁰

Note, however, there are Old Testament verses where *yôm* attached to a number actually does refer to long time periods. Here are two examples:

- Hosea 6:2, *He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day.* This refers to Israel’s ultimate restoration hundreds or thousands of years in the future.
- Zechariah 14:7, describing the Day of the Lord, contains *yôm echad* (translated “unique day”), which is identical to *yôm echad* of Genesis 1:5 (translated “one day”). The context of Zechariah 14:7-8 suggests *yôm echad* will be a period of time spanning at least one summer and one winter, obviously longer than a 24-hour calendar day.

Archer and Geisler also point out that no definite article (“the”) appears with *yôm* on days one through five in Genesis one. Archer says the absence of “the” implies a more vague meaning than 24 hours—an indefinite but literal sense of *time* or *age*.

Similarly, YECs claim “day” (*yôm*) accompanied by the phrase “and there was evening and there was morning” necessitates a 24-hour day interpretation. Others dispute that assertion, suggesting the phrase was merely intended to communicate that each “day” or epoch had a definite beginning and ending. For instance, the *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states “These are not ordinary days bounded by minutes and hours, but days of God...The beginning of each act of creation is called morning, and the close of that specific divine act is called evening.”¹¹ Noted Hebrew linguist Gleason Archer concurs: “Concerning the recurring [evening and morning] formula at the end of each creative day...there were definite and distinct stages in God’s creational procedure...it serves as no real evidence for

⁶ *Brown-Driver-Biggs’ Hebrew Lexicon* (1996); *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke (1980).

⁷ The Hebrew word *’olam* is sometimes claimed to mean a long time period. However, Hebrew lexicons show that only in post-biblical writings did *’olam* refer to a long age or epoch. In biblical times, it meant “forever,” “perpetual,” “lasting,” “always,” or “the remote past.” (See David G. Hagopian, Ed., *The Genesis Debate*, 148.)

⁸ Gleason L Archer, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties*, (1982), 60-61. Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (1999), 271. Rodney Whitefield, PhD, “The Hebrew Word ‘Yom’ Used with a Number in Genesis 1,” www.creationingenesis.com/TheHebrewWordYOM.pdf.

⁹ Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 199.

¹⁰ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Zondervan 1999), 271.

¹¹ Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, Editors, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (1990), 3.

a literal twenty-four-hour day concept on the part of the biblical author.”¹² Other Hebrew language scholars (C John Collins, Bruce Waltke, and Rodney Whitefield) agree the evening/morning phrase does not necessitate a 24-hour day interpretation.¹³ Collins comments that the order of evening and morning is a time-span that includes no daylight. While it is commonly thought that evening/morning represents a “day,” Collins says “Logically, this is nonsense [since] a day must describe 24 hours or at least a period of daylight.” He further states “and there was evening, and there was morning” brackets the *night* and marks the end points of each workday of God.¹⁴

Furthermore, the seventh day lacks the concluding refrain, “*and there was evening and there was morning,*” suggesting a non-ending day. The ongoing nature of the seventh day is implied in Hebrews 4:1-11, which describes God’s Sabbath rest: “*Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands ...*” (Hebrews 4:1). Verse 4 clearly ties God’s rest to the seventh day of creation, “*And God rested on the seventh day,*” while verse 6 states “*Since therefore it remains for some to enter it.*” If God’s seventh day were limited to 24 hours, it would be impossible for believers to enter it now. Though the work of creation has ceased, God’s ongoing work of bringing salvation to humanity continues: “*Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said...Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience*” (Hebrews 4:3,11).

Many in the young-earth community point to Exodus 20:9-11 as evidence for a creation week of 24-hour days: *For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day.* Reference to the Sabbath in Exodus 20 illustrates God’s *pattern* of six days of work and one day of rest, not their duration: God’s six *yôms* (epochs) of creating and one of rest. Man’s six days of work and one day of rest. The land’s six years of cultivation and one year of rest (Leviticus 25:4). Gleason Archer notes, “By no means does this demonstrate that 24-hour intervals were involved in the first six ‘days,’ any more than the eight-day celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles proves that the wilderness wanderings under Moses occupied only eight days.”¹⁵

Here are the views of several respected scholars on the meaning of the creation “day” (*yôm*):

- R.A. Torrey (1856-1928), founder of Talbot Seminary and editor of *The Fundamentals* (12 volumes, published in 1910): “Anyone who is at all familiar with the Bible and the way the Bible uses words, knows that the use of the word ‘day’ is not limited to twenty-four hours. It is frequently used to denote a period of entirely undefined length...There is no necessity whatsoever for interpreting the days of Genesis 1 as solar days of twenty-four hours length.”¹⁶
- J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), considered the last of the great orthodox Princeton theologians: “It is certainly not necessary to think that the six days

¹² Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (1982), 62.

¹³ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (2006), 55-57.77; Rodney Whitefield, *Reading Genesis One: Comparing Biblical Hebrew with English Translation* (2003), 68; Gleason Archer, R. Laird Harris, Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (1980), 1:125.

¹⁴ Collins, 56, 77. (Note: [Collins served as chairman of the Old Testament Committee for the English Standard Version \(ESV\) and holds a PhD in Hebrew linguistics.](#))

¹⁵ Gleason L. Archer, “A Response to the Trustworthiness of Scripture in Areas Relating to Natural Science,” *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Prues (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books (1986), 329, cited in Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days*, NavPress (2004), 91.

¹⁶ R.A. Torrey, cited in Rodney Whitefield, *Reading Genesis One*, 136.

- spoken of in that first chapter of the Bible are intended to be six days of twenty four hours each. We may think of them rather as very long periods of time.”¹⁷
- Edward J. Young (1907-1968), regarded as the epitome of conservative exegetical orthodoxy: “But then there arises the question as the length of these days. That is a question which is difficult to answer. Indications are not lacking that they may have been longer than the days we now know, but the Scripture itself does not speak as clearly as one might like.”¹⁸
 - James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000), chairman of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy: “[Young-earth] creationists insist that the days cover a literal 24 hours, but this is not necessarily the case. Sometimes the word ‘day’ is used with a broader meaning...it can mean a period of indefinite duration.”¹⁹ “Any view that makes the earth 12 to 20 thousand years old flies in the face of too much varied and independent evidence to be tenable. In my judgment the earth and universe are indeed billions of years old.”²⁰

Both young-earth and old-earth creationists believe the Bible is inspired and defend their views as being literal. The issue is *interpretation* of the Genesis text. Bruce Waltke asserts young-earth exegesis is hindered by an adherence to a “woodenly literal” reading of Genesis.²¹ Gordon Wenham concurs: “Six days has been seized on and interpreted over-literally, with the result that science and Scripture have been pitted against each other instead of being seen as complementary.”²²

The when of creation

The Bible does not specify the age of creation. The YEC belief that God created the world 6,000 years ago originated from a mid-17th century examination of the Genesis genealogies by Archbishop James Ussher and theologian John Lightfoot. Based on the ages of patriarchs, Ussher and Lightfoot both calculated the universe, earth, and life were created in 4004 B.C. Over the next several centuries, this date became firmly entrenched in Christian belief. The cornerstone of belief in a 6,000-year-old earth rests solely on the genealogies providing a totally accurate and complete chronology. Is it?

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Professor William Henry Green and theologian Benjamin B. Warfield noted *gaps* and *omissions* in the Genesis genealogies. This suggested the creation was conceivably *older* than the 6,000-year timeframe proposed by Ussher and Lightfoot. Today many Bible scholars believe the Genesis genealogies were written primarily to provide only *highlights* and not necessarily a complete record of every actual generation.²³ R.A. Torrey (1856-1928 A.D.), who was selected by D.L. Moody to become the first dean of the Moody Bible Institute, wrote the following of Bishop Ussher’s chronology: “Its accuracy is altogether doubtful. It is founded upon the supposition that the genealogies

¹⁷ J. Gresham Machen, quoted in “Westminster Theological Seminary and the Days of Creation,” cited in www.wts.edu/news/creation.html.

¹⁸ Edward J. Young, quoted in “Westminster Theological Seminary and the Days of Creation.”

¹⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis, Volume 1: An Expositional Commentary* (1998), 84.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 78

²¹ Bruce K. Waltke, “The Literary Genre of Genesis, Chapter 1,” *Crux*, volume 27, number 4 (1991), 2-10.

²² Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Bible Commentary*, Volume 1, Genesis 1-15 (Waco, Texas, Word Books, 1987), 39.

²³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (1994), 273, 290-291; Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (1972), 122-123; Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question*, second edition (2001), 108; *Ryrie Study Bible (NASB)* (1995), study note Genesis 5:3; C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (2006), 204-206, 242; William Henry Green, “Primeval Chronology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April 1890), 285-303, accessed at http://www.rosetree.com/ccog/pchron/f_pchron.html, James Montgomery Boice, *An Expositional Commentary: Genesis (Volume 1)* (1982, 1988), 88-89.

of Scripture are intended to be complete, but a careful study of these genealogies clearly shows they are not intended to be complete, that they oftentimes contain only some outstanding names.”²⁴ There are gaps in the genealogies. Wayne Grudem writes, “...closer inspection of the parallel lists of names in Scripture will show that Scripture itself indicates the fact that the genealogies list only those names the biblical writers thought it important to record for their purposes. In fact, some genealogies include names that are left out by other genealogies in Scripture itself.”²⁵

As evidence the genealogies are telescoped (compressed or abbreviated), scholars point to examples such as the genealogy of Moses, which appears four separate times in Scripture (Exodus 6:16-20, Numbers 26:57-59, 1 Chronicles 6:1-3, 23:6-13). Moses’ genealogy is given as Levi to Kohath to Amram to Moses. As straightforward as this seems, related Bible passages suggest that several generations were likely skipped between Amram and Moses.²⁶ 1 Chronicles 7:20-27 provides a parallel genealogy of Ephraim, son of Joseph (brother of Levi), from the same period of history as the Mosaic genealogies. While only 4 generations are listed from Levi to Moses, 12 generations listed from Joseph to Joshua during the same time period.

Moses’ Genealogy	Joshua’s Genealogy
Levi	Joseph
Kohath	Ephraim
Amram	Beriah
	Raphah
	Resheph
	Telah
	Tahan
	Ladan
	Ammihud
	Elishama
	Nun
Moses	Joshua

It has been suggested that the Mosaic genealogies are perhaps only 20 to 40 percent complete. Those who hold that the genealogies are telescoped place the creation of Adam and Eve ~10 to 30 thousand years ago, but perhaps as late as 60,000 years ago.²⁷

Experts in Old Testament genealogy note there is wide-spread consensus regarding dates and chronology from the time of Abraham. However, prior to Abraham, there is little available Biblical or historical information on which to build a solid chronology. Grudem specifically mentions “prior to Abraham, the setting of dates is very uncertain.”²⁸

²⁴ R.A. Torrey, *Difficulties in the Bible -- Alleged Errors and Contradictions*, Chapter 5, <http://isom.vnsalvation.com/Resources%20English/Christian%20Ebooks/RA%20Torrey%20Difficulties%20in%20the%20Bible%20Alleged%20Errors%20and%20Contradictions.pdf>.

²⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1994), 290.

²⁶ John Millam, “The Genesis Genealogies,” www.reasons.org/articles/the-genesis-genealogies.

Also see C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (2006), 204-206.

²⁷ John Millam, “The Genesis Genealogies.”

²⁸ Grudem, 290-291.

In addition to gaps and omissions, genealogical words such as “son” (Hebrew *ben*), “father” (*ab*), and “begat” or “fathered” (*yalad*) are central to this issue. “Son” (*ben*) has many *literal* meanings: son, grandson, great-grandson, great-great-grandson, or descendent. “Father” (*ab*) can *literally* mean father, grandfather, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather and ancestor. “Begat” or “fathered” (*yalad*) is not limited to just the immediate generation, but can also apply to distant generations. R.A. Torrey noted, “The word translated ‘begat’ is sometimes used not of an immediate descendent, but of succeeding generations.” Further, “son” may be a literal son or a distant descendant many centuries removed.²⁹ A good example can be found in Genesis 46:15, which enumerates the offspring of Jacob and Leah: “*altogether his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three.*” A careful look at this genealogy reveals that the “sons” (*ben*) included multiple generations of sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons.

As a result, the early Hebrew convention of including just the most historically important individuals in the genealogical record, coupled with the broad meanings of *ben*, *ab*, and *yalad*, raise serious questions whether the Genesis genealogies may be regarded as an absolute chronology pointing back to a 6,000-year-old earth. The genealogies themselves provide a rationale for human origins dating earlier than six to ten thousand years ago.

Creation of the universe and heavenly bodies

When the universe was first proved to have a beginning, cosmologists were up-in-arms, since they had always believed in an eternally-existing universe with no First Cause. Astronomer Fred Hoyle coined the term “Big Bang” as a term of derision, while Sir Arthur Eddington, a British cosmologist, said, “Philosophically, the notion of a beginning to the present order of Nature is repugnant...I should like to find a genuine loophole.”

Atheists attribute the Big Bang origin of the universe 13.7 billion years ago to purely naturalistic mechanisms, theorizing the universe is “self-caused” or just “popped into existence.” However, OECs believe the Big Bang supports the creation account in Genesis 1:1 with God speaking the universe into existence, creating it from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*).

Genesis 1:1 is an amazing statement of God’s miraculous creation of the universe: *In the beginning (re’shît), God created (bara) the heavens and the earth (ha’shamayim we ha’erets).*

- Beginning (*re’shît*): Hebrew scholar John Sailhamer states, “Since the Hebrew word translated ‘beginning’ refers to an indefinite period of time, we cannot say for certain when God created the world or how long He took to create it. This period could have spanned as much as several billions years, or it could have been much less; the text simply does not tell us how long. It tells us only that God did it during the ‘beginning’ of our universe’s history.”³⁰ Whitefield notes that *re’shît* does not allow an instantaneous creation. The word suggests a period of time of unstated length which precedes the conditions described by Genesis

²⁹ R.A. Torrey *Difficulties in the Bible -- Alleged Errors and Contradictions*, Chapter 5, <http://isom.vnsalvation.com/Resources%20English/Christian%20Ebooks/RA%20Torrey%20Difficulties%20in%20the%20Bible%20Alleged%20Errors%20and%20Contradictions.pdf>.

³⁰ John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Multnomah Books, 1996). (Note: Sailhamer is an Old Testament scholar and was President of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2000. He holds an MA in Semitic Languages and a PhD in Ancient Near East languages and literature.) He also holds a Master of Theology in Old Testament from Dallas Theological Seminary.)

- 1:2. “Genesis 1:1 places no limits on how old the universe may be.”³¹ C. John Collins suggests that the *perfect* verb form used in Genesis 1:1 distinguishes “the beginning” from the six-day creation narrative of Genesis 1:3-31, which is written with the *wayyiqtol* verb form.³² The time period between “the beginning” and the creation week is unstated in the text.
- Created (*bara*): The Hebrew word for “created” (*bara*) means to create out of nothing. It is a *completed* verb form, meaning only that the creation was accomplished at some point in the past.
 - “The heavens and the earth” (*ha’shamayim we ha’erets*): This Hebrew phrase (known as a merism) means “all the raw materials needed to make sun, planets, stars, nebulae, galaxies, molecules, atoms”³³, “the entire universe”³⁴, or “the organized universe, the cosmos.”³⁵ This matches perfectly with the view of the big bang beginning—a cosmological singularity from which all matter, energy, space and time originated, and clearly supports *ex nihilo* creation as described in Genesis 1:1 and Hebrews 11:3: *By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*

Respected Christian philosopher William Lane Craig notes, “This cosmological singularity, from which the universe sprang, marked the beginning, not only of all matter and energy in the universe, but of physical space and time themselves. The Big Bang model thus dramatically and unexpectedly supported the biblical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.”³⁶

One bone of contention is when the sun and moon were created. As noted above, “the heavens and the earth” (*ha’shamayim we ha’erets*) is inclusive of the sun and moon, suggesting they were created “in the beginning.” However, YECs point to the fourth creation day (Genesis 1:14-18) as evidence the sun and moon were created later. Let’s examine the passage.

Genesis 1:16 says, *And God made (Hebrew asah) the two great lights.* In contrast to the verb “create” (*bara*), the verb *asah* expresses making something from pre-existing material, not *ex nihilo* creation of Genesis 1:1. Further, it does not specify *when* God made the heavenly bodies, only that the task was completed.³⁷ Several Bible scholars believe Genesis 1:16 is more accurately interpreted as meaning God *had made* the heavenly bodies prior to the fourth day.³⁸ James Boice writes, “It is not said that these [sun and moon] were created on the fourth day; they were created in the initial creative work of God referred to in Genesis 1:1.”³⁹ (For those wishing to delve further into the Biblical Hebrew grammar and

³¹ R. Whitefield, 18-19.

³² Collins, 21, 42-43, 51.

³³ Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (1980).

³⁴ W.E. Vine, M.F. Unger, W. White, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary* (1996), 54-55.

³⁵ Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 32 (1975), cited in Collins, 54.

³⁶ William Lane Craig, “Cosmos and Creator,” www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od172/cosmos172.htm.

³⁷ Biblical Hebrew verbs do not have tenses or express *when* an event occurs. Unlike English verbs, Hebrew verbs indicate complete finished action (*perfect* “tense”) or incomplete unfinished action (*imperfect* “tense”). A completed action may have been completed in the near past (24 hours ago) or the distant past (eons ago).

³⁸ Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (1982), 61. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (1994), 300. Harris, Archer, Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*.

³⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis, Volume I: An Expository Commentary*, (1998), 75.

verb forms, please see footnote below on Whitefield's "The Fourth Creative 'Day' of Genesis: Answers to questions about the Sun, Moon, and Stars.")⁴⁰

One additional detail of the original Hebrew merits consideration. Genesis 1:14-15 tells us, *And God said, "Let there be [hāyāh] lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years"...And it was so.* Verse 14 focuses on the *function* of the lights ("for seasons, and for days and years") rather than their origin. The completed-action phrase, "And it was so," confirms the sun and moon had completed the functions God commanded in Genesis 1:14-15 (providing signs, seasons, days and years) for at least one cycle. The completion of the cycle of seasons, days and years requires much longer than 24 hours, and therefore is an additional indication the creation *yôm* is a long time period.⁴¹

Age of the earth

The Christian faith is based on truth. Scripture speaks of man knowing the Creator from His creation:

- *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their measuring line goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.* (Psalm 19:1-4)
- *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* (Romans 1:19-20)

Philosopher and theologian Augustine of Hippo believed that science could not contradict orthodox Christianity because the Creator God and the Redeemer God are one. Truth cannot contradict truth.

Old-earth creationists accept the geological and cosmological estimates of a 4.5 billion year old earth. Scripture speaks not of a young earth or an old earth, but an ancient earth: *Hear O mountains...you everlasting foundations of the earth* (Micah 6:2). *The ancient mountains crumbled, and the age-old hills collapsed* (Habakkuk 3:6).

Multiple independent evidences confirm an ancient earth, including 40 different methods of radiometric dating and numerous non-radiometric measurements: Ice core samples from Antarctica and Greenland provide an unbroken record of annual ice layers spanning the past 800,000 years. Annual tree ring records provide a continuous record of the past 15,000 years. Coral reefs record long ages of growth (Eniwetok Reef 140,000 years, and the Grand Bahama Reef 790,000 years). Ancient annual lake varve sediments provide evidence of earth's history dating back 15 to 20 million years.⁴²

⁴⁰ Rodney Whitefield, PhD, "The Fourth Creative 'Day' of Genesis: Answers to questions about the Sun, Moon, and Stars," www.creationingenesis.com/TheFourthCreativeDay.pdf.

⁴¹ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (2006), 57; Rodney Whitefield, *Reading Genesis One: Comparing Biblical Hebrew with English Translation* (2003), 102-103.

⁴² "Radiometric Dating: A Christian Perspective," Roger C. Wiens, <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/resources/wiens.html>; C. John Collins, *Science & Faith: Friends or Foes?* (2003), 249-250; "Reliability of Radiometric Dating", Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days* (2004), 175-184; William Newman, *Geologic Time* (U.S. Geological Survey, 1997), <http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/geotime/contents.html>; Jeff Zweerink, "Ice Cores Reveal History," www.reasons.org/ice-cores-reveal-history. "Geology and Creation Science,"

Augustine presciently wrote, "In matters that are obscure and far beyond our vision, even in such as we may find treated in Holy Scripture, different interpretations are sometimes possible without prejudice to the faith we have received. In such a case, we should not rush in headlong and so firmly take our stand on one side that, if further progress in the search of truth justly undermines this position, we too fall with it."⁴³ Copernicus and Galileo were castigated by the Church for advocating the cosmological theory of heliocentrism (earth revolving around the sun), which the Church deemed contrary to their geocentric understanding of Scripture (Psalm 93:1, Psalm 104:5, Ecclesiastes 1:5). Ultimately scientific discovery helped clarify Scripture and prompted correction of a faulty interpretation.

Young-earth believers attribute virtually all of earth's geologic characteristics to catastrophic processes that occurred during the Flood of Noah. OECs believe earth's surface was formed through both rapid catastrophic processes (earthquakes, flash floods) and slow processes (plate tectonics; mountain building; formation of coal, oil, & diamonds; coral reef formation, etc.). OECs believe in the Noahic Flood and God's judgment on sinful man, but reject YEC "flood geology." (For those interested, the history of "flood geology" is a fascinating tale, which first originated in the mid-1800s through the "divine visions" of Ellen G. White, prophetess and founder of the Seventh Day Adventist movement. See references below.⁴⁴)

The truth is that many geological features of earth simply do not support the YEC flood-geology model. Christian geochemist W.U. Ault writes, "The serious Bible student will not seek to support the physical aspects of Bible history with pseudo-science."⁴⁵ Conservative theologian Wayne Grudem comments: "[I] am not persuaded that all of the earth's geological formations were caused by Noah's flood rather than by millions of years of sedimentation, volcanic eruptions, movement of glaciers, continental drift, and so forth...its advocates have persuaded almost no professional geologists, even those who are Bible-believing evangelical Christians."⁴⁶

Young-earth believers posit the 6,000 to 10,000 year-old creation just *appears* to be much older. OECs reject the "appearance of age" concept. The "appearance of age" theory was first conceived by Philip H. Gosse in 1857. It was rejected in Gosse's day, but was once again resurrected by John Whitcomb in 1961. Theologian Wayne Grudem asks, "Why would God create so many different indications of an earth that is 4.5 billion years old if this were not true?" Hebrews 6:18 states, *It is impossible for God to lie*. It is not in God's nature to create something young and fallaciously give it the *appearance* of age. The concept runs contrary to Romans 1:19-20: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature,*

www.answersincreation.org/geology.htm; *God's Word, God's World*, Patti Townley-Covert (Editor), RTB (2009), 32-26; "The Age of Coral Reefs," www.asa3.org/asa/education/origins/coralreefs.htm; Davis A. Young and Ralph F. Stearly, *The Bible, Rocks and Time: The Geological Evidence for the Age of the Earth* (2008), 310.

⁴³ St. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Volume 1*, John Hammond Taylor, Editor, (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 41.

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White (1827-1915), prophetess and founder of the Seventh Day Adventist movement was the earliest proponent of "flood geology," which came to her in "divine visions." White's disciple, George McCready Price (1870-1963), a scientifically self-taught armchair geologist, dedicated his life to the defense of White's vision and was first to coin the term "flood geology." Flood geology was rejected until the 1960s, when the mantle of flood geology was passed from Price to Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, neither of whom had professional degrees in geology. In 1961 they published *The Genesis Flood*, which turned innumerable Christians toward YEC. For additional information, see Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (1992), and J Greene, "A Brief History of Flood Geology," www.reasons.org/files/chapters/seattle/200409.pdf.

⁴⁵ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 2, Merrill C. Tenney, Editor (1976), 563.

⁴⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (1994), 273, 290-291.

have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

In the final analysis, it is antithetical to God's nature to create a young earth and give it an artificial appearance of old age.

Creation of life and mankind

Both young-earth and old-earth creationists believe God created all life. OECs believe God created the earliest primitive micro-organisms on earth approximately 3.8 billion years ago and continued to create life through the "days" of creation (long epochs of time), including all plant life, sea and flying creatures, land animals including primitive bipedal primates, and finally humanity's actual historical parents, Adam and Eve, God's "crown-jewel" of creation, made in His image (*Imago Dei*).

Young-earth and old-earth views on God's creation of plant-life reveal significantly different interpretations of Scripture. The young-earth view is well stated by John MacArthur: "He created them as fully mature, fully developed...He did not create just seeds and cells...He made trees with already-mature fruit...The garden itself was created mature, fully functional, and therefore with the appearance of age."⁴⁷ But what does Genesis say?

And God said, "Let the earth sprout [dasha] vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with seeds in them, on the earth," and it was so. The earth brought forth [yatsa'] vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is there seed, each according to its kind.

The old-earth interpretation differs in several important ways. First, the old-earth view posits the sun is already present, having been created "in the beginning," as part of "the heavens and the earth" (*ha'shamayim we ha'ets*), as opposed to the young-earth view in which the sun is not created until the fourth day of creation (the day following the creation of plant life). Second, Genesis 1:11 does not literally state that God created vegetation and trees fully formed. Rather, it says that God commanded the *earth to sprout* vegetation and trees. The Hebrew word translated "sprout" (*dasha*) means "to cause to sprout or shoot forth," and "brought forth" (*yatsa'*) means to "come out or go forth." There is no mandate that God created fully-formed plants and fruit trees. Third, the Hebrew phrase translated "and it was so" in Genesis 1:3-31 merely indicates the *completion* of God's commands. (It is the *waw-consecutive* form of the imperfect verb "to be" and has the *completed action* meaning.) This phrase does not mean that the command was achieved immediately. It only indicates *completed* action (see footnote 34), but not *when* the action was completed.⁴⁸ "And it was so" means God's command, "the sprouting of vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit," was fully *completed*. These completed processes ("plants yielding seed and trees bearing fruit") require seasons and years, not just 24-hours. Textual evidence, therefore, seems to favor a view much longer than 24 hours.

OECs believe God created all life, from the simplest one-celled organism to the most complex creature. Origin-of-life researchers are stumped in their quest to find unguided naturalistic processes necessary for bringing life from non-life, since even the simplest primitive organism is unimaginably complex. Francis Crick, co-discoverer of DNA,

⁴⁷ John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning*, (W Publishing Group, 2001), 54-55.

⁴⁸ Whitefield 71-72, 95. Whitefield notes that the same consonantal phrase, "and it was so," also appears in 2 Kings 15:12, Judges 6:37-38, and Amos 5:14. In all cases, completion of the action does not take place immediately, but takes place over extended periods of time.

comments, “An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to almost be a *miracle*, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going.”⁴⁹

Regarding mankind, as noted earlier, the Genesis genealogies do not define the exact date of the creation of Adam and Eve. Whether humanity’s parents were created less than 10,000 years ago (YEC view) or more than 10,000 years ago (OEC view), both OEC and YEC believe in the historical creation of Adam and Eve and the historical Fall. They were at the headwaters of the human race and the result of special creation.⁵⁰ In contrast, “Theistic Evolution” denies the historicity of Adam and Eve and the Fall. This has profound theological implications, because the Fall of our historical parents is inseparable from the origin of sin and the doctrine of redemption. If mankind did not fall in Adam, we cannot be redeemed in Christ.

A quick note from science: Recent mitochondrial DNA studies in human females and recent Y-chromosomal studies in males trace all human origins back to one woman and one man, who geneticists refer to as “Mitochondrial Eve” and “Y-chromosome Adam.”⁵¹

Darwinian evolution

Many in today’s secular society believe that Darwinism has reduced the Bible to a foolish fairy tale. The “New Atheists” (Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett) routinely denigrate Christians as being “flat-earthers who reject real science and believe in a 6,000 year old earth.” Evolutionists incorrectly assume that an ancient universe makes Darwinism true, and YECs mistakenly assume that since OECs believe in an old earth, they also believe in evolution. Both assumptions are false.

Like young-earth advocates, old-earth creationists accept “micro-evolution” (i.e., variation in bird beak size, development of bacterial resistance to antibiotics, minor changes within species, etc.), but adamantly reject Darwinian “macro-evolution,” which posits that all life originated from primitive one-celled organisms that ultimately evolved by unguided naturalistic processes into the broad diversity of plants and animals that have populated planet earth.

Old-earth creationists believe God supernaturally created all life over long ages of time, allowing early species to die out and then create new species, “renewing the face of the ground” (Psalm 104:29-30). OECs accept the geologic record as an indication of the age of the earth, but contrary to evolutionists, believe the fossil record more correctly reflects God’s creation of life rather than evolution. For example, during earth’s geologic Cambrian Period (circa 530 million years ago), numerous complex life forms appeared *abruptly* in the fossil record with no prior historical traces. The sudden and simultaneous appearance of more than 70 complex animal phyla defies a naturalistic explanation.⁵² Complex Cambrian life-forms just suddenly appeared, in agreement with Genesis 1:20-23. Paleontologists refer to this as the Cambrian Explosion. Harvard evolutionary paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson writes, “It remains true, as every paleontologist knows, that most new species, genera, and families and nearly all new categories above the level of families appear in the

⁴⁹ Francis Crick quoted in Richard William Nelson, *Darwin, Then & Now* (2009).

⁵⁰ C. John Collins, “Adam and Eve as Historical People and Why It Matters,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, Volume 62, Number 3, September 2010.

⁵¹ Fazale Rana with Hugh Ross, *Who Was Adam?: A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Man*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), 60-67.

⁵² Fazale Rana and Hugh Ross, *Origins of Life* (2004).

[fossil] record suddenly and are not led up to by known, gradual, completely continuous transitional sequences.”⁵³ The fossil record actually comports better with special creation than Darwinian gradualism. Mathematician Granville Sewell writes, “[T]hose who claim that science has eliminated the supernatural from Nature have a view of science that has been out of date for 80 years.”⁵⁴

Further, OECs believe the irreducibly complex nanotechnology found in cells and the complex specified information present within protein molecules and DNA code *clearly and unequivocally point to an Intelligent Designer—God*. Renowned British Philosopher Antony Flew, a former atheist, writes, “It is impossible for evolution to account for the fact that one single cell can carry more data than all the volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica.” Herbert Yockey, physicist and information theorist, states the universe is at least $10^{10,000,000,000}$ times too small or too young to permit life to be assembled by natural processes.⁵⁵ So whether planet Earth is 6,000 years old or 4.5 billion years old, it is *still too young* to generate life through naturalistic processes.

Death before the fall

Though animal death before the Fall is not found in orthodox creedal statements, today’s young-earth leaders treat it as a defining issue of Christian orthodoxy. John Morris, president of the Institute for Creation Research, states, “If death and fossils predate man’s sin, then the death of Jesus Christ did not pay (sin’s) penalty, nor did His resurrection from the dead provide eternal life.” While YECs reject all death before the Fall, OECs believe animal death was part of God’s creation long before Adam was even created. The OEC view is that Adam’s sin caused his *spiritual* death, eventually followed by physical death, and pre-Adamic animal death is not related to man’s salvation or Christ’s atoning work on the cross. Here is the Scriptural support for the old-earth position:

- In Genesis 2:17, God warned Adam in the garden, “*For in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.*” There was no mention of animal death, just Adam’s death. Both John MacArthur (YEC) and Gleason Archer (OEC) agree this was *spiritual* death for Adam, followed hundreds of years later by Adam’s physical death.⁵⁶ Neither Adam nor Eve suffered physical death the day of the Fall. Following God’s warning, Adam fathered Seth after 130 years followed by other sons and daughters, and then physically died having lived 930 years (Genesis 5:3-5).
- Romans 5:12 states that “*sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin.*” The Greek word used for “world,” *kosmos*, is the same word used in John 3:16, “for God so loved the world...” Though *kosmos* may mean “universe” or “earth,” the most appropriate contextual meaning is “the inhabitants of earth, men, the human family” or “the ungodly multitude of men alienated from God.”⁵⁷ The verse continues, “*death came to all men [anthropos], because all sinned.*” This makes it clear that death came to *men* (Greek *anthropos*). *Anthropos*

⁵³ George Gaylord Simpson, *The Major Features of Evolution*, (1965), 360.

⁵⁴ Granville Sewell, *In the Beginning and Other Essays on Intelligent Design*, (Seattle, WA: Discovery Institute Press, 2010), 115.

⁵⁵ Hubert P Yockey, “Self Organization Origin of Life Scenarios and Information Theory,” *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 91 (1981), 14-97, cited in “New Astronomical Proofs for the Existence of God,” www.reasons.org/new-astronomical-proofs-existence-god.

⁵⁶ John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning* (2001), 217. Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (1982), 72-73.

⁵⁷ www.searchgodsword.org (Romans 5:12)

- specifically refers to human beings, not animals.⁵⁸ Only man sins, not animals. Animal death is neither mentioned nor inferred in Romans 5:12 and is excluded by Paul's use of the word *anthropos*. Writing of death before the Fall, theologian Louis Berkof (YEC) writes, "All of this does not mean, however, that there may not have been death in some sense of the word in the lower creation apart from sin ..."⁵⁹ James Montgomery Boice (OEC) echoes Berkof: "But this does not really pertain to the animal realm, in that animals do not have God-consciousness...[It] is conceivable that animals could be created to enjoy a normal lifespan and then to die without having any of the judgmental qualities death has for man."⁶⁰
- 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 is similarly used by YECs to suggest Adam's sin brought about all death, including animal death. "*For since by a man came death, by a man also came resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.*" However, the context clearly pertains only to mankind, with humanity's death being defeated through the resurrection of Christ. The passage states those who die are the same as those resurrected and made alive in Christ. If 'all' that die in Adam includes animals, then the 'all' made alive by Christ must also include the animals. Certainly this is not the intent of the text, since no mention is made in the Scriptures suggesting the spiritual nature of animals, the moral capacity of animals, the need for animal redemption, nor the physical or spiritual resurrection of animals.⁶¹
 - Job 38:39-41, 39:27-30, penned *prior to* the Genesis creation account, describes animal predation and death as part of God's creation: *Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens and lie in wait in their lair?...The eagle mounts up and makes a nest on high...Spies out food; His eyes see from afar. His young ones also suck up blood; And where the slain are, there is he.*
 - Adam named the animals *before* the *Fall*. (Genesis 2:19-20). Though Adam obviously did not know Hebrew, the animal names chosen by the Divine Author suggest carnivorous activity. The Hebrew word for "lion" (Strong's number H738) means "in the sense of violence." "Cormorant" (H7994) means "bird of prey." "Hawk" (H5322) means "unclean bird of prey." "Eagle" (H5404) means "to lacerate." "Owl" (H8464) means "do violence to." The selected animal names suggest that Adam, in his pre-fallen state, may have understood animal death and had likely even witnessed it.
 - Psalm 104, a poetic parallel to Genesis 1, alludes to the creation and extinction of life over eons of time: *When you hide your face, they are dismayed; When you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the ground.* (Psalm 104:29-30) Over time animals die, return to the dust, and are subsequently followed by new generations created by God.

The issue of animal death pre-Fall is summed up succinctly by Augustine, who did not consider animal death a direct result of the Fall. He wrote, "One might ask why brute beasts inflict injury on one another, for there is no sin in them for which this could be a punishment, and they cannot acquire any virtue by such a trial. The answer, of course, is

⁵⁸ Anthropos: "A human being. All human individuals. To distinguish man from beings of a different order" www.searchgodsword.org.

⁵⁹ Louis Berkof, *Systematic Theology* (1941), 669-670.

⁶⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis, Volume 1 - An Expository Commentary* (1998), 77.

⁶¹ Mark Whorton, *Peril in Paradise*, (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005), 186.

that one animal is the nourishment of another. To wish that it were otherwise would not be reasonable.”⁶²

Concluding thought

Reflecting on God’s days of creation, I conclude with the words of the late Gleason Archer, Hebrew linguist, Bible scholar, educator, author, and champion for biblical inerrancy. He wrote the following in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*:

“Moses never intended the creative days to be understood as a mere twenty-four hours in length, and the information he included in [Genesis] chapter 2 logically precludes us from doing so. It is only by a neglect of proper hermeneutical methods that this impression ever became prevalent among God’s people, during the post-biblical era. Entirely apart from any findings of modern science or challenges of contemporary scientism, the twenty-four hour theory was never correct and should never have been believed—except by those who are bent on proving the presence of genuine contradictions in Scripture...Who can calculate the large numbers of college students who have turned away from the Bible altogether by the false impression that it bounds the conscience of the believer to the 24-hour Day theory?”⁶³

⁶² St. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Volume 1*, John Hammond Taylor, Editor (1982), 92.

⁶³ Gleason Archer, quoted from “Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible,” *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Summit II* (1982), Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Prues, Editors (1984), 329, 333-334.