

Creation and evolution: The Age of the Earth

Even for people who believe the Bible, there are not just two options:

- (a) Flat Earth Creationists
- (b) Geocentric Creationists (Sun goes around the Earth!)

- (c) Young Earth (special) Creationism (YEC)
- (d) Old Earth Creationism (OEC)
- (e) Progressive Creationism (PC)
- (f) Evolutionary Creationism (EC)
- (g) Theistic Evolution (TE)

These views show the diversity held by mainstream evangelical Christians. All believe the Bible, which teaches that God is the creator of everything, so all are creationists (Not just the YECs).*

- (h) Liberal Theology of Evolution
- (i) Materialistic Evolution

The age of the Earth is a separate issue from Evolution

- An old Earth doesn't require evolution, but evolution does imply an old Earth.
- While Church tradition and reason have their place, we as evangelicals believe that the Bible "is the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct" so it is important to look at what scripture says about creation on its own, without undue reference to outside sources.
- Likewise, Science (tries to) work by looking at the natural world with little or no attachment to dogma, so it should be assessed by its own standard.
- Of course, we can (and should) look at how the two relate.

Mainstream scientific view (covers d-j above)

The Earth is 4,600 million years old (4.6Ga) and the universe is about 12Ga:

- This opinion is not controversial and came out of research by people who were committed to the Bible (not atheists) and accepted a time frame based on biblical genealogies. This meant that Archbishop James Ussher thought that the Earth was created in 4004BC (John Lightfoot later narrowed this down to the 23rd October at 9am!)
- This was originally recognised by studies of rocks (Geology); further evidence coming from astronomy (eg distances of stars).
- Physics (the earth cooling estimates) initially put an upper limit on the Earth's age which many geologists (& evolutionists) were not happy with.
- Ironically, the discovery of radioactivity bolstered the Ancient Earth idea, providing:
 - a) the source of the Earth's heat.
 - b) a clock by which to measure time.

Mainstream evangelical view

Our all-powerful God could have created the world in 6 seconds or 60 billion years, the issue is how he actually did it. Some Christians feel that the Bible clearly states that he created it in a miraculous fashion. Others believe that God does work through processes and that it is His consistency in this that gives us our laws of science. For example, Psalm 104 talks about God's creation of natural processes.

* (j) Intelligent Design Creationism (ID) is a recent idea that can be held by people believing positions a)-h) but in the main probably hold positions c)-f)

Creation and evolution: The days of Creation

When reading Genesis 1, it is tempting to ask "how does this relate to Science?" (the secular creation story). This is probably the wrong question, we should rather ask how it relates to the ideas of creation current at the time of the original readers.

There are a number of ways in which Genesis 1 is interpreted by Bible-believing Christians.

1) **Literal 144 hour creation week (YEC).** Geological and fossil records mainly formed during Noah's flood (Genesis 6-9). Evolution is limited to change within a 'created kind' and after the Fall.

Pros

- Simple and plain reading of the text.
- Has a good tradition.
- Links well with other verses in the Bible. (eg Water canopy Gen 1:6, no rain Gen 2:5, flood Gen 6-9, rainbow covenant 9:12-17; no death before the fall Gen 1:29-30 & 9:3; Sabbath Ex 20:8-11; End times & 1000 year reign would be when world is about 7000 years old).
- Clear about the biological effects of the fall.
- A 'knock-out punch' against atheism.

Cons

- This is not the only tradition eg Augustine. Some YEC ideas are very new, eg water canopy.
- Seems to assume God prefers to work by miracle rather than process.
- Fails to take the method of revelation into account (cf Old Testament prophecies & Revelation).
- Emphasises clear meaning to us at the expense of the meaning to the original readers.
- YEC Science and flood geology fail to 'hold water'.
- Criticisms of Old Earth evidence do not bear scrutiny.

2) **The Gap view (OE & PE).** This states there is a gap between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2 in which all the geological evidence is found, followed by a period of re-creation.

Pros

- Genesis 1:2 can be translated "*the Earth became formless and empty*".
- The gap is often seen to include the fall of Satan and the angels (Isaiah 24:1, Jeremiah 4:23-6). This is the Ruin Re-creation theory.

Cons

- Re-creation isn't referred to anywhere in Scripture.
- Requires animal death before the fall.

3) **The Day-Age view (OE & PE).** This states that each 'day' is a long period of time.

Pros

- Takes the sequence of events in Genesis 1 literally.
- The Hebrew word used for "day" can also mean a long period of time.
- Psalm 90:4 "*for a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by*".
- Sequence of events can be made to fit 'quite well'.

Cons

- Genesis 1 sequence does not clearly match the scientific sequence eg Sun and Stars on day 4.
- It ties latest science too closely to Genesis. What happens when the science changes?
- Requires animal death before the fall

4) **The Revelatory view (OE & PE).** This view holds that the days referred to are those when God revealed the sequence of events in creation to Moses.

Pros

- Takes the method of revelation seriously.

Cons

- This is at best a strained reading of the text.

5) **Apparent Age view (YEC).** This was first proposed by Philip Henry Gosse in *Omphalos* (1857) two years before Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*. It states that the Earth has an appearance of age, just as Adam would have appeared as a grown man.

Pros

- Overcomes any conflict between Science and the Bible.

Cons

- Philosophically unpopular as it implies that creation (and therefore the Creator) is deceptive.

6) **The framework view (literary. EC & TE).** This states that Genesis 1 is a theological statement against the current views of pagan gods.

Pros

- Takes the interpretation of the original readers seriously.
- Takes into account other Near East creation stories from the time.
- Emphasises Genesis 1 as an 'unpacking' of Genesis 1:2 "*now the Earth was formless and empty*".

Formless ⇌ form	Empty ⇌ filled with
Day 1 – light	Day 4 – sun, moon and stars
Day 2 – sea and sky	Day 5 – sea creatures and birds
Day 3 – a) dry land	Day 6 – a) land animals
b) life (plants)	b) spiritual life (humanity)
Day 7 – God rested	

Cons

- Is not plain from our reading of the text.
- Requires animal death before the fall.
- Like some versions of the other ideas it strongly implies 'pre-Adamites' (humans before Adam).

Personally, I think that biology has made as strong a case for 'humans being apes' as it can (more on this next month). What does Scripture say?

- Genesis 1:26-9, humans are made in God's image.
- Genesis 2:7, Adam is made from the dust of the ground, and Eve (2:20-24) is made from Adam's side.
- It is possible to try and use the details in Genesis 2-5 to relate this to development in the New Stone Age, eg farming. This would be around 8000 years ago. The first anatomically modern humans have been dated as living around 200,000 years ago in Africa, spreading world-wide about 100,000 years ago.

There are various ways of trying to accommodate all of this.

- 1) **Literal history view.** Adam and Eve were made literally as described in Genesis 2 in a miraculous fashion and are the biological forebears of us all.
- 2) **The re-telling view.** Adam and Eve are the original parents of anatomically modern humans in Africa, but this was retold in a Near East context to relate to readers at the time Genesis was written.
- 3) **Ancient Adam.** Adam was the first man as described in Genesis 2, but lived several million years ago and may even be a different biological species.
- 4) **Federal head view.** Adam was not the biological father of us all, but was a representative of all humanity as the first spiritually alive person in a relationship with God.
- 5) **Representative view.** Adam and Eve are general representatives of humanity and therefore the Fall was a process not an event.

These views should at best only be held loosely and there are other possibilities too!

It is important to approach these controversies with a desire for truth, to understand Scripture and to glorify God. We are warned not *"to devote [ourselves] to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work"* (1 Timothy 1:4) and to *"avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless"* (Titus 3:9). This was written for a different reason to these debates, but I think we would do well to follow Paul's advice here.

The Fall.

The whole Age of the Earth debate often hangs in the minds of Christians upon two key areas (what it says about Adam as mentioned above) and what happened at the Fall.

Christians often assume that all physical suffering, animal death and even natural forces such as volcanoes and earthquakes are the result of Adam's disobedience. This fits comfortably in the YEC position, that but less so in many alternative views. For some this may be a 'deal breaker' in attempting to discern between the alternatives. After all, this is getting very close to the fundamentals of the gospel and at first glance an old Earth would appear to be undermining this.

However, a look at what is actually claimed when God declares judgement in Gen 3:14-24 would suggest a little caution:

Satan is told:

- he will be humbled (v14);
- he will be enemies with humanity (v15);
- he will receive a fatal blow from a person/people born from 'the woman' (ie Jesus Christ (vs15)).

Eve is told (v16):

- Childbearing pains will increase
- Relationship with husband will be strained
- This will include being 'ruled' by her husband

Adam is told:

- his relationship with 'the ground' will be strained (v17)
- the ground will produce thorns and thistles for Adam (v18)
- obtaining food will be hard work all of his life (v19)
- and reminded he will return to the dust (v19)

We are told:

- Adam and Eve had children (v20)
- God clothes them (having sacrificed an animal to do so) (v21)
- Adam and Eve's relationship with God is altered (vv22-24)
- This includes loss of automatic access to God in the way they had formerly known (vv22-24)

The death that they suffered Gen2:17 was certainly spiritual death but it is not clear from vs19 that physical death was a consequence of the Fall at all.

Animal death is usually considered part of the Fall by joining the dots from other verses:

- Gen1:29-30 (people and animals allowed to eat plants). The specific blessing to eat animals being left until the time of Noah (Gen 9:3).
- Would God consider creation 'good' if there was death? Also the future picture of the wolf lying down with the lamb (Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25)

However we need to be cautious are we saying volcanoes on Mars or the moons of Jupiter; the predatory habits of deep sea fish or the teeth of crocodiles and sabre-toothed cats are the result of human sin. This would seem to stretch Gene 3 too far. Proponents of a young Earth even claim that fundamental physics such as the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics came into play at the Fall!